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After New India: Diasporas, Anglophonisms, Returns

by

Ragini Tharoor Srinivasan

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Rhetoric

and the Designated Emphasis

in

Gender, Women and Sexuality

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Shannon Jackson, Co-Chair
Professor Colleen Lye, Co-Chair
Professor Pheng Cheah
Professor Lawrence Cohen
Professor Michael Mascuch
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Summer 2016

Abstract

After New India: Diasporas, Anglophonisms, Returns

by

Ragini Tharoor Srinivasan

Doctor of Philosophy in Rhetoric

Designated Emphasis in Gender, Women and Sexuality

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Shannon Jackson, Co-Chair

Professor Colleen Lye, Co-Chair

After New India is a literary and cultural study of the Anglophone discourse on the rise of a "New India" after the economic liberalization of the country in the early 1990s. The project asks whether India's putatively "global" ascendance has, in fact, as both popular and critical sources aver, decentered expatriate writers and exhausted diasporic tropes that were central to the writing and study of Indian Anglophone literature as "postcolonial" literature. In order to pursue this question, I focus on the contemporary literary registration of three aspects of India's rise that map onto my sub-titular terms, "diasporas, Anglophonisms, returns": first, the epochal, but ultimately counterfactual, temporal inversion in which India begins to represent world futurity vis-à-vis its diasporas in the West; second, the literary-critical discourse on the simultaneous globalization and indigenization of Indian English; and third, the empirical social fact of reverse migration to India, specifically by Indian Anglophone writers from the United States and United Kingdom. In readings of global icons, fictions, and nonfictions that have been central to the New India discourse, *After New India* shows how New India emerged through "East-East" encounters between diasporic and national figures of the Indian Anglosphere, who pursued their fellow Indians as proxies and informants in both real and narrative time. In so doing, the project argues that the rise of New India—a rise that inspired returns *from* diaspora to the nation—merits a critical return *to* diaspora as well.

The three chapters of this project consider how the New Indian icons of the expatriate writer and the call center agent, national and diasporic novels by Chetan Bhagat, Bharati Mukherjee, and Raj Kamal Jha, and popular, nonfictional narratives of Indian ascendance written by diasporic repatriates including Suketu Mehta and Amit Chaudhuri differently mediate intersubjective encounters in the New Indian Anglosphere. Together, my readings show how longstanding worries about the illegitimacy of a colonially-bequeathed Indian English underlie the literary-critical turn away from postcolonial tropes (chapter one), novelistic preoccupations with call center English and the wordless subaltern (chapter two), and the repatriation of Indian writers seeking compensatory identification with their New Indian Others (chapter three). All of

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these movements can be understood as attempts to resolve the problem of diasporic Anglophonism in India through the "East-East" encounter. Ironically, *After New India* argues, they also evince the vitality of the diasporic vantage and significant transformations within Indian Englishes, plural, that render moot the assumption of Anglophone exceptionality. The Conclusion turns to the graphic novels of Sarnath Banerjee in order to offer a final word on the aspiration of self-return and a speculative account of the promise of India's "redevelopment" after New India.

"World history travels from east to west;
for Europe is the absolute end of history,
just as Asia is the beginning."
—G.W.F. Hegel

"…the future has become present but does not
resemble the idea of it that one had in the past."
—Gérard Genette

"Because, friend, I have had a miff with Fate,
for things are not what I thought they were,
what they seemed they were, and what might-have-
been I wish they were!"
—G.V. Desani

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments

When I was deciding between doctoral programs in the spring of 2009, a colleague advised that I choose Berkeley Rhetoric because the majority of students thanked the Graduate Student Services Advisor in the acknowledgements of their dissertations. This, it seemed to my colleague, was a sign of a generous community and infrastructure of support, and it factored into my own decision-making. Seven years later, it is my privilege to thank my community of supporters within and beyond Rhetoric.

Shannon Jackson first heard my voice and stood by me through the twists and turns of graduate school and my thinking. Thank you, Shannon, for the example of your social works. Colleen Lye asked the questions that needed to be asked; without her, this dissertation would have been much longer, but no better. Colleen, thank you (thank you!) for saying yes—and no. Thanks to Pheng Cheah and Lawrence Cohen, for planting so many of these seeds. To R. Radhakrishnan, for true interlocution, encouragement, and friendship.

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Many of the ideas presented here were first worked through in articles and review essays for other venues, and I've received incisive feedback from a number of wonderful editors: Jonathan Abel, Umme Al-Wazedi, Madhurima Chakraborty, Merve Emre, Charlotte Eubanks,

Preface

This is not the dissertation I intended to write. But then, how much do one's intentions count "in the web of actions" on which the production of a dissertation ultimately depends?[1]

When I entered the department of Rhetoric in 2009, I had two years experience working as the Editor of an ethnic magazine called *India Currents* and a Bachelors degree in the beguiling interdisciplinary formation of "Literature." This was neither English nor Comparative Literature, but Critical Theory and Cultural Studies, by another name. My undergraduate honors thesis had been a close, involved, and embattled reading of a work of literary and cultural theory (not a work of literature, but a work of theory) that radically problematized the ethnic narratives I would go on, as magazine editor, to produce. Is it any surprise that, as a prospective graduate student, I was unsure what my disciplinary home should be? I applied to doctoral programs in a number of fields, including American Studies, Anthropology, and Communication. English wasn't among them.

I'd like to think I was open when I entered Rhetoric: open to disciplinary transformation, open to the claims new objects might make on me. To some extent, however, although I didn't know it then, I had already been trained.

Here's what I thought I knew: That I was not studying English literature. That I would never work on writers like Jhumpa Lahiri and V.S. Naipaul.[2] That I would resist, at all costs, discussion of model minority mythology, ethnic assimilationist imperatives, diasporic nostalgia. I had taken a class on "diasporic Subcontinental women's fiction" in college and found it deeply alienating. The professor had tacitly demanded that the two of us Indian American women in the course testify as "native informants" among our peers, even as our experiential relations to the "ethnographic and ideologically saturated text[s]"[3] we read were then deemed wanting.[4]

So this dissertation is not what I intended, because to write about Indian literature as an Indian American seemed like capitulation to the coercively mimetic imperative that haunts so many of us students of literature, culture, and the contemporary (students of color in the American academy in particular). Not what I intended, because I know too many Indian Anglophone literary writers personally, because English is my mother's field, because I'd rather write novels than write about them. Familiar anxieties, perhaps. But it is not an overstatement to

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[1] I refer here to an essay I read in a graduate seminar, one that stayed with me, though it has little to do with this dissertation (then again, policing the boundaries of "what has to do with what" is tricky business). Certainly, the discussion of intention in Asad's essay extends well beyond the context of "the modern killing machine" (13). Talal Asad, "Thinking about Terrorism and Just War," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 23.1 (2010), 3-24.

[2] I did not succeed, and have since published on both Lahiri and Naipaul. In my essay on Lahiri, I offer some reasons for this resistance with reference to *The Namesake*, which "got under my skin in the way that many novels do: not because of the book itself, but because of what it represented, because of its reception, because of its place in the world republic of letters." Ragini Tharoor Srinivasan, "Lahiri, High and Low," *Public Books* (January 20, 2014).

[3] Deepika Bahri, *Native Intelligence: Aesthetics, Politics, and Postcolonial Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 5.

[4] That, at least, is how I experienced the course as a college sophomore in a private research university in the American South. Years later, having myself taught undergraduates, I am more appreciative of the challenges of teaching literature organized around an identitarian rubric, especially to students who believe themselves to be interpellated by the course texts.

say that *After New India: Diasporas, Anglophonisms, Returns*—a dissertation on Indian Anglophone literature—is precisely what I came to Berkeley *not* to write.[5]

In fact, I tried hard not to write this dissertation, even while I was writing it. For years, I contemplated defecting for Anthropology, only to find my movements stymied by family circumstance, personal inertia, and lingering unease with ethnographic methods. I began projects on intercultural performance theory, inter-state ambassadorial culture, museums, and festivals. But what follows here was always right there, underlying the other avenues of inquiry I tried to pursue and objects I labored to own. I am, it turns out, or had to learn to be, a reader of literary texts in English, and I'm not yet done thinking after the sign, "India."[6]

One of my attempts to get away from Indian Anglophone literature took the form of an extended project on a Smithsonian Institution museum exhibit I first encountered in its planning stages during my tenure at *India Currents*. I received grants from UC Berkeley to work on the exhibit; I attended the opening; I conducted dozens of interviews with curators, political operatives, involved artists, and academics; I published two articles about it. I enjoyed being a different kind of researcher and reader. Ironically, instead of leading me outside the dissertation, the exhibit returned me to its primary concerns.

The exhibit, "Beyond Bollywood: Indian Americans Shape the Nation" (2014-2015), crystallized a number of tensions that will be apparent in both *After New India* and my approach to it. For one thing, the exhibit was not supposed to be about India—but it *was*. It was not supposed to be about the rise of New India—but it *was*. "It was not [going to be] Holi and Diwali and Rangoli and Hinduism," one of the exhibit's key initiators, Parag Mehta, told me. "It was, 'let's tell the story of Indians in the United States, how they got here, where they came from, what they did, and why it mattered." It was supposed to depict assimilated Indian Americans cathecting to the project of U.S.-national imagining and nation-building—but it couldn't leave India behind.[7]

"Beyond Bollywood," was comprised of parallel tracks of documentary artifacts (like Congressman Dalip Singh Saund's campaign memorabilia and doctor-writer Abraham Verghese's doctor bag) and works of art, including poems, paintings, and photographs. In what was otherwise a rather anodyne exhibit—one that celebrated the first Indian American Miss America, Nina Davuluri, as the apotheosis of immigrant arrival—the art stood out.

I was particularly struck by a photographic series titled, "If I Were Back in India, Who Would I Be?" by Sejal Patel, an art teacher and community organizer in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The series of four images depicts Patel, who was born in India but immigrated to the United States as a child, in staged reenactments of Indian village life (Figure 1). Patel is pictured wearing a *ghagra choli*, a patterned and mirrored skirt with a cropped blouse; a *dupatta*, or shawl, is carefully draped over her breasts and head and then tucked into the skirt. She wears

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[5] To invoke another writer I long ago foreswore, "This is not what I had planned; but perhaps the story you finish is never the one you begin" (509). Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981).

[6] Resistance is a key part of the critical impetus that moved me, and no doubt many others, to go to graduate school in the first place. I first read these words of Stuart Hall's in Wahneema Lubiano's Introduction to Cultural Studies course: "The only theory worth having is that which you have to fight off, not that which you speak with profound fluency" (280). I am reading them still. Stuart Hall, "Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies," *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, Paula Treichler (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 277-294.

[7] For an extended discussion of the exhibit and its return to India, see Ragini Tharoor Srinivasan, "The Smithsonian Beside Itself: Exhibiting Indian Americans in the Era of New India," *Verge: Studies in Global Asias* 1.2 (2015), 158-191.

Figure 1. Sejal Patel, "If I Were Back in India, Who Would I Be?" (1996), "Beyond Bollywood: Indian Americans Shape the Nation" at the Smithsonian NMNH / by permission of the artist

ornate, hanging earrings, called *jhumkas*, and anklets with delicate bells, as well as a single bangle on each wrist, metal thickly wound to give the appearance of rope.

The photographs are in black and white, muting the effect of what might otherwise appear in color to be the traditionally festive or, from a position of non-knowledge, "exotic," dress of a rural Gujarati woman. Each photo depicts Patel in the process of, or recovering from, a form of domestic labor: carrying water, lifting firewood, rolling *atta*, dough, to make *chapatis*. In two images, her face is clearly shown, as she looks out into the distance at some person or object outside the frame. In the first, Patel holds a *lota*, or water pot, on top of her head with one hand; the other hand is on her hip. Her expression, nostrils flared, eyes wide open, is direct, even defiant. She stands, her feet in *chappals*, on dirt in a clearing before a grove of trees. A man-made boundary of mid-sized rocks, or boulders, creates a horizon behind her. The second image depicts Patel lifting a log from a pile before the same trees. Her expression is focused, meditative. The third and fourth images depict Patel seated on the ground, head down, rolling *chapati* dough and examining, a pained expression discernable in her profile, what appears to be her ankle.

The photographs are staged reenactments that give away their distance from the imagined, originary laboring events. Patel's fingernails, visible over the rolling pin, are beautifully manicured; her darkened toenails are equally polished. Significantly, she is alone in each image. There is no indication that this performed labor, the food preparation and resource retrieval, is directed toward any particular subject—a husband, parents, community, child. Instead, each laboring posture is directed toward the camera. Together with the title, the images appear as if part of a dreamscape. Were it not for Patel's garb and tools, she could be anywhere, in any clearing of trees, on any dirt ground. Thus, the photographic sequence depicting an "Indian" Patel actually registers Patel's non-presence in India.

Upon first viewing this series, I was tempted to read it as self-Orientalizing or, relatedly, as exploitative of a rural, laboring subject position that the artist herself does not occupy. The curatorial framing of the images did not help. In an explanatory text panel displayed with the photographs, curator Masum Momaya wrote: "If she lived in India, [Sejal's] days would consist of rolling rotis, making yogurt, carrying water, and fetching firewood. But because she lives in America, who can she, and other desi women, be?"

It was a discordant note for "Beyond Bollywood" to strike for a number of reasons. The framing condition ("if she lived in India") did not qualify the India to which it referred, and the pat answer provided ("because she lives in America") reproduced a myth of American opportunity that was doubly self-congratulatory: first, to the non-Indian American viewer, who could leave the exhibit with misplaced admiration about the personal and professional opportunities afforded women of color in the United States; and second, to the Indian American viewer, who might feel smug about having emigrated from India in the first place. Moreover, the phenomenon of diasporic return to India which I had been researching for the dissertation proffered an entirely contrasting response to Patel's titular question.[1]

The curatorial text was unwarranted and yet also unsurprising; the frame of the assimilationist exhibit provoked Momaya's India-U.S. comparison, if not the images themselves. According to Patel, the series was part of a years-long process of auto-ethnographic self-

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[1] In the Introduction, I quote an Indian American informant of David Heenan's, whose words interestingly mirror Patel's title: "If India was then what it is now, I probably wouldn't have left" (91). David Heenan, *Flight Capital: The Alarming Exodus of America's Best and Brightest.* (Mountain View: Davies-Black Publishing 2005).

reinvention, an attempt "to recreate the space and time of the 'original' performance" constructed through awareness of the other's "gaze":

> It seems that the desire to dress up and act as the other has always been present with me…In the process of reinventing myself, I wonder about what I left behind…I perform as if I am being watched. The awareness of that gaze…consumes my photographs…I find myself being imagined and re-imagined by none other then [sic] myself.[2]

In other words, the photographs were never intended to offer a critique of rural labor or celebration of opportunity outside India. Rather, this was the artist's attempt to inhabit the subject position of self as other, to engage in a performance of Indianness at once familiar and distant, a performance of self-return and transformation, a performance that I, a fellow Indian American, recognized at once.

"If I Were Back in India, Who Would I Be?" illustrates how the viewer's gaze constructs and objectifies a subject who nevertheless maintains her own relation—agential, imaginative, and temporal—to that subjection and its rendering through the image. Following Rey Chow's respecification of a theory of native agency, Patel's photographs "[bear] witness to [their] own demolition—in a form which is at once image and gaze."[3] The native, Patel, looks back at India *and* at the viewer not simply as a defiled, essentialized image of feminized Third World labor but with an "indifferent gaze,"[4] calling into question not the photographer's self-consciousness, but the viewer's, as well as the perspective offered by the exhibit itself. To put a finer point on it, even if the curatorial framing enacts a kind of demolition, the image itself bears witness to it, and in so doing wordlessly speaks back.

In the final days of completing this dissertation, my thoughts have returned often to the relation between Patel's photographs, the artist's intentions, the curatorial framing of the series within the terms of "Beyond Bollywood," and the viewer's possible response. By literalizing as past what for Patel was a counterfactual future, "Beyond Bollywood" displayed the anachrony of diasporic imagining. By performing at once as self and other, while bearing witness to her own process of self-othering, Patel highlighted the double valence of looking back. There, at the nexus of those layered, implicated relations, within the entanglement of image, text, intention, reading, and misreading, resides my own critical impetus, as well as that of the following work.

After New India is about the contradictoriness of the diasporic relation to India in the era of New India's rise. It's about the attempt to leave India, to get away—whether from postcolonial tropes like hybridity, from elite Anglophonisms, or from the limited vantage of diaspora. Equally, it is about going back, reimagining the self, about the narration of a counterfactual future in which India does, in fact, rise and the diasporic subject is present to, as opposed to absent from, it. Finally, it's about the kinds of objects, intentions, and frames we pursue in order to have purchase on ourselves and our others: the Indian icons who populate the global imaginary; the genres through which we wage literary critiques; the real time encounters we seek in order to give narrative form to our lives.

This is not the dissertation I intended to write. Having written it now, I can only imagine what it would have been had I instead not.

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[2] Sejal Patel's artist statement and series description are available from <http://www.patelsejal.com>.

[3] Rey Chow, "Where Have All the Natives Gone?" *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of intervention in contemporary cultural studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 51-52.

[4] Ibid.

Introduction

Confronting New India

"India is now a metaphor,
a particular way of comprehending the world."
—*Bharati Mukherjee*[1]

"[T]he problem is that for those who live at home,
who are not global migrants, the reality of India has to be
daily confronted at a non-metaphoric level."
—*Meenakshi Mukherjee*[2]

   This dissertation is a literary and cultural study of the Anglophone discourse on a rising, global India, and how it has metabolized the three sets of problems captured in the epigraphs above: the problem of confronting India's "reality," the problem of the "global migrant," and the problem of India's "metaphoricity," specifically in the English language as it has manifested in the literary, social, and political complex of Anglophonism on the Indian subcontinent in the contemporary period. The exchange between two iconic (and unrelated) Mukherjees—the one, Bharati, known primarily as a diasporic novelist; the other, Meenakshi, as an Indian national literary scholar—is just one of many instances of vexed relation and response that the project's chapters will variously unfold. Put simply, I am interested in how the Indian Anglophone writer's encounter with India has been mediated by his or her encounters with other Indians; how, in this example, Bharati Mukherjee's attempt to define India is countered, indeed adjudicated, by Meenakshi Mukherjee's privileged avowal of the space of home, the temporality of the daily, and the proximity of reality; and how, in the era of the New India, in response to a sedimented history of such adjudication, a range of Anglophone writers in and from diaspora pursued the vantage the latter Mukherjee claims.

   "Mukherjee v. Mukherjee" is an instance of intertextual encounter between a novelist and critic; to that end, it represents the questions that this project pursues at the level of literary discourse. But my epigraphic and subtitular terms—realisms, diasporas, Anglophonisms, returns—also animate, at the levels of form and content (for the moment, heuristically distinguished), the corpus of Indian subcontinental Anglophone literature, from the 1930s social realism of Mulk Raj Anand, recently revived as a harbinger of the new social realisms of Aravind Adiga; to the narratives of exile and return offered in the celebrated postcolonial novels of Salman Rushdie in the 1980s; to the fraught rejections and displacements of English on offer in the post-millennial novels and nonfiction of Aatish Taseer and Jhumpa Lahiri, among others. The terms might switch places and remain equally applicable: Anand's were experiments in writing the subaltern Indian in English, from the exilic perspective of Bloomsbury; Rushdie's magical realism involved a chutneyfication of Indian English; Taseer and Lahiri have literally

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[1] Bharati Mukherjee, "Preface," *Darkness and Other Stories* (Hammondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985).

[2] Meenakshi Mukherjee, "The Anxiety of Indianness: Our Novels in English," *Economic and Political Weekly* 28.48, 2607-2611 (November 27, 1993), 2610.

and figurally returned to India, while experimenting with autobiographical and ethnographic modes of writing the real.[3]

This project's subtitle and the Introduction's epigraphs, then, give us the Indian Anglophone literary discourse we know, while my title poses the driving questions. To what India(s) do writers return *after* New India? How have the critical rubrics of diaspora, Anglophonism, and return inflected the literary *pursuit* of New India?

"New India" is a rhetorical construct which I will spend considerable time unpacking in the pages ahead. At once a temporal signifier of India after the liberalization of its financial markets, starting with the International Monetary Fund (IMF)-led economic reforms in 1991, and a qualitative descriptor of a rising, enterprising global India, "New India" is part of a larger discourse on Asia's rise in the 21st century.[4] This is a discourse that has seen popular circulation in ideas about "the decline of the West and the rise of the rest," ideas about the awakening of the sleeping Indian elephant-economy, and the emergence of an Indian dream as poignant as its American analogue.

As an Indian American whose parents came to the United States from India in the late 1970s for college and graduate school, the story of a New India that the next aspirational (read: middle-class, mobile) generation wouldn't *have* to leave was childhood lore before it became a scholarly preoccupation. Growing up in the 1990s, I traveled almost yearly to visit family and friends in the putatively emerging India, enacting a widely shared diasporic rite that I've elsewhere termed, following Amit Chaudhuri, "rehearsing return."[5] On those trips, and later as the Editor of an Indian American ethnic magazine, I saw and read firsthand, in the confidence of the new, entrepreneurial Indians and the testimonies of reverse migrants, that if India had once been stuck in the "waiting room of history,"[6] now it represented the future to millions of subjects, in addition to the possibility of "get[ting] filthy rich."[7]

This changing tide in India's ambitions and material prospects was attended by related discursive developments in India's self-conception and its image in the world. First, New India was not only a name for civilizational renewal and capitalist development, but also a nationalist pledge that India would no longer require the West or its diasporas in the United States and the United Kingdom as loci of mediation. "What is the point of writers who call themselves Indian authors, but who have no Indian readers?" pulp fiction author Chetan Bhagat voiced the emerging sentiment. "I want my country to read me."[8] Responding to the pontifications of Non-Resident Indian (NRI) talking head, Pankaj Mishra, India-based pundit R. Jagannathan cheered "the rise of new, more independent voices that [could talk] authoritatively about a changing

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[3] Mulk Raj Anand, *The Untouchable* (Wishart, 1935); Aravind Adiga, *The White Tiger* (New York: Free Press, 2008); Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (New York: Penguin Book, 1981); Aatish Taseer, *The Way Things Were* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015); Jhumpa Lahiri, *In Other Words,* trans. Ann Goldstein (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016).

[4] Fareed Zakaria, *The Post-American World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008).

[5] Ragini Tharoor Srinivasan, "Rehearsing Return," *India Currents* 28 (2014); See also Amit Chaudhuri, *Calcutta: Two Years in the City* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013), 76. Cf. Sandip Roy, "Going Home," *India Currents* (December 2008).

[6] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

[7] Mohsin Hamid, *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2013).

[8] Quoted in Randeep Ramesh, "Author's mass-market success upsets Indian literati" *The Guardian* (October 8, 2008).

India"[9] without relying on self-appointed ambassadors in diaspora like Mishra. That many of New India's celebrated cultural artifacts and authoritative voices in the early, post-millennial years were, in fact, routed through the West (*Slumdog Millionaire*, directed by Danny Boyle and produced in the United Kingdom, is just one prominent example) did little to temper the exuberant self-congratulation, which saw its apex in the Hindu nationalist BJP's electoral triumph in 2014 and concurrent appointment of the homegrown, son-of-a-chai-wallah, Hindi-speaking, India-educated, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)-member and former Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, as India's fifteenth Prime Minister.

Second, the North Atlantic Indian diaspora that had sprung up to escape India's belatedness was itself becoming a belated quantity. In the early 1980s, Americans still viewed India as "profoundly foreign," a nation "defined…by the grim gray imagery of despair."[10] In part as a corrective to that imagery, India began to project itself abroad as "a craft nation," a repository of culturally-specific traditions of music, dance, and performing arts traditions.[11] This reputation persisted until the early 1990s, which saw India's real and symbolic entry into the world marketplace. By the early 2000s, images of an emergent India associated with high tech and outsourcing circulated globally. Individuals like my parents who had immigrated to the United States in the 1970s and 1980s now felt that they had been left behind by an India that was a prominent player on the world stage; they were late to the party happening in the rising East, stuck on the wrong side of history in the declining West. In Ulka Anjaria's words, "At long last, India [was] no longer a place one [had to] leave in order to live the good life."[12] "Non-resident Indians were opting for jobs in Bangalore, rather than Boston," wrote Shoba Narayan. "The Western gold rush had come full circle."[13]

In 1993, when the Indian American doctor and writer, Abraham Verghese, was asked to interview candidates in Bangalore for medical residency opportunities in the United States, over four hundred over-qualified candidates applied for five jobs. All of them were desperate to leave India for further medical training. Recounting this experience in the *New Yorker*, Verghese expressed gratitude over how fortunate he had been in comparison: "fortunate that my parents had emigrated, fortunate that I had got the residency in Tennessee."[14] Less than fifteen years later, scholars, novelists, journalists, and pundits were consumed with narratives of, as one forum at the University of Pennsylvania put it, the New India of "global companies" and "attractive professional opportunities."[15] In the words of one of David Heenan's informants for the business monograph *Flight Capital*, "When I left India [in 1992], all anybody could talk about was 'I want

[9] R. Jagannathan, "Behind Pankaj Mishra's rants: A pathology of Hindu-phobia and self-hate," *Firstpost.com* (October 26, 2014, Web.

[10] Laura Shapiro, "5,000 Years of Splendor: The Festival of India is a movable feast of culture," *Newsweek* (September 16, 1985).

[11] Paul Greenough, "Nation, Economy, and Tradition Displayed: The Indian Crafts Museum, New Delhi," *Consuming Modernity: public culture in a South Asian world*, ed. Carol A. Breckenridge. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press (1995): 241.

[12] Ulka Anjaria, "Introduction: Literary Pasts, Presents, and Futures," *A History of the Indian Novel in English* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 22.

[13] Shoba Narayan, *Return to India: An immigrant memoir* (Jasmine Publishing, 2012), 130.

[14] Abraham Verghese, "The Cowpath to America," *New Yorker* (June 22/29, 1997), 88.

[15] "Return: One Family's Journey to America and Back," *Knowledge@Wharton* (November 2007), available online from <http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/return-to-india-one-familys-journey-to-america-and-back/>.

to go to the States'…Now, nobody talks about that. If India was then what it is now, I probably wouldn't have left."[16]

Although imperatives of "return" had always characterized diasporic structures of feeling and modes of living, at the turn of the new millennium, return to India from the United States and United Kingdom took the form of physical reverse migration. Observing this, pundits wrote worriedly of the United States' dwindling clout in the world economy. Scholars across the disciplines coined a range of terms—"flight capital," "reverse brain drain," "brain circulation," "technomigration"—to describe the returns to Asia which were rapidly taking place, seemingly as a consequence of American decline.[17] But return was not only an economic calculation. For Indian American immigrants like Narayan, return fulfilled a lifelong desire to recover, revisit, and re-inhabit not just the place, India, but also the past of the subject's inhabitance of it. A temporal longing was fulfilled through the spatial operation of relocation, "as if," to borrow W.G. Sebald's account of memory, "one were not looking back down the receding perspectives of time but rather down from a great height, from one of those towers whose tops are lost to view in the clouds."[18]

After New India asks how contemporary Indian Anglophone literature and criticism registered and produced (and not necessarily in that order) the discursive inversion in which India began to represent the future, and the Euro-American world, the past. In pursuing this question, I have assembled an archive of literary and cultural artifacts, including global icons and a range of literary genres, that variously illuminate the implications of this epochal—if ultimately counterfactual—shift. The discussions which follow start from the observation that India's rise eventuated through two significant returns: the empirical social fact of diasporic reverse migration, and the dream of return to the vernacular. I pursue both returns on the rhetorical level of critical discourse as well as in Anglophone literary texts that variously attempt to vernacularize the English language itself. My readings confirm that longstanding worries about the illegitimacy of Indian Anglophonism underlie the critical turn away from diasporic postcoloniality (chapter one), novelistic preoccupations with call center English and the wordless subaltern (chapter two), and the repatriation of Indian writers seeking compensatory encounters with their New Indian Others (chapter three). All of these movements were motored by the aspiration of self-return that characterized the rise of global India—however, I argue against the prevailing discourse, in ways that were reliant on, not independent of, the diaspora.

At the time of writing in 2016, a critical consensus is emerging that the globalization of India has meant a literary return to the nation. Priya Joshi contextualizes her take on the New Indian literature by quoting Amish Tripathi (a banker-turned-pulp-novelist, like the better-known Chetan Bhagat) on the "changing" India: ". . . people frankly don't care for . . . stories of the British Raj or the struggles of NRIs. After a century, India is rich again, and people want to

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[16] David Heenan, *Flight Capital: The Alarming Exodus of America's Best and Brightest.* (Mountain View, CA: Davies-Black Publishing 2005), 91.

[17] See Vivek Wadhwa, "A Reverse Brain Drain," *Issues in Science and Technology* (Spring 2009): 45-46. Available from <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1358382>; Heenan, 2005; AnnaLee Saxenian, *The New Argonauts: Regional Advantage in a Global Economy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Aalok Khandekar, "Engineering the global Indian: Skills, cosmopolitanism, and families in circuits of high-tech migrations between India and the United States" (unpublished dissertation, 2010).

[18] W.G. Sebald, *The Emigrants,* trans. Michael Hulse (New York: New Directions, 1996 [1992]), 145.

hear stories about themselves—about our call centre generation."[19] E. Dawson Varughese describes "New" Indian literatures as those that, in contradistinction to the Anglophone literatures of old, "talk directly of, and to New India."[20] Harish Trivedi argues that in the New India, the English language has actually "gone down…in terms of its economic and social clout [while] Hindi and other Indian languages have come up."[21] For Anjaria, what's significant about the novel in New India is "that [the] experience [of diaspora] is no longer represented as a sea change."[22]

If, as K. Anthony Appiah memorably wrote, postcoloniality was "the condition of…a comprador intelligentsia: of a relatively small, Western-style, Western-trained, group of writers and thinkers who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery,"[23] then the rise of a global New India is meant to mark the abatement of such mediation. After decades of India and its Anglophone writers having been oriented toward the West, now Indian literature is returning to rooted national subjects, returning to vernacular languages and concerns, moving away from the elitism and elisions of a diaspora-focused postcolonialism, returning finally to the real India—*or so the story goes*. In the work of all those cited above, and in the broader literary discourse on New India, the idea that India's Western diasporas, the study of Anglophonism, and postcolonial theory have finally been superseded carries a curiously triumphal tone, one which I would argue deserves particular scrutiny when voiced by Anglophone academics, holding appointments (often, in English departments) as scholars of the postcolonial, working in institutions in the United States and United Kingdom. Too often, and here I wish to emphasize my own academic position, we counter-pose the burden and anxiety of English as a cultural system with the comparative spontaneity (if not freedom) and ethicality of vernacular, *bhasha*, or language literatures.[24] It is as if English were a quantity other than a language, and that, concurrently, to read, study, or teach Indian literatures written in English entails an abandonment of linguistic and poetic operations for capitulation to an ongoing project of colonial (now, neoliberal) subjectivation.

After New India puts pressure on the idea of a literary return to India in the extended global moment for two additional reasons as well. First, because narratives of return to India have been implicated in and are productive of a pronounced nativist discourse. Changing ideas about Indian globality, representational self-sufficiency, and futurity compelled mobile diasporans and writers to return "home," but they also led nationalist subjects to return, in the virulent tones of

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[19] Quoted in Priya Joshi, "Chetan Bhagat: Remaking the Novel in India," *A History of the Indian Novel in English,* ed. Ulka Anjaria (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 311-312.

[20] E. Dawson Varughese, *Reading New India: Post-Millennial Indian Fiction in English* (London and New York: Bloombsury Academic, 2013), 152.

[21] Harish Trivedi, "Foreword," *Chutnefying English: The Phenomenon of Hinglish,* ed. Rita Kothari and Rupert Snell (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2011), xix.

[22] Anjaria, 2015, 13.

[23] K. Anthony Appiah, *In my Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 149.

[24] "Burden" and "anxiety" are Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's and Mrinalini Mukherjee's terms, respectively in Spivak, "The Burden of English," in *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament*, ed. Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 134-157; and Mukherjee, "The Anxiety of Indianness," 1993. Cf. Aamir Mufti, *Forget English! Orientalism and World Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016). Mufti defines English "not merely as a language of literary expression but as a cultural system with global reach, not simply a transparent medium but an assemblage and apparatus for the assimilation and domestication of diverse practices of writing (and life-worlds) on a world scale" (17).

Hindutva resurgence, to the pre-colonial past, to dig, quite literally, for the mythological river, Saraswati.[25] New India has seen numerous, violent clashes between state-sanctioned Hindu nationalism and champions of free expression, including the sedition controversy and arrest of student leader Kanhaiya Kumar at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in February 2016. Observing the events at JNU, Anjum Hasan, an editor at India's premier journal of politics and culture, *The Caravan*, notes that New India is marked by "a terrible insecurity": "We seem to be wondering who we really are, culturally, and this uncertainty expresses itself as a hollow aggrandizement—a recourse to orthodoxy, and a silencing of the alternative view, enforced through violence."[26] A related recourse to orthodoxy has manifested in diaspora as well, as academic South Asianists, including some of my own advisors, clash with self-appointed ambassadors for a "Hindu India" over the content of world history textbooks used in California schools.[27]

Second, I put pressure on ideas of return to India because I'm not convinced that we diasporic subjects, Anglophone writers, and literary critics ever really *left*. Each of my chapters explores this predicament of not being able to leave India, of the imperative of returning to India, of the performative demands of the New India discourse. Chapter one considers the tenacity of Anglophone postcoloniality as a critical paradigm that continues to inflect and structure the social scientific study of the New India and its subjects. Chapter two juxtaposes novels by repatriates, emigrants, and critics of the nation-state, who narrate New India through performances of diaspora-nation and elite-subaltern identification. Finally, while literary critics have long been occupied with the exilic content of postcolonial writing, chapter three's genealogy of the emergence genre points to an alternate archive of Indian Anglophone nonfiction structured through dynamics of return.

Thus, the first observation I offer here to be developed throughout the work—that nation-oriented recursion emerged as the primary sign of India's global ascendance; that India's rise was therefore not a rise, but a return; and that ideas of new emergence evince the tenacity of diasporic modes of belonging and Anglophone postcoloniality—is neither neutral nor normative, but a critical description. It is not a celebration of return nor a proposal of it. It demands as consequence heightened attention to rhetorics of return, so that we might think better and more critically about the pasts we uncover, the tongues we reanimate, the histories we narrate, and the presents in service of which they are mobilized.

"Return" speaks to phenomena, concepts, and processes beyond the Indian case. Indeed, it is one of the oldest narratives in the study of diaspora, a formation "structured by a teleology of

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[25] Manu Balachandran and Itika Sharma Punit, "India is spending millions to find an ancient river that probably never existed," *Quartz India* (August 19, 2015), available online from <http://qz.com/480801/india-is-spending-millions-to-find-an-ancient-and-probably-mythical-river/>; Seema Chishti, "Can you make a river come alive? The long, dry quest to find the Saraswati," *The Indian Express* (July 12, 2015), available online from <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/can-you-make-a-river-come-alive-the-long-dry-quest-to-find-the-saraswati/>.

[26] Quoted in Saikat Majumdar, "Indian Writers Under Siege: A Roundtable," *Public Books*, 1 March 2016.

[27] Wendy Doniger, "The Repression of Religious Studies," *Chronicle of Higher Education* (April 20, 2016), available from <http://chronicle.com/article/The-Repression-of-Religious/236166>; see also Elizabeth Redden, "The Religious War Against American Scholars of India," *Inside Higher Ed* (April 12, 2016), available from <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/04/12/scholars-who-study-hinduism-and-india-face-hostile-climate>

origin, scattering, and return."[28] Diaspora is a "boomerang story" of competing attachments in which the pull of home—imagined or real, dreamt or forsaken—is often only matched by the impossibility of going back.[29] Return is chosen, as in the case of certain European diasporas, and compelled, as in the case of those the United States deports south of the border. Return is Saidiya Hartman's quest not to find her roots, but to take "the routes traveled by strangers," routes that are the only mother country she can claim.[30] Return also speaks to the religious and cultural practices, community formations, performances, and textual productions through which diasporas keep home "there" alive "here."

During my years in graduate school, "return" emerged as a concept with both seductive linguistic motility and transdisciplinary significance beyond diaspora studies.[31] In a neoliberal present in which dominant political actors, policymakers, and university administrators, alike, speak the language of "return on investment," cultural theorists have become interested in other modalities of return, uses and abuses of history, and ethics of investment that might enable new conceptions of world futures. We need only recall the argument of James Clifford's *Returns: Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty-First Century*, the third part of his influential trilogy on culture and its predicaments, to know that the problem of return is also fundamentally the problem of the contemporary—since, as Clifford puts it, "[t]he past, materialized in land and ancestors, is always a source of the new."[32]

Along with "return," the rubric of the contemporary is also gaining prominence in literary studies—particularly in the constellation known as "global Anglophone" literatures—despite the fact that the contemporary is "a field with no established canon or historical period."[33] For Anjaria, contemporaneity "signals something irreducible to narrative time….[it] refuses our conventional academic signs of expertise"; and yet it is "literally and critically, the future of the field."[34] Toral Gajarawala describes the contemporary as "collagist"; it is assumed to be a "secular, post-identitarian, and fleeting" condition, and yet it rings with both "newness and emergence" and "problematic [continuities] of time past"[35] (like the Sarasvati-searches

[28] Jarrod Hayes, "Queering Roots, Queering Diaspora," in *Rites of Return: Diaspora Poetics and the Politics of Memory,* ed. Marianne Hirsch and Nancy K. Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 74.

[29] Ragini Tharoor Srinivasan, "Boomerangs and Exiles," *India Currents* (December 2008).

[30] Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 9.

[31] At the time of writing in 2016, "return" is being researched in fields ranging from anthropology to literature; for instance, the anthropologist Deborah A. Boehm is engaged in a project about return migration and deportation between the United States and Mexico, and the literary scholar Sonali Thakkar is exploring the trope of return in *Our Sister Killjoy: or Reflections from a Black-eyed Squint*, by the Ghanain novelist Ama Ata Aidoo, as part of a larger project on mid-20th century European migration. See also Fran Markowitz and Anders H. Steffanson, eds. *Homecomings: Unsettling Paths of Return*, (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2004); Takeyuki Tsuda, *Diasporic Homecomings: Ethnic Return Migration in Comparative Perspective* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009); Marianne Hirsch and Nancy K. Miller, *Rites of Return: Diaspora Poetics and the Politics of Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); and Biao Xiang, Brenda S. A Yeoh, and Mika Toyota, *Return: Nationalizing Transnational Mobility in Asia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

[32] James Clifford, *Returns: Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 25.

[33] Sarah Chihaya, Joshua Kotin, and Kinohi Nishikawa, "'The Contemporary' by the numbers," *post45 Contemporaries* (February 29, 2016); Amy Hungerford, "On the Period Formerly Known as Contemporary," *American Literary History* 20:1-2 (2008), 410-419.

[34] Anjaria, 2015, 20-21.

[35] Toral Gajarawala, "Caste, Complicity, and the Contemporary," *A History of the Indian Novel in English,* ed. Ulka Anjaria (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 373-374.

mentioned above). This simultaneity is not only, as Gajarawala suggests, because the concept of the contemporary implies the globality that a related term, modernity, lacks, but also, I want to stress, because the contemporary is definitionally about coexistence. To be contemporary (adj.) means "belonging to the same time, age, or period; living, existing, or occurring together in time"; to be a contemporary (n.) is to be "one who lives at the same time with another or others."[36] To be contemporary is not, then, simply to be present and of the moment, but rather to be within *presence*, to share and occupy together moments in time.

My approach to the contemporary in this work marries an understanding of contemporaneity as a temporal signifier, to an understanding of contemporaneousness as a condition of being together, a condition of possible and probable encounter, relation, and confrontation. In order to address the first aspect of the term—its signification of an extended present—I distinguish between the past-contemporary, the present-contemporary, and the future-contemporary. The "past-contemporary" is the recent past, extending back to the mid-20th century Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947. In most accounts of literary periodization, this is the "period formerly known as contemporary," "around 1948," "post-45": the temporality of the postcolonial.[37] The "present-contemporary," by contrast, is the immediate moment of this writing, the "now" of the newly global, and that which, when apprehended, is already receding into the past. Finally, the "future-contemporary" marks the horizon of all possible action, thought, and feeling in the present moment. Within the terms of this tripartite division, the New India discourse is at once past-, present-, and future-contemporary: a qualifier for the enterprising India of the first two decades of the 21st century, as well as a marker of aspirations for a form of global ascendance predicated on a vexed conjuncture of development discourse, attempted Westernization, nationalist resurgence, techno-futurism, and pre-colonial return.

In proposing this heuristic division, I distinguish also between the "postcolonial" and the "global" as two distinct but related imaginaries corresponding to past- and present- iterations of the extended contemporary moment.[38] The postcolonial and the global are temporal markers which enable literary periodization; they are referents for trends in the critical discourse; and they are pedagogical rubrics which structure the teaching, study, and deliverance of Anglophone literatures of the South Asian subcontinent in the American academy. To put these terms into motion in service of the present inquiry, then: If, in a past-contemporary postcolonial framework, Indian Anglophone literature, literary discourse, and the literary market were dominated by expatriate writers in diaspora, like Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh, then what happens to the present-contemporary diasporic writer after the rise of a New India which writers either need not leave at all, or to which they might actually return? If, in a past-contemporary postcolonial framework, the elite, colonially-imposed English language existed in a hostile relation to

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[36] *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2016. Available online from <www.oed.com>

[37] Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Is the post-in postmodernism the post-in postcolonial?" *Critical Inquiry* 17.2 (1991), 336-357; Jed Esty and Colleen Lye, "Peripheral realisms now," *Modern Language Quarterly* 73.3 (2012): 269-288; Leela Gandhi and Deborah L. Nelson, "Around 1948: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Global Transformation," *Critical Inquiry* 40.4 (2014).

[38] I follow Akhil Gupta's argument in *Postcolonial Developments: Agriculture in the Making of Modern India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998) that postcoloniality is itself the name for a particular set of experiences of and dispositions toward modernity. However, I am interested in "globality" as a regime distinct from modernity that both names a transhistorical range of configurations of inter- and trans-national relation and is posited as a successor to postcoloniality as a descriptor of the structural location of the non-Western world in the extended contemporary moment. Cf. Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash and Roland Robertson, eds., *Global Modernities* (London: SAGE Publications, 1995).

vernacular literary production, then what kind of linguistic and literary rapprochement has the globalization of India effected? If, in a past-contemporary postcolonial framework, Indian Anglophone literature was not only the province of an elite minority, but also evidenced Meenakshi Mukherjee's "anxiety of Indianness" (quoted in the second epigraph), then to whom does the New Indian literature belong? Finally, how did diasporic and national, elite and subaltern, vernacular and Anglophone subjects negotiate the present-contemporary New India through the fact and experience of their very *contemporaneity*?

NEW INDIA: DEFINITIONS, CONTRADICTIONS

By the middle of the first decade of the 21st century, the "New India" moniker had gained currency among pundits, politicians, journalists, and academics as a descriptor of India's economic "dream run" (the period of outsized growth between 2003-2008), the nation's capitalist ambitions, and the confluence of its "hard" economic and "soft" cultural power.[39] The discourse on New India suffused the economic, cultural, and political spheres equally, undergirding both evaluations of Indian Anglophone literature's spectacular penetration of what Pascale Casanova terms "the world republic of letters"[40] and political platforms like the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) "India Shining" campaign in 2004.

At the same time, the rhetoric of New India was already being exposed as just that: as rhetoric in the pejorative sense, hot air that couldn't mask India's persistent systemic inequality, poverty, sectarianism, and infrastructural rot. By the second decade of the 21st century, it was evident that India's bursts of outsized economic growth in the preceding decade had not translated into development for the majority of Indians. New India had dozens of billionaires, but there were still hundreds of millions in poverty. The "sunrise industry" of the call center was a sham.[41] The death toll of suiciding famers in Maharashtra alone amounted to an average of ten per day, and a single corporation, the Tatas, ran over a hundred companies.[42] While "rising China" seemed to refer to the statistical inevitability of China's economic ascendance (with the U.S. debt holdings to prove it), "New India" was notable precisely for its repeated failures to transcend its status as an ideological smokescreen for domestic policy failure. Viewed against the 2008 Beijing Olympics and the Expo 2010 Shanghai China, the 2010 Commonwealth Games in New Delhi were a highly visible example of India's abortive ascendance, one that the graphic novelist Sarnath Banerjee, discussed in the Conclusion, would enshrine as an emblem of India's dispositional "short-termism": i.e., "beautifying Delhi [by c]overing all that is crappy with

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[39] One of the first popular uses of "New India" was in the *Times of India*'s 2007 promotional videos featuring Bollywood star, Amitabh Bachchan; available online from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KNomFKB8sgk>. Cf. Siddhartha Deb, *The Beautiful and the Damned: A Portrait of the New India* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2011); E. Dawson Varughese, *Reading New India: Post-Millennial Indian Fiction in English* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013); Anthony P. D'Costa, ed., *A New India? Critical Reflections in the Long Twentieth Century* (London: Anthem Press, 2010).
[40] Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters,* trans. M.B. DeBevoise (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004 [1999]).
[41] Deb, 2011, 11.
[42] Arundhati Roy, *Capitalism: A Ghost Story* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014). See also Arundhati Roy, *Field Notes on Democracy: Listening to Grasshoppers* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2009). For Roy, India's much touted 9 percent rate of growth (which, in 2014, had slumped to under 6 percent, a decline widely cited as the cause of the Congress' failure in the 2014 elections) was more a cancer than a cause for celebration: "The higher the rate of this kind of growth, the worse the prognosis. Any oncologist will tell you that" (8).

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marble."[43] Yet despite economists' admissions that India had long since lost the economic arms race with China, and volumes dedicated to demonstrating that the changes signifying New India actually reflected substantial continuities in "old" Indian policy, politics, and sentiment, the "wishful thinking" about India's probable inheritance of the "post-American world" continued with new avowals and narrative performances of the rise.[44]

The paradoxical question behind all of the above—*When*, in fact, was India "New"?—demonstrates once again that there is no geopolitics without chronopolitics.[45] The rearrangement and extension of territorial attachments, political orientations, and communication technologies conventionally referred to under the rubric of India's "globalization," and Asia's more generally, also meant a shift in dominant civilizational assumptions about time and temporality. Pace Francis Fukuyama, history did not in fact come to an end in 1989. Rather, in the new epoch of world history marked by what a 2010 McKinsey and Company Report called "the economic rise of the developing world," India and China "returned to the global prominence they played before the European and North American industrial revolution."[46] No longer was the West to be viewed as the sole originator of universal principles in Hegel's normative terms, which meant that the West was also no longer synonymous with the future.

Despite its patent counterfactuality, the New India discourse was—and remains—salient, then, because it promised to upend basic principles of orientation in western intellectual history. For Hegel, writing in the early 19th century, the dynamic process of world history began in Asia, where the geographical principle of "uplands" interacting with "valley plains" was conducive to the emergence of "the consciousness of a universal."[47] Asian societies were agricultural, which meant the existence of conditions that led to the establishment of private property. But, in Hegel's view, Asia was "shut off" from the maritime principle that characterized Europe, which had "links with the sea" that enabled "life to step beyond itself" (a euphemism, of course, for foreign conquest and imperial expansion).[48] Despite the significant contrasts Hegel draws between China and India, Asia's generally childlike stage in the development of spirit was counterposed with that of Europe, vested with spirit in its mature, seafaring, self-conscious "old age."[49]

The discourse on India's and China's "return to global prominence" shared the Hegelian emphasis on the performative development of consciousness. Consequently, scholars writing on

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[43] Sarnath Banerjee, *All Quiet in Vikaspuri* (Noida: HarperCollins Publishers India, 2015), 57.

[44] "It was not so long ago that India appeared in the American press as a poor, backward and often violent nation," Pankaj Mishra observed. "Suddenly the country seems to be not only a 'roaring capitalist success story' but also, according to *Foreign Affairs*, an 'emerging strategic partner of the United States.' To what extent is this wishful thinking rather than an accurate estimate of India's strengths?" See Mishra, "The Myth of the New India," *The New York Times* (July 6, 2006).

[45] Paul Virilio, *The Information Bomb* (1998), trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2000).

[46] McKinsey & Company, "India's Urban Awakening: building inclusive cities, sustaining economic growth" (McKinsey Global Institute, 2010).

[47] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction*, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 191.

[48] Ibid., 196.

[49] Ibid., 130-1. In Balachandra Rajan's reading, India marked a conceptual limit to Hegel's philosophy of world history; it was "another traditional name for forgetfulness…the place where the will to move on is challenged." India effectively lured reason away from itself, thwarting its self-actualization, which is why, for Hegel, India had neither history, justice, morality, nor concept of freedom as such. Balachandra Rajan, *Under Western Eyes: India from Milton to Macaulay* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999): 101.

the politics of representation in the putative "Asian Century" have tended to foreground the question of Asian autonomy, an ability to speak back to the West that Rey Chow terms "economic-semiotic transfer."[50] For Chow, as for other cultural theorists like Purnima Mankekar, the rise of India and China inaugurated a new politics of visibility and voice, allegorized through "the event of emergence" (Chow) or the "temporality of emergence" (Mankekar).[51] The relation I want to underscore here is the relation between the rhetoric of return, on the one hand, and the temporality of the event of emergence, on the other. Commonsensically, the former is a going back, a recursive movement toward an existent, established origin, whereas the latter is about a dawning into view for the first time, an opening into a field that is only incipiently coming into being. The insistence on narrative beginning serves "to modify the meaning of past occurrences after the event…by refuting a first interpretation and replacing it with a new one."[52] Yet the time of the Asian Century and, it follows, of New India was one of both recursion and emergence, return and the rise.[53]

That the time of New India both preexists the now and is yet to appear is key to my tripartite understanding of the contemporary in this dissertation. All of the figures and phenomena discussed in the pages ahead involve complex negotiations of history and futurity, as well as of the experience of temporal disruption. In chapters one and three, I show how the iconic Indian figures of the expatriate writer and call center agent were not only out of place (e.g., left behind in diaspora) or placeless (e.g., at work in the no man's land of the Business Process Outsourcing industry), but out of time, in at least two senses. For expatriates returning to the New India, reterritorialization was premised on the sense that the diaspora was literally out of time; there was no more time available to forestall the choice to return "home." Thus, Amit Chaudhuri describes his return to India as motivated by the simple fact of his mortality: "I didn't want to discover one day that I was old, not far from death, and still living in England."[54] For New Indian global aspirants like the call center agent, life was literally lived outside the normal temporal registers, requiring a series of what A. Aneesh calls "somatic adjustments."[55]

In chapter one, I nominate these figures, the expatriate writer and call center agent, as "twin subjects of the New Indian Anglosphere." The operative word here is "Anglosphere," for undergirding arguments about the emergence of a New India, New Indians, and New Indian literatures is an evolving consensus about the English language in which its business is conducted. In India, whatever qualifier is appended to the sign "English," the language has historically been

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[50] Rey Chow, "Framing the Original: Toward a New Visibility of the Orient," *Entanglements, or Transmedial Thinking about Capture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 172.

[51] Purnima Mankekar, *Unsettling India: Affect, Temporality, Transnationality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

[52] Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983), 56.

[53] In "The Smithsonian Beside Itself" (2015), I discuss the rhetoric of emergence at some length, specifically with respect to ideas of the Indian American community as an "emerging community." Immigrant populations frequently stake their identitarian claims to the "host" country on the perception of mainstream acceptance, and the story of the Indian American community has exemplarily been one of repeat emergence, whether in terms of literary and media events (e.g. the film *Gandhi*, 1982; Jhumpa Lahiri's 1999 Pulitzer for *The Interpreter of Maladies*), bilateral Indo-U.S. initiatives (e.g. the 123 Agreement of 2008), or high profile individual achievements (e.g. Sabeer Bhatia's founding of Hotmail, 1996; Satya Nadella's ascension to Microsoft CEO, 2014). In each instance, India is said to have finally, and for the first time, "arrived" into the collective American consciousness.

[54] Chaudhuri, 2013, 247.

[55] A. Aneesh, "Negotiating Globalization: Men and Women of India's Call Center," *Journal of Social Issues* 68.3, 514-533 (2012), 516.

understood as both "a concept-metaphor for linguistic hegemony"[56] and "a language of possibility…a promise of modernity…a move away from old and oppressive spaces of social life."[57] Whether embracing or repudiating English, the Indian writer, reader, and speaker have to divest the language of what Francesca Orsini calls Indian English's "triple privilege"[58]—owing from the legacy of British colonialism, longstanding class-distinctions within India, and the fact of the language's global dissemination.

English has always been a vehicle of upward mobility and economic development in India, but now, in the New India, it is finally available to lower-caste and class communities formerly barred access to educational and vocational institutions for English-language acquisition.[59] It is verily a *new* English, one that, as Rashmi Sadana observes, many young Indians "have only ever related to as a global rather than a colonial or even post-colonial [language]."[60] As English becomes more accessible, it is less coveted than before and less a distinguishing marker of class and caste; it no longer necessarily signifies a "linguistic color line."[61] Observing these transformations, some herald an "India after English,"[62] in which the hegemony of the language has been sufficiently contested as to now be beside the point.[63]

What does it mean to *have* a language—to own and master it, to deploy it at will? Conversely, what might it mean to be *had* by it—to be spoken by it, suffused with it, to have *it* speak *you*?[64] Does such having imply or entail such being had? On the one hand, English is an *overvalued* language in New India, as it is around the world. The result has been the marginalization of India's many other vernacular, or *bhasha*, languages, as greater numbers of Indians strive to acquire competency in English. On the other hand, English is *devolving* in New India.[65] In the main, critics of the New Indian Englishes believe that the democratization of the language has led to its bastardization. Neither of these claims logically presupposes the other, nor

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[56] Bishnupriya Ghosh, *When Borne Across: Literary Cosmopolitics in the Contemporary Indian Novel* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 49.

[57] A. Aneesh, *Neutral Accent: How Language, Labor, and Life Become Global* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 6.

[58] Francesca Orsini, "India in the Mirror of World Fiction," *New Left Review 13* (January-February 2002).

[59] Leya Mathew, "School 'Choice', English, and Enduring Inequalities in Liberalizing Kerala" (unpublished dissertation in progress)

[60] Rashmi Sadana, "Writing in English," *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Indian Culture*, ed Vasudha Dalmia and Rashmi Sadana, 124-141 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 125.

[61] Aatish Taseer, "How English Ruined Indian Literature," *New York Times* (March 19, 2015).

[62] Samanth Subramanian, "India After English?" *New York Review of Books Daily* (June 9, 2014), available online from <http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2014/jun/09/india-newspapers-after-english/>

[63] That said, English remains the language "through which global stereotypes about India have to be managed for its self-promotion" (Chakravorty 40). Thus, an India after English does not presuppose a world after English, nor the wholesale transformation of American or British English-language imaginings of India. Despite Modi's descriptions of India as a nation of "mouse- (as opposed to "snake-) charmers," imaginings of the latter tenor abound: in the flashy, kaleidoscopic colors of films as different as *Slumdog Millionaire* and *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel,* and in the sensational tales of foreign reporters, like the *Times'* former India correspondent, Gardiner Harris, whose 2012 dispatches from New Delhi included essays on the city's "plague" of rhesus monkeys, one on a "big fat Guar" wedding in Rajasthan, complete with groom-bearing horse in pink slippers, and another about fang-baring stray dogs: "No country has as many stray dogs as India." See Mrinalini Chakravorty, *In Stereotype: South Asia in the Global Literary Imaginary* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014); Gardiner Harris, "My Big Fat Guar Wedding," *New York Times* (July 17, 2012) and "Where Streets are Thronged with Strays Baring Fangs," *New York Times* (August 6, 2012).

[64] Here, I take inspiration from Trinh T. Minh-ha, whose work has consistently emphasized that as "you speak it, it speaks you" (56). Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Cinema-Interval* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

[65] Vijay Nambisan, *Language as an Ethic* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2003).

must they necessarily conflict; however, they can also be reformulated in terms of a contradiction. On the one hand, an English that is over-esteemed in India and daily recruiting new aspirants and speakers is also an English that is, quantitatively speaking, *on the rise*. On the other hand, an English that is being provincialized and vernacularized by these increasingly unfluent speakers, as well as those writers who patronize them, is an English that is, qualitatively speaking, *on the decline*.

Each claim has both sociological and literary contours. Concerns about English's hegemony subtend concerns about the place of vernacular Indian texts in the world literary sphere, as well as about the authentic Indianness of primarily or exclusively English-speaking (and writing, reading) Indians in the nation and its diasporas. Concerns about the qualitative decline of what the novelist G.V. Desani described as the "goodly godly"[66] English tongue subtend concerns about the "spirit,"[67] in Raja Rao's sense, of the speakers, writers, and readers of the putatively unrefined language, as well as of the fates of those Indian subjects who employ the increasingly minoritized version of an elite English tongue. This may very well be a contradiction at the heart of the democratic process: the broadening of the base of English speakers is inevitably attended by a certain lessening of standards. Certainly, as linguists observe and British English speakers lament, this has been the case with American English.[68]

Concerns about the simultaneous indigenization and globalization of the English language in India underlie a third significant anxiety about English in New India, which I discuss in chapters one and two: namely, anxiety over the loss of Indian English as a literary language with privileged purchase on the aesthetic. (An ironic turn, since the postcolonial language debates have tended to center on the problem of the self-annihilating "gain.") Construed as a vehicle of communication in service of India's aspirational economic ascendance, it matters little whether the English spoken is a queer form of Hinglish, call center English, or the Queen's (a triplicate, and not binary, distinction, as I will emphasize in the next chapter). But it matters very much indeed if the question is about Indian English as a language for the production of a body of literature with "worlding" or "world-making" potential.[69]

In this dissertation, I discuss these contradictory developments in Indian Englishes and of the Indian Anglosphere in relation to the temporal and experiential category of "contemporaneity" introduced above. The question is not only whether there is an "India after English," or whether the new "global" English will have purchase on the "real" India that the "postcolonial" English didn't, but how a range of writing subjects inhabited and mobilized the cultural and linguistic complex of Indian Anglophonism in order to apprehend the New India, its past, present, and future, and their places within it. In chapter one, those subjects are literary critics and ethnographers seeking to understand different forms of identity and mobility among Indian subjects across class positions and national locations. In chapters two and three, those subjects are novelists and journalists seeking encounters with their New Indian Others in both real and narrative time.

This language and literature-focused approach distinguishes my work from that of social scientists and media theorists including Purnima Mankekar, Sarah Sharma, and Rebecca Brown,

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[66] G.V. Desani, *All About H. Hatterr* (New York: New York Review of Books, 1970, 1986), 36.

[67] Raja Rao, "Author's Foreword," *Kanthapura* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1947, 1938), vii.

[68] See Zoltan Kovecses, *American English: An Introduction* (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2000), especially chapter 15, "The democratic nature of American English."

[69] Pheng Cheah, "What is a world? On world literature as world-making activity," *Daedalus* 137.3, 26-38 (Summer 2008).

who seek to understand the temporal experience of India's globalization through internationally-circulating cultural artifacts like film and television, figures like taxi drivers and business travelers, and visual arts exhibitions.[70] By that same token, the interest I share with them in situating the complex of Anglophonism in relation to global icons and migration patterns distinguishes this work from that of recent literary studies on the new dispensation of English in India and the corresponding globalization of Indian English literature, including work by E. Dawson Varughese, Suman Gupta, and Aamir Mufti.[71]

For example, in her anthropological account of transnational public cultures between the urban centers of New Delhi and the San Francisco Bay Area, Mankekar tracks what she calls affective "unsettlement" across sites ranging from Indian American grocery stores to Hindi films and television, and in the words of informants in Saratoga, California, and New Delhi, India, alike. She argues persuasively that the temporality of emergence in New India is dominant and singular; both individual and national aspirants adhered to this temporality of "potentiality…fraught with a hopeful waiting…weighted by an acute sense of uncertainty."[72] And yet, oddly, there is little attention to the transformations within English and Hindi in the New India and how they mediate such uncertainty in this account. Unsettlement, feelings of being unmoored, and uncertainty about India's future (both about India's *having* a future and *being* a future) were of course significant affective components of diasporic and national modes of subjectivity in the time of New India. However, in my view, it is equally significant that accounts of New Indian subject formation achieved their greatest dissemination in the new, lowbrow Anglophone literature of the New India, like the pulp fictions of Bhagat, discussed in chapter two, and in internationally-circulating works of generically hybrid Anglophone nonfiction, discussed in chapter three. It is significant because it allows us to chart a course between the comparative frames of past and future, on the one hand, and English and its others, on the other, toward an understanding of the linguistic, temporal, and identitarian others *within* English.

Moreover, the future-oriented account of the time of Mankekar's "Aspirational India," while characteristic of prevailing scholarship, is only half the story.[73] What Mankekar calls the unsettlement experienced by diasporic and national Indian subjects in the time of New India was also, I am arguing, significantly articulated through new orientations toward the past, toward the excavation and narration of alternate histories that could comprise the ground of yet to be realized Indian and world futures. In the first half-century after independence, Indian Anglophone writers like Rushdie and Rohinton Mistry were concerned with re-writing history as a way of explaining the present (e.g., accounting for the abortive modernity of the Indian nation-state in the decades following Partition and during the Emergency). By contrast, the question that occupied writers of the New India was not simply how to account for the present, but rather, in Veena Das's words, "how to inherit our past."[74]

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[70] Mankekar 2015; Sarah Sharma, *In the Meantime: Temporality and Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Rebecca Brown, *Displaying Time: People, Process, and Art at the 1985–86 Festival of India* (forthcoming).
[71] Varughese 2013; Suman Gupta, *Philology and Global English Studies: Retracings* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Mufti 2016.
[72] Mankekar, 2015, 22.
[73] Aime Carillo Rowe, Sheena Malhotra, and Kimberlee Perez, *Answer the Call: Virtual Migration in Indian Call Centers* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013): "Indeed, it is India's future that seems to be at stake" (174).
[74] Veena Das, "Afterword," in Anand Pandian and M.P. Mariappan, *Ayya's Accounts: A Ledger of Hope in Modern India* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 205.

By paying attention to recurring logics of return across literary genres, and by complexifying accounts of Anglophonism and Indian *Englishes* (plural), I seek to understand New India beyond the affect (or "meme"[75]) of aspiration and beyond the cultural logics of enterprise.[76] Put differently, I seek an account of New India as something other than a scene of acquiescence to neoliberalism's aspirational time, of McKim Marriot's "dividual" Indian subject's rebirth as an "individual" entrepreneur of the self.[77] In this dissertation, New India is foremost a scene of relation unfolding in time between contemporaries. New India is a stage, I will argue, a stage on which a range of subjects bore witness to their mutual imbrication in encounters involving "transpersonal"[78] volition, aspiration, and communicative relation in the new global Anglosphere.

EAST-EAST ENCOUNTERS: A RETURNEE WALKS INTO A CALL CENTER

Many have interpreted the rise of New India as the emergence of India in Western, or more specifically American, form.[79] By that same token, New India actually threatened longstanding "Western," "American," and more broadly Anglophonic cultural complexes. In the New India, it was urban, cosmopolitan and nominally Western subjects whose centrality and relevance to the project of Indian globality was in question. At stake, then, I argue, was not simply the transformation in relations between East and West discussed above, in which the East became the new West and Bangalore the new Boston, but rather a transformation in relations between East and West significantly enabled by a transformation in relations between dueling figures *in* and *of* the East itself.

In January 2004, the writer Siddhartha Deb returned to India, where he was born and raised, from the United States, where he had gone, like many before him, to earn a Ph.D. But instead of completing his doctorate at Columbia University, Deb had written an autobiographical novel, *The Point of Return*, and started working as a freelance journalist. Now, he was in Delhi on assignment from the London-based *Guardian*.[80] His task: to secure a job at an Indian call center and write an insider account of working at the center—or the backroom—of the global economy. Deb would later begin his best-selling work of nonfiction, *The Beautiful and the Damned: A Portrait of the New India*, with a description of the identitarian gymnastics required to fulfill this charge:

> …I had to put aside the Indian passport I had acquired, and the identity presented in its pages, and create a CV that offered a different identity, one more reasonable for an aspiring call centre worker. In order to take a job where I might have to change my name and accent and become a Western person, I first had to erase most traces of the West

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[75] Somini Sengupta, *The End of Karma: Hope and Fury Among India's Young* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2016). Sengupta writes: "Aspiration was a meme that infected India's idea of itself" (18).

[76] Nandini Gooptu, ed. *Enterprise Culture in Neoliberal India: Studies in Youth, Class, Work and Media* (New York and Oxford: Routledge, 2013).

[77] McKim Marriot, "Hindu Transactions: Diversity without Dualism," *Transaction and Meaning*, ed. Bruce Kapferer, A.S.A. Essays in Social Anthropology 1 (Philadelphia: ISHI, 1976), 111.

[78] The "transpersonal" is Nancy Miller's coinage: "the links that connect an individual not only backward in time vertically through generations but also in a horizontal, present tense of affinities…a zone of relation that is social, affective, material, and inevitably public." See Marianne Hirsch and Nancy K. Miller, *Rites of Return: Diaspora Poetics and the Politics of Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 5.

[79] Akash Kapur, "How India Became America," *New York Times* (March 9, 2012).

[80] Siddhartha Deb, *The Point of Return: A Novel* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002).

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from my existing self. In order to become globalized through the call centre, I had to stop
being globalized and become a provincial Indian…I took an expensive class in call centre
English at the British Council in Delhi, paying more for that brief course of a few weeks
than I had for my entire state-subsidized higher education in India.[81]

Deb was a foreign-returned Indian who had immigrated to the United States to pursue
opportunities in higher education. Now, he was tasked with impersonating an aspiring call center
agent, before he himself could undertake a journey of what A. Aneesh calls "virtual migrancy."[82]
That the Columbia-educated Deb was, by all accounts, already too "globalized" to be a
convincing prospective call center agent did not apparently occur to the London-based *Guardian's*
editorial team. In their view, Deb was an Indian, not only an Indian passport holder, but also a
brown-skinned subject legible as Indian in the Western racial order; therefore, he was a veritable
Indian "insider" and a perfect candidate for the freelance job. And yet, Deb was far from an
"insider" in the New India: he had to fabricate an alter-ego for his CV and mask the signs of his
Western education. An accomplished writer of Anglophone literature, he also had to learn to
speak a new language: "call center English."

  The scene of encounter in which a returnee like Deb walks into the globalizing
technoscape of the Indian call center is this project's effective mise-en-scène, one which allows us
to locate New India at the interstices of physical reterritorialization and virtual mobilities,
including, but not only, the mobility of the call center agent. In the early 21st century, returnees
from diaspora—journalists, novelists, and scholars (Deb represents all three)—sought access to
subjects from a range of class positions who could ostensibly help them to understand New India.
These national Others—whether aspiring Birlas and Tatas, or the mall-goers—were then asked
to serve as *native's* informants, as intimate others whose lives could both testify to India's
heightened representational autonomy and legitimize the return narratives of the nation's
dispossessed diasporans.[83] In contradistinction to the classic "comprador"[84] figure of the native

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[81] Deb, 2011, 8-9.

[82] A. Aneesh, *Virtual Migration: The Programming of Globalization* (Durham: Duke UP, 2006).

[83] The question of native informancy, broadly construed, is shared territory of postcolonial and diaspora studies, two
fields within which this project is located. To use the example of two canonical feminist works in these fields, native
informancy is the shared terrain of Trinh T. Minh Ha's "writing postcoloniality" and Rey Chow's "writing diaspora,"
the problem that animates both *Woman Native Other* (Trinh) and "Where have all the natives gone?" (Chow). In her
critique of the epistemological pretensions of Western anthropology, Trinh argues that the anthropologist uses
language as a technology of power through which he, "an interpreter," can turn the native into a native informant
by stripping his "identity off and past[ing] it back on." Chow extends Trinh's insights into a critique of a broader,
trans-disciplinary valorization of ethnic, national, and racial difference, while noting that "the 'authentic' native, like
the aura in a kind of *mise-en-abime,* keeps receding from our grasp. Meanwhile our machinery churns out inauthentic
and imperfect natives who are always already copies." Chow's pronoun usage is telling. Unlike Trinh, who labors to
expose the phallogocentrism of a suspect anthropologist, offered as her radical other ("I am profoundly indifferent to
his old way of theorizing"), Chow turns the neo-Orientalist critique inward, to "our" attempts to apprehend the
native.
  In a similar vein, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak begins *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* with the observation that
"a certain postcolonial subject had…been recoding the colonial subject and appropriating the Native Informant's
position." Spivak's Native Informant appropriates the subject position of native in a double move that renders the
other-native a static site, akin to an area, for knowledge acquisition while the informant him/herself is articulated as
an agential subject. I seek in this work to further Spivak's observation of the evacuation and replacement of the
position of native informant by considering more precisely the nature of this "direct" tapping and mediation of
"indigenous knowledges" in the time of New India. See Chow, 1993, 46; Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman Native Other:
Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 70, 59, 74; Gayatri Chakravorty
Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), ix.

informant, the *native's* informant is not an insider informing on his/her people for an outsider audience, but rather a subject rendered informant specifically for and through intersubjective encounters with intimate others, i.e., fellow insiders. As the chapters of this project will show, New India repeatedly staged contests between pairs of significantly *Indian* subjects as they attempted to speak the same language across class, caste, linguistic, and other demographic barriers and, in the same moment, realized the limits of their mutual intelligibility.

I am aware of the charge of essentialism which might—which *must*—follow statements about "significantly *Indian* subjects" of the "East" or "West." Certainly, as a scholar trained in the critique of Orientalism, I will not be uncritically producing "Indian" and "American," "East" and "West" as monoliths to be read individually or in binary opposition. Such terms function for me as operative rubrics that structure what Jacques Rancière would term the "partition of the sensible" in both narrative and archival mediations of India's global form.[85] Following Dipesh Chakrabarty's invocation of "Europe" and "India" as "hyperreal terms," I will be using "Indian," "American," "East," and "West" as similarly figured quantities "whose geographical referents remain somewhat indeterminate."[86]

This is not, as Vivek Chibber has argued, a rhetorical sleight of hand meant to eschew the responsibility of addressing the "real" referents of East and West.[87] Rather, I follow Chakrabarty's insistence on the coterminance of the abstract and the real, of, with apologies to Wallace Stevens, ideas of the thing and the thing itself. To put the "East" or "India" in scare quotes is not to deny the existence of the East or of India, but rather to focus on the rhetorical means by which we approach, recognize, and address the quoteless-quantity. "India" emerges repeatedly around the world, through the imaginings of Indians, non-Indians, and hyphenated-Indians equally, and through the operations of historical inquiry and romantic fantasy alike. It emerges simultaneously in the past, present, and future, articulated as Raymond Williams' "structure of feeling."[88] Understood in these terms, India is not only a place but also a process, one that constantly gives rise, shape, and form to different possibilities of inhabitance of a location called "India" and a subject position marked "Indian." India operates through a kind of conceptual logic in which, though it may not exist in the singular, it is made to exist as its possibility, made true *as* an idea of India, as an idea of a possible world called India, its facticity sedimented by repeat narration and the performances that "translate" its "given ground."[89]

Whatever India is, then, to whomever, wherever, and whenever, it is *also* an occasion in the form of a sign, "India," situated at the nexus of a geographic, cultural, and textual imaginary. To return to this Introduction's epigraphs, it is fair to say that I am offering a partial defense of Bharati Mukherjee's definition of India as "metaphor." However, I do not equate "metaphoricity" with "extra-territoriality," a term with considerable currency in studies of diaspora, including

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[84] For two classic accounts of the comprador figure, see Appiah 1992 and Rob Nixon, *London Calling: V.S. Naipaul, Postcolonial Mandarin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). Cf. Ian Almond, *The Thought of Nirad C. Chaudhuri: Islam Empire and Loss* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[85] Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004).

[86] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 27.

[87] Vivek Chibber, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital* (London: Verso, 2013), 126-129.

[88] Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (Chatto and Windus, 1961), 64.

[89] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 294.

Mankekar's, and one to which I will return. Rather, I posit and demonstrate that the tenacious trope of an "idea of India" continues to demand critical investigation. Even as the texts, figures, and institutions discussed in this work take a material, territorial "India" as their undergirding principle, the rhetoric of the idea of India is also produced discursively, mutably, and metaphorically. Finally, and in response to Meenakshi Mukherjee, I argue that global migrants, too, have had to reckon with "the reality of India," even when that reality has assumed the forms of absence, indeterminancy, displacement, and abstraction. The abstract, after all, is not the negation of the real; it is an abstraction of it. A metaphor is not a perversion of the real; it is a deployment of it.

Recent work on virtuality stressing the virtual's proximity, not opposition, to the real, underlies this point. For example, Homay King argues, following Gilles Deleuze, Elizabeth Grosz, Pierre Lévy, Brian Massumi, and Rob Shields, that "virtuality" is a term deeply embedded in and entwined with conceptions of actuality, reality, and presence, as opposed to the conceptions of absence, metaphoricity, or abstraction with which the concept is often associated. To be "virtually" here (or there), King notes, is to be "nearly there, almost there, close enough to be practically indistinguishable from being there."[90] This understanding of virtuality assumes heightened significance in the nonfiction writing of Amit Chaudhuri, discussed in chapter three. Observing peculiar incarnations of western artifacts in Calcuttan modernity, Chaudhuri notes not only that "the faraway can be manufactured—perhaps is *always* manufactured," but that in light of the fictional, the real, actual, and nonfictional can become "matter[s] of slight puzzlement."[91] This is why Bharati Mukherjee qualifies "metaphor" as "a particular way of comprehending the world"—not because India is not real to the diasporan, but because the diasporan's apprehension of India is mediated by such puzzlement.

Let me offer one more clarification about my strategy in using textual and narrative metaphors in relation to "New India." My intention is not simply to rehash the important arguments made after the linguistic turn by scholars like Benedict Anderson and Homi Bhabha: namely, that the nation is a form of textual affiliation in the process of being narrated, of coming into being in and as language.[92] *After New India* is of course indebted to postmodern theorizations

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[90] Homay King, *Virtual Memory: Time-Based Art and the Dream of Digitality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 12. Relatedly, in his work on the development of digital archives as ethnographic texts, Johannes Fabian argues for the heightened presence of the virtual: "…'virtual' originally connotes effectiveness, strength rather than weakness. Consigning documents to a virtual archive makes them more real, not in any ontological sense but in terms of their 'practicality'" (5). For Fabian, the storage of ethnographic documents like interview transcripts within virtual archives makes possible "a form of ethnography that is not predicated on the absence of the object" (10). Moreover, it does not reduce that object to "tabulating quantifications" or prose that "withhold[s] from (some may say spare) the reader the events and documents on which it must nevertheless ground its authority" (10). Cf. Johannes Fabian, *Ethnography as Commentary: Writing from the Virtual Archive* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 5.

[91] Chaudhuri, 2013, 65.

[92] This over-familiar discourse has fallen out of fashion given the popularity of non-national, transnational, cosmopolitan, and "world" rubrics in literary and cultural studies, but it is worth revisiting, given that the New India discourse evidences both the tenacity of nation-orientated thinking in the production of global narratives and the interruptive presence of the global that always inheres in articulations of the nation form. In Benedict Anderson's canonical argument, it became possible to imagine the nation because of a modern conception of space-time predicated on the primacy of lateral thinking. It was not that past and future collapsed into an instantaneous present, but rather that modernity entailed an expanded notion of the present through the conception of the "meanwhile": "simultaneity [became], as it were, transverse, cross-time" (24). The newspaper and the novel were key technologies vested with, and productive of, this critical "meanwhile": fellow citizen-subjects shared in the "steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity" of reading and took solace in the knowledge of their temporal coincidence and spatial

of the nation's textuality, but it seeks to advance that critical discourse in two ways. First, I do this by focusing on both temporal and spatial relations of contemporaneity between diaspora and nation, as the discourse on emergence begged a return to the past as a resource, not just for the present, but for a different future. In this effort, I seek to participate in an ongoing, critical conversation about temporality and its literary signatures beyond the Indian context; here, the work of Pheng Cheah, Eric Hayot, and John Marx is of particular inspiration.[93]

Second, I assemble a range of twinned figures who differently mobilize "Indian" identity in the New India moment: migrants who left and returned to India in order to experience, study, and write about it; and virtual migrants who have been technically located within the bounds of the Indian nation-state all along. The nominal and imaginative self-identification of these subjects as "Indian," I argue, was fundamental to their narrative relation to and production of both diaspora and nation in the time of New India. By identifying dueling figures of Indian globality, and by assembling an archive of texts that both respond to and emerge from their critical encounter, *After New India* argues that the discourse on New India centered on Indians' relations to other Indians, and not only on India's relationship to the West.

Here is a brief example of what I am suggesting: Many scholars and writers, including Rey Chow and Arundhati Roy, have read outsourced labor as neocolonial coolie work, a discourse I discuss in detail in chapter one. They focus on how the Indian call center agent—let's say his name is "Shyam"—is made to perform as an American "Sam" by neutralizing his Indian accent, adjusting to time zones across the world, and mimetically producing the sounds and knowledges of an American subject, while serving needs identified by Euro-American trans- and multi-national corporations ("Yes, Ms. Paulson, of course we remember you. Happy Thanksgiving, I hope you're roasting a big turkey in our WA100 model oven."[94]). My readings suggest, by contrast, that the Indian "Shyam" was engaged in a performative relation to an *Indian* "Sam," an Indian exilic or diasporic "Sam," who was also another version or form of the Indian Anglophone subject-self. In the call center novels of Chetan Bhagat and Bharati Mukherjee, discussed in chapter two, this performative relation is enacted through each author's identification with the call center agent-character.

My approach to New India assumes that it was and is an epistemological occasion in two distinct senses. New India is a scholarly area of study, but it is also an "identity object of study,"

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juxtaposition (26). The laterality of the "meanwhile" enabled the development of the "community in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations" (36).

In the past three decades, Anderson's argument, which reads anti-colonial nationalisms as derivative of earlier "modular" forms of European and American nationalism, has been the subject of much revision, especially in postcolonial studies (Chatterjee). Writing in 1990, Homi Bhabha complicated the notion of simultaneous narration "meanwhile" by arguing that there are two distinct temporalities of "writing the nation": the pedagogical, in which the nation's people are understood as historical objects, and the performative, in which the nation's people are understood as present producers of the national collectivity. This splitting of the national subject is fundamentally ambivalent; the nation speaks a "disjunctive narrative" that brings into relief the ways in which modernity has always been constituted through internal contradiction (311). See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (1983), revised ed. (London and New York: Verso 2006); Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990); Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and* Postcolonial *Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

[93] Pheng Cheah, *What is a World? On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016); Eric Hayot, *On Literary Worlds* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); John Marx, *Geopolitics and the Anglophone Novel, 1890-2011* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[94] Chetan Bhagat, *One Night @ the Call Center* (New Delhi: Rupa Paperback, 2005), 41.

an object suffused with the political desires of those who seek to know, apprehend, and write about it, an object for and from which writer-knowers desire and have desired social justice.[95] The India-rooted and diaspora-routed writers discussed in this dissertation internalized the idea of Indian globality as a challenge to encounter the "real" India and "real" Indians, as if for the first time. For some, the embrace of this imperative necessitated the disavowal of earlier diasporic and Anglophone attempts to apprehend India, like Chetan Bhagat's repudiation of Indian writing in English in the "exilic" tradition of V.S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie—a repudiation that mirrors Prime Minister Narendra Modi's commitment to giving international speeches in Hindi.[96] Others strove, whether earnestly, self-reflexively, or ironically, to re-skill themselves in an ethnographic narrative mode that would enable them to apprehend aspects of the New India and New Indians that/whom they might earlier have "denied...shut [out]…[or] looked upon…as a stubborn aberration."[97] These narrative encounters and narratives of encounter with the Other compose the chapters of *After New India*, while establishing the contours of what I am calling the New Indian Anglosphere.

ENCOUNTERS IN THE NEW INDIAN ANGLOSPHERE

After New India pursues the stories of the rise of and return to New India by examining narratives of encounter *in* Anglophone literatures and cultural production, as well as *between* writers, scholars, and cultural producers and their subjects in the Indian subcontinent and its diasporas. Before concluding this Introduction, then, I want to make some comments about the concept of "encounter," prevailing uses, and the extent of my invocation of those uses here. This project does not offer a philosophy of encounter, nor does it review familiar touchstones in the Western phenomenological tradition.[98] My interest in encounter is at once more specific and more broad. I am interested in the careers of "encounter" as an index of East-West and East-East relations, as a method of scientific knowledge production, and as a mode of humanistic inquiry into literature's world-making potential.

First, I engage with the concept of encounter as a temporal and spatial frame through which scholars, especially in postcolonial studies and the range of fields we might provisionally term studies of globalization, have approached the meeting of "East" and "West," as outlined in the above discussion of Chakrabarty and his critics. In the writings of many prominent theorists, the East-West encounter has variously signified the historical phenomena of colonialism and imperialism, capitalism's encounters with the local, the systems of knowledge production known as Orientalism, interculturalism, interracial relations, translation, globalization, and the production and negotiation of cultural difference more generally. With each invocation, the "East-West encounter" accrues a kind of self-evidentiary force, even though its referents are ever shifting. As Pheng Cheah observes, "the original type case of hybridization is the colonial cross-

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[95] Robyn Wiegman, *Object Lessons* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).
[96] Prashant Agarwal, "Why Narendra Modi will deliver his UN speech in Hindi," *Quartz* India (September 27, 2014), available from <http://qz.com/272169/why-narendra-modi-will-deliver-his-un-speech-in-hindi/>
[97] Chaudhuri, 2013, 30.
[98] I am thinking here of canonical accounts of the encounter in western philosophy, including Hegel's master-slave dialectic, Martin Buber's dialogic intersubjectivity, Levinas' hermeneutics of experience, and the Heideggerian encounter with being.

cultural encounter"[99]; thus, critics of multiculturalism, scholars of ethnic studies, literary theorists, and many others have also used postcolonial elaborations of the East-West encounter in work that has variable historical contiguity with colonialism itself.

Against routinized invocations of the East-West encounter, this project strives to locate and specify the contours of such encounters in the time of New India. Did the rise of New India mean the consummation of the East-West encounter, or might it negate some earlier understandings of that meeting? What meeting of subjects or concepts will give us critical purchase on the social and literary transformations wrought by India's ascendance into global legibility? When does "East-West encounter" actually refer us to something better understood as an "East-*East* encounter"? Nearly four decades after Edward Said's *Orientalism*, is it even justifiable to speak and write of "East" and "West" when we know how and to what violent ends those ideological monoliths have worked (and work still) in the world?

Second, I engage with the encounter as it has assumed methodological form in ethnographic fieldwork by the disciplinary traditions of anthropology and sociology. Arguably more than any other field, anthropology has contributed to a multi-level theory of the encounter: interpersonal, intercultural, between individuals, between national cultures, and so on. My use of the concept takes inspiration from anthropologist Johannes Fabian's account of encounter as both the imaginative and ideological connections that preexist one's "actual meetings" in the world, and those meetings themselves, which might be planned or accidental, forced or fortuitous.[100] What encounters all share is their tendency to narrative form: in order to be apprehended, analyzed, and taught—in order, that is, to assume epistemological force—the encounter must be "arrested, frozen."[101] Encounters thus become accounts of encounters, but they are also discrete anchors in broader narratives of events, happening, and historical phenomena.[102] Following Fabian and his well-known account of the anthropological denial of coevalness, I stress that an encounter is always an encounter with an Other in time.

Third, I am using "encounter" in this dissertation as an analytical tool with which to think jointly about social scientific methodologies with purchase on "objective" knowledge of South Asia, on the one hand, and literature as an aesthetic encounter with the "real" South Asia, on the other. Following Sara Ahmed's thesis on the priority of encounters, I contend that New India did not achieve global form, nor did New Indians assume legibility as subjects of the global, until they were met by "an-other" whose conferral of recognition enabled the inhabitance of globality.[103] Throughout this project, I track scenes of such encounter and recognition between diasporic, Non-Resident, elite, cosmopolitan, and Anglophone Indian subjects and their national, Resident, subaltern, provincial, and vernacular Others in the time of New India. I strive to attend, in each instance, to the desires that suffuse these encounters, both planned and accidental, bonding and alienating.

How, and with recourse to whom, did diasporic subjects attempt to keep time with the

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[99] Pheng Cheah, *Inhuman Conditions: On Cosmopolitanism and Human Rights* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 89.

[100] Johannes Fabian, *Memory Against Culture: Arguments and Reminders* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 146.

[101] Ibid, 147.

[102] Ibid, 148-149.

[103] Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Postcoloniality* (New York and Oxford: Routledge, 2000), 8. Ahmed acknowledges that there are limits to this thesis. Not all encounters are possible; in fact, some are already designated as impossible in history.

India to which they once belonged? How did they apprehend the New India of the "present"? Around the globe, subjects in India's British and American diasporas asked if they, too, might have a place alongside New India's national subjects as inheritors of India in its global form. In the United States, Indian American visual artists like Sejal Patel, discussed in the Preface, imagined counterfactual Indian futures, the Indians they would have been had they never left India—and then found their work enshrined in U.S. national institutions like the Smithsonian. Writers like Suketu Mehta and Rana Dasgupta who had previously been based in the United States and United Kingdom returned to India in order "to deal with India of the present."[104] Bharati Mukherjee, who long ago foreswore Indian-American identity, returned to India to capture the nation through the story of call center workers. Through such efforts and encounters, a prior transactional logic between East and West was not only inverted, but also effectively invalidated.

To be clear: These were not just encounters between self-exiled, diasporic writers and rooted Indian nationals. In the early 2000s, *resident* Indian cultural producers also narrated their encounters with intimate Indian others, through and against whom their own contrasting modernity or belatedness came into sharp relief. As rapid, unruly urbanization took place across the country and India's cities expanded to make room for rural migrants, English-speaking Indian urbanites found their centrality to Indian public discourse giving way to regional, non-Anglophone and *new*-Anglophone subjectivities. Many found their own provisional Western identities complicated by a range of new subject positions and cultural logics. Journalists Sonia Faleiro and Aman Sethi undertook long-form reporting projects on the lives of individual New Indians—bar dancer Leela, in Faleiro's case, and the contract worker, Ashraf, in Sethi's.[105] For R. Raj Rao, Raj Kamal Jha, and Chetan Bhagat, the novel served as a vehicle for the narration of new Indian emergent subjectivities, from Rao's Hinglish-speaking Bombay-wala who cruises among the working class, to Jha's "Man," who luridly fantasizes about inhabiting the flesh of the subaltern, to Bhagat's self-helping call center agents, discussed in chapters one and two.[106]

What connects the diaspora and India-based writers in question is that they were all relatively elite, upper-class and caste subjects struggling to reconcile their surprising belatedness in the new world order—or, to use the terminology made famous by Louis Dumont, to understand the latest "power-status" inversion in which the old Anglophone elite cut from Jawaharlal Nehru's cloth now had to pay obeisance to new moneyed New Indians like capitalist titan, Mukesh Ambani.[107] High literary icons like Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, and Anita Desai found themselves outsold in India by popular Anglophone novelists like Preeti Shenoy, Ravi Subramanian, Durjoy Datta, and Ravinder Singh, just as the cultivated Ingabanga and *bhadralok* of Amit Chaudhuri's Calcutta ceded ground to the mall-goers of Kolkata.

The brief biographical narrative I offered in the opening pages of this Introduction will have made clear my own position as a relative elite, a diasporic returnee, and an Anglophonist. I must stress, then, that my interest is *not* in defending the postcolonial Anglophone elite, nor in asserting the necessity of an old guard's continued reign in India. In each of the following

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[104] Suketu Mehta, *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 38.
[105] Sonia Faleiro, *Beautiful Thing: Inside the Secret World of Bombay's Dance Bars* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2011); Aman Sethi, *A Free Man: A True Story of Life and Death in Delhi* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2012).
[106] R. Raj Rao, *The Boyfriend* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2003)); Bhagat 2005; Raj Kamal Jha, *She Will Build Him a City* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).
[107] Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and its Implications,* trans. George Wiedenfeld (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, trans. 1980, 1966).

chapters, I seek to assess the diasporic and Anglophonic structures of feeling, writing, and knowing that attended the rise of the New India. I am interested in how the supposed privileges of diasporic location and Anglophonism function in tandem, while serving as both enabling conditions of the apprehension of New India *and* epistemological traps of the kind identified by Meenakshi Mukherjee in the epigraphs. Throughout this work, Robyn Wiegman's "object lessons" serve as a critical reminder that every attempt to write India, to know India, to apprehend India, is an attempt to forge "an intimate relation, crafted within and from the sociality and materiality of a world we inherit…[and] an attempt to transform that intimacy into reinventing the world."[108] Rather than participate in the typical self-flagellation of the postcolonial "native" scholar, who must do everything s/he can to deflect the "inherent tension between the self-identity of postcolonial elites and the people they claim to represent,"[109] I claim to represent no one and pursue instead in this dissertation the *desires* for representation, understanding, belonging, and recognition that undergird such claims in the first place.

CHAPTER OVERVIEWS

After New India consists of three chapters in which I consider how a pair of New Indian global icons (chapter one), national and diasporic novels of New India (chapter two), and popular, nonfictional narratives of Indian ascendance (chapter three) differently mediate intersubjective encounters in the New Indian Anglosphere. These chapters explore numerous valences of my subtitular terms: *diasporas* both within and outside the territorial bounds of India; literary and functional, Indian and global *Anglophonisms*; *returns* to postcolonial theory, to national literature, to India from diaspora, to the rural from the urban, to history, and to the diaspora once more. Taken together, they argue that the critical disavowal of diasporic postcoloniality, the literary narration of elite-subaltern encounters, and the empirical pursuit of the New Indian everyman are each attempts to resolve the problem of New India's counterfactual rise by vernacularizing English in India. The Conclusion offers, through discussion of the graphic novels of the Calcutta-born, Berlin-based Sarnath Banerjee, some final thoughts on the aspiration of self-return and the promise of India's future redevelopment.

In the conduct of this research, I have turned to an archive that spans genres: literary fiction, pulp fiction, journalism, and works of sociology and anthropology. I have asked both what it means to write global India and what it means to write and read *as* a global Indian. In pursuing these questions, I have found that there is a particular scene of encounter—or what we might call after the anthropologists an intersubjective scene of relation—that repeats across both fictional and nonfictional genres of Indian Anglophone prose. This is the scene of encounter between repatriated expatriate writers and call center agents; the scene of encounter between novelists, journalists, and scholars who *return* to the global India from diaspora and those call center agents to whom they turn in order to apprehend the New India. Siddhartha Deb's undercover reporting on the call center is just one of many examples of such encounter, and in my first chapter, "Expatriate Writers and Call Center Agents: Twin Subjects of the New Indian Anglosphere," I offer an extended reading of both the literal and figural meeting of these figures.

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[108] Wiegman, 2012, 20.
[109] Simon Gikandi, "Between roots and routes: cosmopolitanism and the claims of locality," in *Rerouting the Postcolonial: New directions for the new millennium,* ed. Janet Wilson, Cristina Sandru, Sarah Lawson Welsh (New York: Routledge, 2010), 29.

In June 1997, when the *New Yorker* published its much-discussed special issue on Indian Anglophone literature, the majority of those featured in its "family photo" of Indian writers, including Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Amitav Ghosh, and Amit Chaudhuri, were diaspora-based. Two decades later, and as discussed above, scholars of Indian Anglophone literature are celebrating the fact "[the] experience [of diaspora] is no longer represented as a sea change."[110] Reading the figure of the Indian Anglophone expatriate writer against New India's globally iconic call center agents, chapter one argues that the diasporic experience *is* absolutely being represented as a sea change—only the changing sea is located within, as opposed to outside, the territorial bounds of the Indian nation-state. In an inversion of the postcolonial narrative of departure from an India that could not accommodate the aspirations of its educated elite, followed by virtual (literary) return, call center agents virtually migrate away from India, while fashioning themselves as entrepreneurial subjects within the nation-state.

The twinning of expatriate writer and call center agent helps us to re-locate the supposedly superseded diasporic discourse in social scientific studies of the Indian call center, particularly ethnographies that have resuscitated postcolonial literary tropes like mimicry and hybridity. These studies perform a belated valorization of diaspora by figuring New India as a scene of proliferating migratory, and not just entrepreneurial, subjectivities. By moving between studies of Indian Anglophone literature and studies of New India's new Anglophone subjects, chapter one allows us to re-see the supposedly flexible and opportunistic movements of the expatriate writer in terms of inflexible ideologies around migration, belonging and language, while also re-hearing the Anglophony of expatriate writers as the deployment of a putatively "neutral" English that nevertheless renders them susceptible to the charge of mimicry.

In the past-contemporary postcolonial discourse on Indian Anglophone literature, the question that occupied critics like Meenakshi Mukherjee and Tabish Khair was whether or not an Indian English that is a broad grapholect—but *not* a spoken language used for everyday communication—could serve as a literary language with purchase on the social dimensions of human experience. My second chapter, "Fictions of Encounter: Call Centers, Coolies, and the Novel of the Nation," responds to the transformations in the New Indian Anglosphere discussed in chapter one by posing an inverse question: Can a global English of everyday, transactional communicative exchange transform the affective, social, and political dimensions of human experience into literature?

My primary object in chapter two is a call center novel by Chetan Bhagat, a repatriated expatriate who was educated in India, then worked for Goldman Sachs in Hong Kong, before returning to India. When Bhagat's first novel was published in 2004, literary critics didn't take him seriously, seeing him only as a sociological expression of the fact that English is both quantitatively on the rise in India in terms of number of speakers, and qualitatively on the decline—or, put differently, they saw him as a sign that the democratization of English has meant the language's bastardization. Today, Bhagat has achieved the symbolic heft in conversations on global Indian literature that only Salman Rushdie had in the postcolonial context, and he has done this by explicitly and volubly dismissing earlier generations of Indians writing in English.

Chapter two reads Bhagat's *One Night @ the Call Center*, a nationally-circulating work of pulp fiction that has been read as an exemplar of the new, homegrown Indian Anglophone novel, against Bharati Mukherjee's *Miss New India* and Raj Kamal Jha's *She Will Build Him a City*.

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[110] Anjaria, 2015, 13.

Mukherjee is an Asian American writer typically read in multiethnic curricular contexts; *Miss New India* reads as chick lit with curry. Jha is the Editor of a leading Indian newspaper, whose magical realist fiction draws on stories gleaned from his work as a journalist. Despite the differing reception circles of their work and the generic conventions on which they draw, Bhagat, Mukherjee, and Jha each tell the New India-story as a story of translation: the story of the diasporic subject's encounter with his or her national Other. In each of their novels, that minimal narrative is rendered as one of linguistic failure: betrayal by the globalized idiom of self-help (Bhagat); abortive growth because of the limitations of call center English (Mukherjee); and the cannibalization of coolies by babus who otherwise cannot communicate (Jha). The triangulation of these texts serves my reading of Bhagat in two ways: first, Mukherjee's real and virtual returns to India in *Miss New India* undercut Bhagat's nationalist project in *ON@CC* by revealing the formal homology between intra-national narratives of ascendance and international narratives of immigrant assimilation; second, Jha's dystopian account of coolie cannibalization lays bare the violence that underlies even the comparatively anodyne call center novel.

Jha's depiction of the New India has disturbing implications, as, in *She Will Build Him a City*, the elite apprehension of the subaltern and desire for an encounter with the native Other is consummated in death. My third chapter, "Nonfictions of the Future: The Repatriate and the Genre of Emergence," asks whether literary nonfiction can in fact be more self-reflexive about this social distance than the fictions of New Indian emergence—without approaching self-annihilation. Concurrent with the explosion of Anglophone pulp and genre fiction in India, the past two decades have seen the publication of numerous nonfiction books about the arrival of a "New India" onto the world stage. The titles of such works are themselves revelatory of their content: *India Becoming, India Calling, India Rising, India Unbound*. These works are highly textualized interpretations of encounters the writers have had as participant-observers in and of the New India, but they are, generically speaking, not new.

Chapter three first situates these narratives of Indian emergence at the nexus of three earlier genres of Indian Anglophone nonfiction: "idea of India" books (dating back to Jawaharlal Nehru's *The Discovery of India*), "home to India" narratives (including books by Dhan Gopal Mukerji, Ved Mehta, and Santha Rama Rau), and V.S. Naipaul's India "travelogues." I then offer an extended reading of Amit Chaudhuri's *Calcutta: Two Years in the City*, which is a metacritical commentary on the genre itself, and one which ironizes the ethnographic imperative that animates it. A modernist purveyor of the domestic novel in the heyday of the Indian Anglophone epic, Chaudhuri is today a critical defender of the aesthetic in a literary field consumed with the question of new social realisms. His *Calcutta* bears the stamp of his work as a fiction writer, in ways that both problematize and secure the emergence genre's purchase on the "real."

The texts I read in each chapter are not epiphenomenal to the global processes and scenes of encounter that they describe and through which they have come into being. Rather, following Caroline Levine, I view reverse migration and virtual migration, emergence narratives and call center labor, Hinglishes and Indian Anglophonisms, as social forms that encounter the narrative forms of Indian globality, resulting in specific spatial and temporal rearrangements that must be analyzed in at once aesthetic and political terms.[111] From each of my chapters emerges a

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[111] Levine, a Victorianist, begins her call for a new formalism with a short reading of Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857), which she reads as the (narrative) formal product of an encounter between the (literary) form of the *Bildungsroman* and the (social) form of the gender binary. She argues that the novel's plotting of the encounter of these

narrative premised on the epistemological promise of copresence, self-reflexivity, and cross-cultural dialogue. Together, they give an account of New India as a discursive construct founded in the contradictions of India's economic and cultural ascension into a regime of legibility we might term globality. This New India compelled writers in India and in its diasporas to both seek out encounters with other Indians and to cultivate a disposition of openness to such encounters, which they then recorded in nonfiction and fiction, travel writing and journalism. This New India also compelled me—an Indian American, a student of Rhetoric, and a scholar of Anglophone literature and public culture—to interrogate my attachments to a range of textual forms and critical discourses, and to cultivate a disposition of openness to the inevitable contingency of the attempt to know India. Delineating and analyzing this disposition is the work of this dissertation.

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forms —Tom Brown's maturation in the novel's second half involves his increasing docility and openness to alterity—reveals that the *Bildungsroman* will always be "a feminine genre" so long as the "susceptibility to development" is associated with the feminine pole of the normative gender binary (14-15). How might this type of argument be applied to the field of Anglophone literature from the Indian subcontinent? The field has long been dominated by the form of the national allegory, or "novel of the nation," exemplified by Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) and notoriously touted as the quintessential form of "Third World Literature" by Frederic Jameson. Following Levine, we might reason that the national allegory has been a dominant (narrative) form in the Indian Anglophone field because it was the product of an encounter between the (literary) form of the realist novel, the (political) form of postcolonial independence, and the (social) form of diasporic exile. By locating the national allegory at the nexus of forms, and not simply as a reflection of the Third World subordination of private to public, and individual to nation, we are able to appreciate anew both its social critical force with respect to New India and its aesthetic registration of writerly vocation. See Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 16. See also Frederic Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (Autumn 1986), 65-88.

Chapter 1

Expatriate Writers and Call Center Agents:
Twin Subjects of the New Indian Anglosphere

"English has become an Indian language."
—Salman Rushdie[1]

"'Indian English is global English.'"
—A. Aneesh[2]

Consider two images, each an iconic representation of a distinct form of contemporary Indian Anglophonism. The first (Figure 1) was published in the June 23/30, 1997, issue of the *New Yorker* with the ironic caption "India's leading novelists."[3] The caption was ironic because the photo was taken in London, and all but one of the writers had flown in from outside India, from Amsterdam, Vienna, Boston and New York. The majority pictured—including Amit Chaudhuri, Anita Desai, Amitav Ghosh, Rohinton Mistry, and Salman Rushdie—were at the time expatriates living outside of India. How, then, could they be *India's* leading novelists?

In the past two decades, this image and the special, Golden Jubilee issue on "Indian fiction" in which it was published have been widely discussed as epitomizing the problem of Indian Anglophone literature's historic overdetermination by its reception in the West.[4] These include problems of cultural commodification, or what Graham Huggan has called the traffic in the "postcolonial exotic."[5] When literary scholars critique the fetishization of diaspora in postcolonial studies, or the Anglophone novel's hegemony in the Indian literary sphere, it is often quite literally to this image that they are pointing.

The second image (Figure 2) features call center agents at work in Bangalore. It accompanied a 2011 *Guardian* article by sociologist Shehzad Nadeem, titled, "Accent neutralization and a crisis of identity in India's call centres."[6] The second image is not iconic like the *New Yorker* group picture; if you perform a Google search for "Indian call center," scores of similar images will pop up. However, what it depicts is the emblematic scene of global interconnection, the literalization of what used to be called, after David Harvey, "time-space compression."[7]

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[1] Salman Rushdie, "Damme, this is the oriental scene for you!" *New Yorker* (June 23, 1997), 54.

[2] A. Aneesh, *Neutral Accent: How Language, Labor, and Life Become Global* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 3.

[3] It was later reprinted, with no mention of its original appearance, in *A History of Indian Literature in English,* with the caption, "Salman Rushdie and Friends." A.K. Mehrotra, ed. *A History of Indian Literature in English* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

[4] Tobias Wachinger, "Spicy Pleasures: Postcolonial India's Literary Celebrities and the Politics of Consumption," *ARIEL: A* Review of International English Literature 34.2-3, 71-94 (2003), 71.

[5] Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (Routledge: London and New York, 2001).

[6] Shehzad Nadeem, "Accent neutralization and a crisis of identity in India's call centres," *The Guardian* (February 9, 2011).

[7] David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1990).

Figure 1 (above): From left to right: Vikram Chandra, Amit Chaudhuri, Rohinton Mistry, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Ardashir Vakil (top), Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh, Romesh Gunesekara, Anita Desai. Image first published in the *New Yorker's* June 23/30, 1997, issue with the caption, "India's leading novelists"; later reprinted with the caption "Salman Rushdie and Friends," in *A History of Indian Literature in English*, ed. A.K. Mehrotra (2003).
Figure 2 (below): Indian employees at a call centre in the southern city of Bangalore, India. Photograph: Sherwin Crasto/Reuters/Corbis

On the surface, the images seem to offer a relation of opposition. The first is a picture of primarily expatriate Indian writers who work in high literary *Indian English*; the second is an image of *global English*-speaking call center agents. In the first image, we see celebrated authors, smiling for a photographer whose gaze stands in for the adulation of English-language readers around the world. In the second, we have faceless Indian call center agents, who are also addressing an English-speaking population in the West, but one that is full of grievances and complaints. The first image depicts elite, urban cosmopolitans—Indian participants in a global literary culture whose words travel in the world republic of letters and whose itineraries reflect what Aihwa Ong famously termed their "flexible citizenship."[1] The second features lower-middle class subjects who may be upwardly mobile in class terms, but whose trans- and international migratory itineraries are virtual—subjects who only ever leave India telephonically, if, that is, we can understand them to be leaving India at all. They are, in Simon Gikandi's words, "those who are not yet quite cosmopolitan even when they inhabit the spaces that have come to be inscribed as global."[2]

Relations of opposition are, of course, *relations*, and what I'm already beginning to suggest with this brief reading is that the expatriate writer's and call center agent's disparate forms of economic and social mobility are more closely enmeshed than they appear at first blush. The expatriate writer is a past-contemporary figure from an older phase in Indian Anglophone literature and criticism that valorized exile—a figure who chose, in the classic postcolonial narrative, to emigrate away from an India that could not accommodate its aspirational classes. The call center agent is the paradigmatic subject of social scientific research on the global New India, one whose virtual (imaginative) migrations away from India mirror, in an inverse way, the virtual (literary) returns of the expatriate writer in diaspora. Both expatriate writers and call center agents are subjects whose voices travel throughout the world in the technologically mediated forms of books and phone calls. Both collectivities have been hailed by the West—by elite media apparatuses and publishing companies, and by the trans- and multi-national corporations behind the phenomenon of Business-Process Outsourcing. Both, by responding to that hailing, condition their, and India's, future intelligibility.

Considered together, the expatriate writer and call center agent demonstrate the tenacity of key postcolonial tropes in India's putatively *post*-postcolonial moment—tropes like *hybridity*, *mimicry*, *migrancy, exile,* and the *colonial encounter*. These are not exhausted postcolonial tropes, this chapter will show, but remain key animating problematics in the study of the global. Moreover, I argue that this juxtaposition enables us to re-see each figure in turn—that a past-contemporary *postcolonial* literary discourse animated by tensions around diasporic location and the English language's purchase on Indian realities, will help us to understand the transnational interconnection, racialization, body shopping, and outsourcing we associate with the present-contemporary condition of *globalization* in the Asian century—and vice versa.

On the one hand, I am proposing to read together figures with markedly different access to vehicles of transnational mobility, circulation, employment, and recognition. In so doing, I hope to resist the assumption that the only relation possible between those occupying different

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[1] Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

[2] Simon Gikandi, "Between roots and routes: cosmopolitanism and the claims of locality," in *Rerouting the Postcolonial: New directions for the new millennium,* ed. Janet Wilson, Cristina Sandru, Sarah Lawson Welsh (New York: Routledge, 2010), 23.

class positions is one of opposition—and I will have more to say on this question at the top of the next section. On the other hand, my nomination of these particular figures as twin subjects of the New Indian Anglosphere is overdetermined. These figures are veritable clichés. In turning to them, I am joining other literary and cultural theorists who have in recent years attempted to revalue hyper-visible, overdetermined representations as something other than the traces of Orientalist imaginings or the byproduct of marketing savvy. Bishnupriya Ghosh's *Global Icons* and Mrinalini Chakravorty's *In Stereotype* are two such efforts to locate significant ethics, investments, and anxieties in surface-level, seemingly superficial imag(in)ings of our selves and our others.[3] They both follow, as I do, Rey Chow's work on the surprising, often insidious "creativity and originality" of stereotypical figures—how, for example, clichés like that of "the inscrutable Chinese" have "something significant to tell us about the stereotypical manner in which cross-ethnic representations are conducted by even the most theoretically sophisticated and politically scrupulous."[4]

The expatriate writer and the call center agent are global icons who, to adapt Ghosh's language, "[mediate] a structure of feeling for an emergent collective—possible but yet to come."[5] The *New Yorker* image, with the Booker-of-Bookers- winning Rushdie pictured front and center, is doubly vested with the desires of an international reading public and a putatively national, but actually transnational, literary community for legibility and recognition. Similarly, the call center is the iconic scene of India's (and, more recently, the Philippines and Mexico's) entrance into the global market. I sit in Berkeley, call my bank, and am connected to tech-support in Bangalore. Sitting in Georgetown, you call Gurgaon for remote assistance. From Manila, she collects debts in Madison. In Toronto, he's on the line for Tijuana.

Cliché though it is, the call center poignantly crystallizes the key tensions underlying the question of the globalization of the Global South and the spread of global English. In the late 1990s, the call center was the functional "backroom" of the global economy, the dirty secret of major Western multinational and transnational corporations like Citibank, AT&T, AOL, and Goldman Sachs. In 2000, Arundhati Roy cited a Call Centre College in Gurgaon as exemplary evidence of "how easily an ancient civilization can be made to abase itself completely."[6] At the same time, nationalist celebrants noted with excitement that India was now "one of the main nodes of globalization."[7] Why bring up old colonial baggage, they countered arguments like Roy's, if the call center meant India's increasing relevance to the world? Some argued that the call center was a dynamic space of potential for a generation of would-be global citizens, representing the perfect marriage of tradition and opportunity for India's youth. After all, an entire aspiring middle-class in rural India was supported by remittances from call center work, which had, in Purnima Mankekar's description, "its own sources of enchantment."[8]

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[3] Bishnupriya Ghosh, *Global Icons: Apertures to the Popular* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Mrinalini Chakravorty, *In Stereotype: South Asia in the Global Literary Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).
[4] Rey Chow, *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 58, 64.
[5] Ghosh, 2004, 3.
[6] Arundhati Roy, "Power Politics: The Reincarnation of Rumpelstiltskin," *Outlook India* (Nov. 27, 2000).
[7] Siddhartha Deb, *The Beautiful and the Damned: A Portrait of the New India* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2011), 7.
[8] Purnima Mankekar, "Becoming entrepreneurial subjects: Neoliberalism and media," *The State in India After Liberalization: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, eds. Akhil Gupta and Kalyanakrishnan. Sivaramakrishnan (New York: Routledge, 2011), 228.

Meanwhile, as optimistic Indian pundits eyed the call center as an indicator of India's increasing relevance, the Western media stoked anxieties about globalization. "Outsourcing" and "offshoring" came up often as rhetorical scapegoats for American decline in the 2004 U.S. elections, as they would in 2008.[9] Documentaries like *1-800-INDIA: Importing a White-Collar Economy* assuaged American fears by interspersing scenes of offices with slums, offering poverty as a palliative to the viewer who needed to be reassured that India was still safely behind the times, even as it encroached over the phone lines.[10] The call center agent was seen as both a shadow of a "real" American and as a threat who indexed the Western subject's increasing reliance on Eastern technological management. Never mind that the faceless and nameless workers were underpaid and sleep-deprived, forced to conform to foreign practices in the service of some corporate bottom line. American unions and politicians "protested that the work done by Indian call centre staff was inferior, perhaps even carried out by 'convicted felons.'"[11]

In the first decades of the 2000s, the call center was the primary spatial, social, and economic sign of India's emergent globality. Social scientists, filmmakers, and theatre practitioners turned to the call center as the key site through which to examine the human and inhuman vicissitudes of globalization and the formation of neoliberal subjectivities in the developing world. The call center worker, in particular the nightshift-working female agent, was held up as the paradigmatic new Indian, an exemplary figure of individual entrepreneurial success, a sign of modernity's march post-1991, and confirmation of India's place in the international division of labor, generously construed as contributions to the global service industry.[12] The call center agent was also the subject of a new genre of novels termed "techie lit," though these pulpy, commercial novels were until recently ignored by literary scholars, as discussed in the next chapter.[13]

With these divergent strands in and of the call center discourse in mind, I want to return to Figure 2. The call center agents pictured are sitting in rows in geometrically-partitioned office space. Looking at their identical cubicles, at the faceless subjects gazing into the blue-screened banality of the computer monitor, it is easy to see why some have argued that the call center is an insidious site of Indian abasement, akin to the Chinese sweatshop. By that same token, we can't actually see what each agent is looking at on his or her screen, and they themselves embody a variety of forms of physical comportment: slouching in desk chairs, leaning forward, heads cocked against headsets, arms folded, hand at ear. Two agents are walking around, and the pair

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[9] "The Outsourcing Debate," *PBS,* Public Affairs Television (August 2004), available online from <http://www.pbs.org/now/politics/outsourcedebate.html>

[10] Aimee Carrillo Rowe, Sheena Malhotra, and Kimberlee Perez, "The Rhythm of Ambition: Power Temporalities and the Production of the Call Center Agent in Documentary Film and Reality Television," *Critical Rhetorics of Race*, ed. Michael G. Lacy and Kent A. Ono (New York: New York University Press, 2011) 203.

[11] Deb 7.

[12] On the one hand, the female call center agent is a sign of independence and autonomy; she earns, works at night, and interacts with women and men. On the other hand, she is a threat to so-called Indian values. Thus, after the rape and murder of Jyoti Singh in Delhi in 2012, many commentators noted that she was putting herself through school by working nightshifts at a call center. See Ragini Tharoor Srinivasan, "The Allegory of *India's Daughter*," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, online, June 17, 2015.

[13] See Jyoti Thottam, "Techie Lit: India's New Breed of Fiction," *Time* (October 30, 2008) and Stephanie S. Southmayd, "India on the Line: Globalization, Resistance, and the Literature of Outsourcing," *Postcolonial Text* 8:1 (2013). These novels include Chetan Bhagat's *ON@CC* (2005), Neelesh Misra's *Once Upon a Timezone* (2006), Shruti Saxena, *Stilettos in the Boardroom* (2010); Anish Trivedi's *Call Me Dan* (2010), Bharati Mukherjee's *Miss New India* (2011), and Brinda Narayan's *Bangalore Calling* (2011).

conversing in the front row appear almost conspiratorial. It could be, then, that what we are seeing is an entrepreneurial greenhouse for a generation of aspiring global citizens, and that even the forms of climatic regulation on display here, to stay with the greenhouse metaphor, are in service of individual growth. Of the seventeen call center agents pictured, six, or roughly 35%, appear to be women, in contrast to the *New Yorker* image, which featured approximately 25% women writers, two of whom, Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai, were brand-new on the literary scene. We might conclude, then, that the call center is a progressive outlet in which Indian women can seek opportunity and economic advancement. By that same token, economic opportunity for young women is why some detractors view the call center as an existential threat to India's traditional life-worlds.

The social predicaments presented by the call center are at once familiar and new: thus, it has long since become a clichéd scholarly object in the study of globalization. In 2007, the anthropologist Aihwa Ong reportedly "sigh[ed]" to a colleague "that all her graduate students [were] jumping on the call center research bandwagon."[14] Almost a decade later, such labors are bearing fruit. Since 2006, over half a dozen monograph-length ethnographies of the Indian call center have been written by A. Aneesh, J.K. Tina Basi, Kiran Mirchandani, Shehzad Nadeem, Reena Patel, and co-writers Aimee Carillo Rowe, Sheena Malhotra, and Kimberle Pérez. In addition, the call center has been discussed in recent work by Rey Chow, Akhil Gupta, Shannon Jackson, Purnima Mankekar, Meredith McGuire, Jisha Menon, Kalindi Vora, Sarah Sharma, Raka Shome, and Selma Sonntag, among others.[15] To put a finer point on it, the call center is such a powerful trope of Indian globality that it has merited scholarly treatment in the fields of Anthropology, Communication, Cultural Studies, Geography, Linguistics, Literature, New Media, Performance Studies, Politics, Sociology, and now Rhetoric—to say nothing of its depictions in the work of journalists, novelists, theater practitioners, filmmakers, and artists

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[14] Quoted in Selma K. Sonntag, "Linguistic globalization and the call center industry: Imperialism, hegemony or comopolitanism?" *Language Policy* 8, pp. 5-25 (Springer 2009), 6.

[15] A. Aneesh, *Virtual Migration: The Programming of Globalization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Aneesh 2015; J.K. Tina Basi, *Women, Identity and India's Call Centers* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Rey Chow, *Not Like a Native Speaker: On Languaging as a Postcolonial Experience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014); Akhil Gupta and Purnima Mankekar, "Intimate Encounters: Affective Labor in Call Centers," *positions* 24. 1 (2016): 17-43; Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Arts, Supporting Publics* (London: Routledge, 2011); Meredith L. McGuire, ""How to Sit, How to Stand": Bodily Practice and the New Urban Middle Class," *A Companion to the Anthropology of India*(2011): 115-136; Jisha Menon, "Calling Local/Talking Global: the cosmo-politics of the call-center industry," *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory* 23, no. 2 (2013): 162-177; Kiran Mirchandani, *Phone Clones: Authenticity Work in the Transnational Service Economy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012); Shehzad Nadeem, *Dead Ringers: How Outsourcing is Changing the Way Indians Understand Themselves* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); Reena Patel, *Working the Night Shift: Women in India's Call Center Industry* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010); Smitha Radhakrishnan, *Appropriately Indian: Gender and Culture in a New Transnational Class* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Aime Carillo Rowe, Sheena Malhotra, and Kimberlee Perez, *Answer the Call: Virtual Migration in Indian Call Centers* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013); Sarah Sharma, *In the Meantime: Temporality and Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Raka Shome, "Thinking through the diaspora Call centers, India, and a new politics of hybridity," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 9, no. 1 (2006): 105-124; Sonntag 2009; Kalindi Vora, *Life Support: Biocapital and the New History of Outsourced Labor* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015). See also R. Dossani and M. Kenney, "The next wave of globalization: relocating service provision to India," *World Development* 35.5 (2007): 772-791 and M. Pal and P. Buzzanell, "The Indian Call Center Experience: A Case Study in Changing Discourses of Identity, Identification, and Career in a Global Context," *Journal of Business Communication* 45.1 (2008): 31-60.

around the world.[16]

Of course, *what* is being said about the call center is even more significant and revealing than *where* it's being said. Vora reads the call center agent in relation to the gestational surrogate, thus figuring the former not only as a subject offering tech-support, but also as one who provides "life support" by investing "vital energy" in other, comparatively more valuable bodies. Gupta and Mankekar read call center labor in relation to recent Marxist theorizations of immaterial labor, affect, and alienation. For Menon, the call center presents an opportunity to re-theorize "cosmopolitanism from below." Surveying this vast, interdisciplinary literature in the context of the popular discourse on the call center, what is most interesting is how the call center agent has gone from being figured as a "cybercoolie" to a "cosmopolitan" (and in some cases, back again), a trajectory that mobilizes two significant strands of the discourse on the Indian Anglophone expatriate writer, who has similarly been charged with "Babu-ism," self-Orientalization, and capitulation to Western audiences and markets, even as s/he is also the putative subject of a new literary "cosmopolitics."[17]

Despite their seeming opposition, then, it should be even more apparent now that the two images with which this chapter begins capture a set of complementary relations around the concepts of mobility, voice, and identity. First, the question of *mobility*, and more specifically the vantage of exile. Expatriate writers have long been accused of approaching India as an extra-territorial quantity, and a number of Indians writing outside of India have fed such critiques. For example, the Introduction began with a brief discussion of a mid-1980s contretemps between California-based novelist Bharati Mukherjee and Delhi-based literary critic Meenakshi Mukherjee over the question of India's "metaphoricity" and what it means for "those who live at home, who are not global migrants" to have to confront India's realities "at a non-metaphoric level." The call center agent disrupts such binaries between those who live at home and those who are global migrants since they themselves by definition both live at home, where they are tethered to family and community, *and* are global migrants who have intimate, virtual relations to other places, other people, and other ways of being. They invite us to consider how expatriate writers, too, may have had to reckon with "the reality of India," even when that reality has assumed the forms of non-presence, absence, erasure, and displacement.

Second, the question of the Anglophone *voice* and its accents. Both expatriate writers and call center agents are subjects whose English words and voices must undergo processes of linguistic transformation. As per this chapter's epigraphs, the expatriate writers are trying to make their English, *Indian*; the call center agents are trying to make their Indian English, *global*. The expatriate writer's project—of making English *Indian*—is one that has tended to culminate either in chauvinistic proclamations of Anglophone exceptionalism, discussed later in this chapter, or a kind of self-flagellation by Anglophone literary scholars who decry the use of English even in their English-language criticism. The call center agent's task—making Indian

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[16] *Outsourced* (Shadowcatcher Entertainment, dir. John Jeffcoat, 2006); *Outsourced* (NBC television, 2010-2011); *Call Center Girl* (Star Cinema, dir. Don Cuaresmo, 2013); *Disconnect* (play by Anupama Chandrasekhar, American premieres, 2013); "Call Cutta" and "Call Cutta in a Box" (Rimini Protokall, world premiere, 2008); "Alladeen" (The Builders Association, 1999-2007).

[17] Cf. Tabish Khair, *Babu Fictions: Alienation in Contemporary Indian English Novels* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Bishnupriya Ghosh, *When Borne Across: Literary Cosmopolitics in the Contemporary Indian Novel* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2004); Rebecca L. Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

English *global*—involves the simultaneous projects of eliminating difference (the difference of "Mother Tongue Influence," for example) and cultivating a very specific difference—an Indian, neutral, and global difference—from the American, British, or Australian voice.[18] The "neutral accented" global English of the call center agent thus invites us to consider anew how the "cosmopolitan style" of a writer like Salman Rushdie is secured through specific linguistic performances of difference.

Finally, the question of *identity*. Expatriate writers and call center agents are Indian subjects who speak for India and from India, and in so doing are effectively India's ambassadors outside the territorial bounds of the nation-state. But as ethnographies of the call center make clear, despite the fact that call center agents are located in India, and that their very location in India is the condition of their desirability to the outsourcing industry, they do not have any more purchase on "Indianness" than do the diaspora-based, expatriate writers. Describing the *New Yorker* image, Tobias Wachinger notes that, at time of photographic capture in 1997, most of the featured writers "live[d] in Britain or the United States, and only [went] back to India for family visits or readings."[19] The observation is part of a broader critique of the *New Yorker's* epistemic violence in interpellating a group of Anglo-American elites as representative "Indians." Similarly, Nadeem's call center agents are not considered "authentic" Indians despite their living in India. As the ethnographies cited above observe, the "Americanized identities" of India-based call center agents—acquired knowledges, habits, and tastes, over and above affected accents—render suspect their Indian bonafides as well.[20] To invoke the old bugbear, the "authenticity" of both sets of definitionally hybrid subjects is always in question: the elite expatriate writers because of their circulation in the Western literary sphere; the call center agents because of their supposed mimicry of Americanized identities, conformance to Western corporate imperatives, and somatic alignment to foreign time zones.

I will expand on each of these terms and problematics—mobility, voice, and identity—in the sections which follow.

(DISPORIC) MOBILITY: REVERSE MIGRATION VS. VIRTUAL MIGRATION

When critics observe the de-fetishization of diaspora in Indian Anglophone literary studies, an argument discussed in the Introduction, what they are really talking about is the de-fetishization of the *mobility* of urban, cosmopolitan migrants and expatriate writers like those pictured in the 1997 *New Yorker* image. In such arguments, "diaspora" is used interchangeably with "elite," and the experiences of immigration and emigration assumed ipso facto to speak to the experiences of the privileged few. Thus, when I first began to give talks on this material in spring 2016, I received pushback on the twinning of figures who appear, at first blush, to exist on irreconcilable sides of the international division of labor. Was I not wrongly *equating* call center labor, with its vexed "affective" and "immaterial"[21] aspects, with the privileged activity and worldly circulation of expatriate writing? What kind of *comparison* could be made between mobile cosmopolitans and constrained provincial subjects? Wasn't I *obscuring* significant class and caste differences?

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[18] Global Indian has become global neutral, a surprising conflation I will return to in a later section.
[19] Wachinger, 2003, 71.
[20] Rowe et al., 2013, 144. Cf. S. Radhakrishnan 2011.
[21] Gupta and Mankekar, 2016.

I take these worries seriously—and as an invitation. For it is both despite and because of these structural differences of position that Siddhartha Deb returned to India to impersonate an aspiring call center agent; both despite and because of these differences that ethnographers of Indian subcontinental origin, including many of those named above, returned to India from their academic-institutional locations in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom to "study" the call center. Instead of irreconcilable opposition, I elect to read these figures in a relation of engagement and encounter. I imagine a meeting between the expatriate writer and the call center agent and attempt to hear the language in which they might communicate. Is it an English that is an Indian language, or, to move between epigraphs, an Indian English that is a global one? Against the idea that elites and relative subalterns can only exist in a relation of exploitation or condescension, I read the call center agent in dialogical relation to the expatriate writer: as the virtual migrant to his reverse migrant; the embodiment of the future to his pursuit of the past; and the speaker of a new "call center English" to his literary English.

The privileging of the cosmopolitan migrant is the context of Pheng Cheah's oft-cited critique of James Clifford and Homi Bhabha's "cosmopolitan" theories of cultural hybridity, which Cheah charges conflate hybridity with "cultural agency" (Clifford) as well as "physical freedom from being tied to the earth" (Bhabha). For Bhabha in particular, Cheah argues, "postcoloniality *is* the hybridity of metropolitan migrancy. Everything happens as if there were no postcolonials left in decolonized space."[22] Writing in his own defense, James Clifford argues that his work has always tried to show "the historical embeddedness of…relational cultural formations in political and economic structures," and that any form of "freedom" enabled by cultural hybridity is "making the best of given (often bad) situations…a matter of specific juxtapositions, selections and overlays offered and imposed in limited historical conjunctures."[23]

I agree with Clifford that Cheah's reading of what he calls "hybridity theory" depends on an articulation of "freedom" that neither Clifford's attention to cultural sedimentation nor Bhabha's work on discursive ambivalence consistently evidences. By that same token, I seek to build on Cheah's important point that more precise accounts of hybridity, diasporic subjectivity, and migrancy are needed if they are to speak to the conditions of uneven development under globalization.[24] To that end, I offer the call center agent as a postcolonial subject "left in decolonized space" whose agency is unmistakably premised on the "condition of miredness" that Cheah calls "given culture."[25] That this subject is also the repository of the hybridity of (virtual) migrancy, and as such is an heir to the metropolitan migrant supposedly fetishized by Clifford and Bhabha (not to mention the *New Yorker*), confirms less that postcolonial hybridity is an analytically vacuous category than that it continues to offer critical, conceptual purchase on contemporary social, cultural, and political problematics, in particular the phenomena of migration, arrival, and return.

Foundational theories of diaspora, including those by Clifford and Stuart Hall, engage the dynamics of arrival and return in equal measure: arrival into alternately welcoming and hostile host countries; return, whether psychic and physical, to originary homelands. In Hall's Derridean

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[22] Pheng Cheah, *Inhuman Conditions: On Cosmopolitanism and Human Rights* (London and Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 92.
[23] James Clifford, "Mixed Feelings," in Cheah and Robbins, *Cosmpolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation* (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 362-369.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Cheah, 2006, 117.

account, the question is how the diasporic subject of the Caribbean can take up cultural identity as a strategic position despite the fact that there can be no return to something like originary identity, no return to the putative homeland. For Clifford, too, routes are never guaranteed to secure roots. In his account, the diasporic community is one that is "'not-here' to stay," a community which transports, rather than leaves behind, the homeland.[26] This ambivalent and differential conception of diasporic identity is shared in part by Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin. In their textually mediated, anti-Zionist theory of diaspora, return becomes that which can never be fulfilled. For the Boyarins, Jewish identity as "Diaspora identity" does not mean that the Jewish people have no connection to "Land."[27] They are rooted to very specific, territorially- and textually-locatable land that they dream of as theirs even after twenty centuries of exile; however, this is a dream that must be deferred, as race and space *cannot* be articulated together. Roots must not compel return routes.

In recent years, studies of diaspora have moved toward even greater emphasis on extra-territoriality, from the avowal of homelands to which one has no "direct access" (Hall) or homelands to which one can never return (Boyarins), to homelands that do not exist in any empirically locatable sense. In the Sikh diaspora, to recall Brian Axel's argument, Khalistan is not conceptualized as "an empirical place of origin" to which Sikh subjects in diaspora can return; rather, the idea of an anterior, national Sikh collective body is fantastically produced in the fragmented, diasporic present.[28] Extending Axel's account, Jasbir Puar argues that homelands are not just geographical-territorial site, but "cohered through sensation, vibrations, echoes, speed, feedback loops, recursive folds and feelings." For Puar, the turn to affect theory enables her to locate "actual bodies…in multiple places and temporalities simultaneously."[29]

Axel's and Puar's influential accounts of diasporic subjectivity remain a dominant mode of theorizing diaspora in the Indian context. For Purnima Mankekar, rather than inhering in any essence or locatable truth, "India" can only be traced through its "construction" as "an archive of affect."[30] Her India is characteristic of that of many cultural studies scholars working between the nation and its diasporas in the tradition of Axel and Puar: it is extra-territorial and citational; it exceeds and frustrates the boundaries of the nation-state, even as it circulates, disseminates, and signs the nation's name. Bishnupriya Ghosh's and Mrinalini Chakravorty's respective work on popular dispensations of the global icon and the stereotype in the global literary imaginary also emphasize extra-territorial mediations of India that offer "extravagant invocation[s] of reality in terms of difference," as opposed to ontological identity.[31]

All of these accounts allow us to see how India is produced and circulated in dynamic relation, as opposed to adherence, to its geographical-territorial borders. Nevertheless, we must be wary of too-fast procedures of moving beyond the nation that attend avowals of diasporic affect and stereotypic cultural mediations as productive of, and not resultant from, the presence-absence of some originary homeland. Certainly, if the nation gives rise to those subjects dispersed in diaspora, it is equally true that the diaspora produces the nation it then posits as an origin.

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[26] James Clifford, "Diasporas," *Cultural Anthropology* 9(3), 302-338 (1994), 311.
[27] Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin, "Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity," *Critical Inquiry* 19.4 (Summer 1993), 714.
[28] Brian Keith Axel, "The diasporic imaginary," *Public Culture* 14.2 (2002), 412.
[29] Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 171.
[30] Purnima Mankekar, *Unsettling India: Affect, Temporality, Transnationality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 4.
[31] Chakravorty, 2014, 220.

Diaspora is a symptom that is also a cause, an effect that precedes itself. But the assumption of India's categorical extra-territoriality, engendered by what we might in broad strokes term the affective turn in diaspora studies, risks capitulating to what the Boyarins identify as a cosmopolitan-universalist fear of corporeality, bloodlines, genealogies, and the facticity of descent. It also misrecognizes diasporic attachments that are, in fact, territorial, sensual, and corporeal. As the phenomenon of reverse migration testifies, for many subjects, it is only by physically returning to India, by standing on Indian soil and breathing Indian air, by materially replanting roots, that certain affiliations and allegiances may be effectively renewed.

In contrast to affect-oriented accounts, the new centrality of the repatriated writer in Indian Anglophone literary criticism would seem to secure the empirical site of the nation; however, to my mind, the current critical discourse on repatriation risks mistaking and devaluing the affective intensities of diasporic subjects abroad. As I am arguing throughout *After New India*, the "return to the nation" narrative secures its purchase on the contemporary through a rejection of the earlier centrality of the diaspora—as both critical preoccupation and locus of cultural production—in postcolonial literary criticism, while replacing the idea of English's cosmopolitan imaginary with evidence of its newfangled provincial one. To summarize, what we have are two partial accounts of the diaspora-nation relation: the affect-theoretical account of diaspora as "unsettling" an already extra-territorial nation, on the one hand, and a literary-critical account of repatriation as securing the nation form while threatening to throw the diasporic baby out with the bathwater, on the other. While the first account looks to India's western diasporas as mediating loci productive of India as an "archive of affect," the second attempts to, in Anjaria's words, "render…banal" the difference between East and West.[32] Thus, neither account goes so far as to locate India *and* Indians in both the East and the West, diaspora and nation, simultaneously. Or, to put a finer point on it, neither account is able to grapple with the diasporas *in* India.

By contrast, social scientific accounts of Indian globality have begun to take up R. Radhakrishnan's and the Boyarins' challenges that we develop an account of diasporic subjectivity that recognizes "the cartography of betweenness"[33] as the province of subjects who may not be immigrants or emigrants in conventional terms, but whose itineraries share important institutional and affective components with that of the diasporic subject and whose identities are similarly—that is to say, diasporically—"disaggregated."[34] The call center agent's emergence as a species of "virtual migrant" is an exemplary case. For Aneesh, virtual migration is a form of labor migration that eschews face-to-face contact with foreign employers and clients and is premised entirely on "the real-time unification of different time zones."[35] In his account, virtual migration is not territorial or physical; thus, call center labor may be said to take place within the boundaries of the nation-state, whether or not it is governed by local labor and tax laws, and the call center agent ultimately retains her national identity. Similarly, geographer Reena Patel emphasizes how agents remain anchored in India by technologies like the mobile phone, which enables family and friends to stay in contact with the agent irrespective of her

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[32] Ulka Anjaria, "Introduction: Literary Pasts, Presents, and Futures," *A History of the Indian Novel in English* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 14.
[33] R. Radhakrishnan, *History, the Human, and the World Between* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).
[34] Boyarins, 1993, 721.
[35] Aneesh, 2006, 5.

virtual itineraries.[36]

Contrasting studies dispute this retention of nationality, arguing, as the co-authors of *Answer the Call* do, that "the agent is absent—no longer found in India because she is temporally removed. She has virtually migrated to America."[37] The call center agent's experience of moving between point *a* and point *b* in this account is "not merely imagined."[38] Time zones are crossed in real time and new subjectivities are forged through the agent's disaggregation from the temporal rhythms of the dominant Indian society. What is at stake in this argument about retained or foregone nationality are the conditions under which one can argue that the call center agent is herself a "foreign-returned" subject who experiences "a diasporic sense of loss, longing, and nostalgia for an India [she] cultivate[s] from a sensibility of distance"[39]—whether, in other words, we are to do away with putatively exhausted ideas from postcolonial literary criticism like diasporic hybridity, or move, in our social-scientific studies of global India, toward a "new politics" of it.[40]

VOICE: HINGLISH VS. CALL CENTER ENGLISH

In 2003, David Damrosch observed that English in India is three entities: "the language of…British literature…contemporary global English; and…Indo-English."[41] Damrosch was right that English in India is a plural quantity, but what he called "Indo-English" is hardly *one*. Today, there are myriad forms of English in India, including two of the many on offer in the call center alone: Hinglish and call center English.[42] Against the conventional positing of Damrosch's Indo-English as English's *Indian* form, I want to draw our attention in this section to call center English as a form of English that *is* by definition both Indian and English, a demotic, functional, technocratic English, maybe, but English nonetheless. As a form of global English, as opposed to a renomination of Hinglish, call center English suggests a powerful strand of convergence between its speaking subjects (call center agents) and the English speaking and writing subjects who preceded them (our expatriate writers): both are diasporic subjects who speak a putatively "neutral" language that nevertheless renders them susceptible to the charge of mimicry.

It is often observed that English is a "greedy" language, one historically agnostic about the sources of loan words like "juggernaut," "verandah," "nirvana," "pariah," and "avatar"

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[36] Patel, 2010, 62.

[37] Rowe et al., 2013, 23.

[38] For Mankekar, "imaginative travel" is indeed "a form of migration…central to the constitution of subjectivity," but she is referring to the imaginative travel enabled, for instance, by Bollywood music and films circulating in the United States (2015, 16).

[39] Rowe et al., 2013, 5.

[40] Shome 2006.

[41] David Damrosch, "World Literature, National Contexts," *Modern Philology* 100.4, pp. 512-531, Toward World Literature (May 2003), 519.

[42] In an essay on a Hyderabad call center, Cari Costanzo Kapur writes that agents code-switch between English and Hinglish within the space of the call center, depending on whether they are speaking to customers or colleagues. Cari Costanzo Kapur, "Rethinking Courtship, Marriage and Divorce in an Indian Call Center," *Everyday Life in South Asia*, eds. Diane Mines and Sarah Lamb (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 52. Reena Patel describes interviewing call center agents in a "casual language…sprinkled with Hinglish and colloquialisms" (2010, 30).

which it has, over the years, absorbed into common use.[43] In an essay on the language's encounters with its cultural others, Robert J.C. Young comments on this "facility of self-hybridisation," noting that English does not so much "overpower" other languages as mix with them "in a recurring 'make-nice." "[A]ll Europe went into the making of [English]," he observes, and now the world. Indian English is Young's paradigmatic case of self-hybridisation: "[In India, English] locks inexorably into a Hindi which is itself spattered with English and 'chalta hai'! English has shifted. Hinglish has reached. Let's prepone that talk!"[44]

In fact, the story of Hinglish, the hybrid Hindi-English/English-Hindi spoken by millions in India and variously deployed in the Anglophone literature of New India, complicates Young's understanding of the dominant tongue's metabolism of its linguistic Others. The phenomenon of Hinglish points to the fact that English is also a stealth language, one that not only consumes but also makes itself available to other languages for incorporation. Hinglish troubles Young's account of English as a "cosmopolitan vernacular" responsive to the demands of local and regional conditions by raising the question of Hindi's own "intra-lingual" transformations, and what they mean for the new realities of caste and class in India.[45]

In January 2009, the Mudra Institute of Communications in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, hosted a cross-disciplinary conference on Indian Englishes. "Chutnefying English" drew participation from scholars, writers and filmmakers from across India who debated the emergence of new, hybrid forms of both English and Hindi, India's two official languages.[46] The advent of Hinglish, it was argued, marked the decline of the old Indian Anglophone elite.[47] It meant both a "dumbing down" of English (Rita Kothari) and a "process of evolution" (Gurcharan Das). It was both a recent phenomenon of the new, Young India (Prashant Panday) and a return to an old "lowbrow" linguistic form, exemplified by Shobhaa De's 1960s gossip

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[43] Baljinder K. Mahal, *The Queen's Hinglish: How to Speak Pukka* (Glasgow: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2006). Cf. Kalpana Mohan's column "On Inglish," *India Currents,* available from
<https://www.indiacurrents.com/articles/categories/on-inglish/>

[44] Robert J.C. Young, "English and the Language of Others," *European Review* 17.1, pp. 203-212 (2009): 203-204. Young further celebrates Rushdie as the exemplary producer of what Roman Jacobson calls "intra-lingual translation" (210).

[45] I want to stress here that Hinglish need not necessarily be a "lower class" language. In fact, the challenge of Hinglish is that it describes both lowbrow and highbrow linguistic forms and speakers, from Shobhaa De, "the Queen Mother of Hinglish," to Rushdie, the language's "King-Emperor" (Trivedi, 2011, xvi). In post-millennial writing, however, Hinglish has become an assessment applied by a speaker of Western English (whether American or Britain) to speakers of English in the New India who do not come from the Anglophone upper crust. For instance, when Anand Giridharadas, whose *India Calling* is discussed in chapter three, moves to Mumbai to work for McKinsey, he finds his Indian colleagues "uncool, unsophisticated, raw . . . the Indians that the Anglicized dismissed for being too Indian." These New Indians prefer Bollywood to Hollywood, and say things like, "Arre, don't give her any bhav. . . Chhod, yaar. He is like that only" (82-85). Giridharadas comments on the English used by his McKinsey colleagues, as well as other of his informants, who write "hyperemotional" text messages to him and one another: "It was as if they had so much to say to each other, and no language of their own in which to say it" (75). To anticipate Aatish Taseer's critique of Indian Anglophone pulp fiction's "voicelessness," discussed in the next chapter, Giridharadas perceives his peers—his veritable Indian counterparts in terms of education, qualifications, and professional experience—as unsophisticated, ignorant, raw, and even as he marvels at their usurpation of the old guard. See Anand Giridharadas, *India Calling: An Intimate Portrait of a Nation's Remaking* (New York: Times Books/Henry Holt and Co., 2011).

[46] There are twenty-one other recognized regional languages, including Punjabi, Sanskrit, Tamil, and Urdu.

[47] Colleen Lye observes that the rise of Hinglish is also tied to the rise of a new orality empowered by the digital, a problem (and potentiality) that researcher and Wikimedia-editor Achal Prabhala is currently taking on in the Indian context.

column, "Nita's Natter."

The novelist R. Raj Rao argued that the rise of Hinglish would ultimately be a democratizing phenomenon. He asked:

> What if I have a relationship with a driver? What do I do? Hinglish is a language that sustains such a relationship…Hinglish becomes a language of love, of survival. It allows you to connect to people of a different class. Hinglish is a language of compromise…a language of unification.[48]

For Rao, Hinglish enables dialogical engagement between subjects who earlier would have been unintelligible to one another, not only because of a real language barrier, but also because of the class and caste disparities marked by that linguistic difference. Specifically, Rao was imagining the meeting of an elite Hindi-in-English speaker and a lower-class English-in-Hindi speaker, a meeting of "Coolie" and "Babu," in Tabish Khair's terms. A meeting of two subjects of either the former or latter demographic (and I use that word advisedly) would not have the same romantic force of compromise and unification.

Rao is himself a fiction writer, poet, and professor of English, whose creative writing traffics in the new Hinglish: "Only chalu, streetsmart guys went there," his characters observe.[49] "You're too bindaas" (*TB* 82). Ironically, the democratization of the Indian sphere of relations to which Rao referred at the Mudra conference emerges in his own work—discussed below as an exemplary case—as an unrealizable fantasy of the elite, and the Hinglish his upper-class characters employ as a calculated species of linguistic manipulation.

In *The Boyfriend*, Rao details a love affair between an upper-middle-class, educated, Anglophone journalist, Yudi, and Milind, an "Untouchable," working-class, and semi-literate teenager he picks up while cruising at Churchgate Station in Mumbai. On the one hand, the novel articulates a critique of caste based on the supposedly leveling force of same-sex relations. Yudi says: "I am a homosexual. Gay by caste. Gay by religion" (*TB* 81). On the other hand, it confirms the failure of same-sex relations to trump reigning class, caste, and linguistic boundaries.[50] Throughout the novel, Yudi reflects on the profound Otherness of the working-class men he takes to bed, from "the smell of grime" that emanates from their flesh to the surprisingly lucid observations they occasionally make, against Yudi's patronizing expectations. When Milind comments on the fact of their class divide ("I belong to the working class, and you to the talking class"), Yudi's "ears pop up in amazement, like a dog's" (*TB* 17).

The novel thematizes language as a marker of class. The English-speaking Yudi frequently goes cruising and slumming with non-English speakers; some speak "inchoate things that [make] no sense" and respond to his English provocations with "a brief, blank stare" (*TB* 3). Others, like Milind, specifically challenge Yudi to account for his linguistic privilege, as in these exchanges:

> 'What language do you speak at home?'

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[48] R. Raj Rao, "Is Hinglish a Unifying Force?" *Chutnefying English: The Phenomenon of Hinglish*, ed Ritu Kothari and Rupert Snell (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2011), 202-203.
[49] R. Raj Rao, *The Boyfriend* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2003), 29. Hereafter cited internally as *TB*.
[50] Sandeep Bakshi, "Fractured Resistance: Queer Negotiations of the Postcolonial in R. Raj Rao's *The Boyfriend*," *South Asian Review*, 33:2 (2012), 1-19.

'English…' Yudi mumbled, then quickly added, 'and Hindi.'[51]

Later, on the way to his apartment, Yudi blindfolds Milind, admitting that it is a protective caution so that the working-class boy can't later blackmail him:

> Even as he uttered it, Yudi regretted that he'd used the word 'blackmail'. It amounted to putting ideas in people's heads.
>
> 'Do I look like a blackmailer to you?' the boy asked, hurt…
>
> …'I didn't say *you* were a blackmailer,' Yudi explained. '…In English, we say 'Prevention is better than cure.' (*TB* 10-11)

This exchange is ostensibly happening in Hindi, which allows for Yudi's bracketing of an English expression as located in a different discursive register from the rest of his statement. The unstated fact of the Hindi-medium also allows Yudi to remark on the quality of Milind's Marathi in other moments in the novel. But the fact that all of the prose is rendered as a translation into English for the Anglophone reader gives the work an ironic, even cynical tone. The language of working-class Milind is doubly mediated by Yudi and by the narrator. By that same token, the Hinglish that appears in the novel—"I'm a pucca Bombay-wala" (*TB* 10)—is actually a partial translation by the narrator from the Hindi that Yudi and Milind are "actually," in the possible world of the novel, speaking. Hinglish thus emerges as a narrative device of the Anglophone writer, and not a language of compromise and unification between Yudi and Milind. It confirms, as opposed to disrupts, the impossibility of the cross-class, cross-caste encounter to which Rao refers. Indeed, if at all the novel establishes parity between these characters, it is in the fact of their mutual incomprehension: Yudi of Milind's Marathi; and Milind of Yudi's English.

At the Mudra conference, Trivedi drew a distinction that is key to understanding the failure of such supposedly democratic encounters mediated through Hinglish, and which returns us to the earlier questions we raised via Young: The rise of Hinglish can mean *either* Hindi-in-English *or* English-in-Hindi, depending on the competencies of the speaker in question. Hindi-in-English speakers pepper fluent English with "slang words, everyday words, family words [from Hindi]. Words that are first to your lips when your son has taken the car again…or food is so delicious it takes you by surprise."[52] By contrast, English-in-Hindi speakers incorporate so much English into Hindi as to have transformed Hindi's very "syntax, modes of speech, idiom, and indeed sensibility."[53] English's chutnefication is Hindi's Anglicization; English's hybridization is Hindi's degradation. To what extent, then, is Hinglish even a type of English? And what is its relation to the "call center English" that is taught and certified all over New India?

As stated earlier, global media, theatrical productions, and even cultural theorists typically figure the call center agent as someone who has adopted an Anglo-pseudonym and speaks English in a fake American or British accent. By all accounts, however, India's call centers "[dropped] the fake accents" as early as 2003, emphasizing instead the production of "neutral accents" that could be "universally understandable," with "noise-free clarity."[54] English, as

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[51] In a different context, in which he seeks to impress the father of a woman who is in love with him, Yudi will announce that he only speaks English at home and cannot be assigned to ranks of the vernacular, Telugu-speaking community to which his family belongs.

[52] Mahal, 2006, vi.

[53] Trivedi, 2011, xi.

[54] Khozem Merchant, "India's Call Centres Drop the Fake Accents," *The Financial Times* (December 8, 2003), 13.

taught and utilized in the business process outsourcing (BPO) industry, is a "modular" and "serviceable" language that is losing its class distinctions while trafficking in new regimes of globality and neutrality.[55] Accent neutralization in turn is both about eliminating difference and about cultivating specific forms of difference, which is why the New York-returned Siddhartha Deb has to learn a new language in order to find work in the call center. Ethnographer A. Aneesh gives as an example of this new language the pronunciation of the word "laboratory." The American pronunciation stresses the first syllable, while dropping the first "o"; the British pronunciation stresses the second syllable, while dropping the second "o." A universal pronunciation, in theory, might keep both "o's" while maintaining the same stress on each syllable.[56]

In *Neutral Accent: How Language, Labor, and Life Become Global*, Aneesh describes his first attempt to get a job as a voice and accent trainer at the Datys call center in Gurgaon. Having lived and worked in the United States for over a decade, he is confident of his experiential credentials. Yet Aneesh swiftly finds that he is actually *too* Western for the job. His interviewer, Payal, asks him to stop using an American accent and "start using a neutral accent, instead." She offers her own form of spoken English as a model. When Aneesh protests that Payal's "Indian English" is not exactly "plain and neutral," she demurs: "Indian English is global English. It is neither American nor British."[57]

Aneesh's encounters in the call center, much like Deb's, illustrate the telling inversions of provincial and global, diasporic and national, that I am tracing throughout this work. In both cases, life lived in the West proves to be a disqualifying and even delegitimating experience when the goal is the inhabitance of the subject position of global tech-support. As Deb notes, it is the provincial Indian who actually has purchase on New Indian aspiration in the global moment. And as Aneesh discovers, the call center is not in the business of neutralizing Indian voices into American or British or even Transatlantic approximates, but rather in the business of producing Indian voices as themselves distinctly and audibly global.

This professed production of a neutral accent points, Aneesh further argues, to a significant fact about globalization: rather than homogenization, globalization is in the business of neutralization, of creating "neutral" spaces like the call center for communication between people who no longer have the information (i.e., the sound of an accented voice) with which to "place" one another. The English spoken by call center agents is supposed to sound as if it issues "from nowhere"[58]—a deeply ironic assignment given that it is precisely this *where*, whether India, Mexico, or the Philippines, that enables the call center to serve its role in the international division of labor in the first place. For Aneesh, the neutrality of call center English is closely tied

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[55] Mathangi Krishnamurthy, "Furtive Tongues: Language Politics in the Indian Call Centre," *Chutnefying English: The Phenomenon of Hinglish*, ed. Rita Kothari and Rupert Snell, 82-97 (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2011), 92.

[56] Aneesh, 2015, 61-62.

[57] Aneesh, 2015, 3.

[58] We should be wary about such equations of the global with the "placeless," which are meant to steer us away from older worries about the flattening, Mc-worlding, and Coca-colonization of the non-Western world. Even in Aneesh's account, a city like Gurgaon only achieves placelessness by specifically citing other places; Gurgaon's townships have names like "Beverly Park" and "Malibu Town." Thus, Gurgaon's "nonplace"-ness is a rhetorical effect of its self-conscious mimeticism. It is a nonplace like Las Vegas or Dubai is a nonplace, which is to say, it is some place very particular indeed. The rhetoric of placelessness as constitutive of globality echoes critiques of the global novel as, in Pankaj Mishra's caustic terms, one that emerges "from an apolitical and borderless cosmopolis" and is therefore "global" or "world." See Pankaj Mishra, "The case against the global novel," *Financial Times* (September 27, 2013).

to the neutrality of the call center's physical space—both the time-bending space of the call center, and the city in which it is located. He argues that Gurgaon, the self-nominated "Millennium City" outside Delhi where numerous Western corporations have set up shop in the past decade, is at once a "virtual city," a "nonplace," and "a global city" that evades "memory and roots…its life is no longer rooted in its fertile soil or its local bazaars."[59]

Aneesh defines neutrality as "indifference to difference," a phrase which invites further scrutiny (which differences, and whose indifference?). When Aneesh writes that "the global techno-economy has….managed to remain neutral to the day/night difference," he is using neutrality in two different senses of the word.[60] First, neutrality is being equated with economic "indifference" as a lack of care for the somatic requirements of the call center agent, who is expected to transform her sleeping, eating, waking, and other practices of living in order to labor during the night. Second, neutrality speaks to the neoliberal rationality of economic opportunism and expediency that characterizes the integrated global economy. What matters is the efficacy of global communication, not its particulars. What counts is the number of profitable transactions, not when or where or even between whom they occur. What Aneesh's discussion overlooks is the extent to which the call center's "indifference to difference" capitalizes on aspects of a liberal Indian rhetoric of difference, plurality, and democratic in-coherence, discussed in chapter three, that has emerged as fundamental to India's nationalist self-conception and the identity it exports.

The definition of neutrality as indifference to difference also overlooks the marketability of controlled, even neutralized difference. Here is anthropologist Mathangi Krishnamurthy's description of "effective communication" in the call center: "Words were mispronounced but confidently. Grammar was garbled but without pauses. Agents spoke assertively, their sentences fluid. Language disabilities had metamorphosed into smart communication."[61] Krishnamurthy's account reveals not only the tenacity of Indian English difference from American, British, and Australian registers, but also suggests the utility of that tenacity. To speak global English is to speak a language at once non-threatening in its patent irregularities and highly efficient as a medium for the conduct of international exchange. To speak global English is to speak Indian English for the purpose of monetizable communication.

Call center-imposed and cultivated neutrality adheres to the Oxford English Dictionary's account of neutrality as a state of in-betweenness: "an intermediate state or condition, not clearly one thing or another." What is neutral is indeterminate; neutral English is a form of English whose point of origin cannot be located. By contrast, the neutrality of English in the past-contemporary postcolonial context—the Nehruvian context of establishing an official language for the young nation-state—was a neutrality of determinate exception. In India's early postcolonial period in the mid-20th century, language was the province of an intense identitarianism; language was not "experienced primarily as a medium," as Lisa Mitchell has shown, but rather as an "object" of "affective attachment."[62] And yet, despite these attachments,

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[59] Ibid., 14. In April 2016, the Harayana government renamed Gurgaon as "Gurugram," an act of revisionist renomination in which Gurgaon joined Bombay, Madras, Calcutta, Bangalore, and other Indian cities as having names insufficiently tied to India's "Hindu" history. We might also read this as a rebuke to the regimes of global non-placeness and virtuality identified by Aneesh.

[60] Aneesh, 2015, 112.

[61] Krishnamurthy, 2011, 88.

[62] Lisa Mitchell, *Language, Emotion, and Politics in South India: The Making of a Mother Tongue* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 5, 128.

the Indian nation-state managed to accommodate competing demands for recognition of numerous linguistic communities, whose loyalties to their respective mother tongues (like Telugu and Tamil) led to separatist demands but not, ultimately, to the creation of new nation-states.

What I want to underscore, following Mitchell, is that English was crucial to this process of accommodation.[63] Both the Tamil language movement and the Telugu language movement feared the establishment of Hindi as the primary official language of the Indian state, given the economic and political disadvantages this would entail for non-Hindi-speaking speakers of Indian vernacular languages.[64] What is particularly important is how English achieved privileged status as "a mediator between other Indian languages…because of its seeming neutrality."[65] This neutrality, it cannot be overstated, was always already politically charged. It was a neutrality predicated on the exceptionality of a language that was "everywhere and nowhere" in India, and which did not share the sedimented social histories of India's indigenous languages.[66]

The neutrality of intermediacy and the neutrality of exception share the quality of the third-term, but they differ in their mediating capabilities. The latter is the form of neutrality that Salman Rushdie rhetorically exploited in that same 1997 *New Yorker* issue, in which he wrote,

> the prose writing…created [in the 50 years since Partition] 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 so-called 'vernacular languages'…'Indo-Anglian' literature represents perhaps the most valuable contribution India has yet made to the world of books.[67]

Much has been said about Rushdie's essay, cited also in this chapter's first epigraph, from its tone, to its deployment of the value term, to its perpetuation of falsities about vernacular literatures. At the time of writing in 2016, it remains one of the most discussed Indian entrants into the fraught and well-hashed "language debate" in postcolonial literary studies, the sides of which may be shorthanded as Chinua Achebe v. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Salman Rushdie v. Amit Chaudhuri, or Vikram Chandra v. Meenakshi Mukherjee.[68] Whatever side one takes in this

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[63] For more on the history of the appointment of English and Hindi as India's official languages, including M.K. Gandhi's advocacy of Hindi over English, see Chakravorty 2014.

[64] Mitchell, 2009, 26.

[65] Rashmi Sadana, *English Heart, Hindi Heartland: The Political Life of Literature in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 6. See also Mitchell, for a discussion of how English doesn't just mediate between different languages in India, but also between "classical" and "modern" variants of the same languages, like Telugu: English "becomes invisible, acting as an apparently external and neutral language in relation to the ostensive conflict between 'classical' and 'modern' Telugu" (185).

[66] Sadana, *English Heart*, 9-10.

[67] Rushdie, 1997, 50.

[68] By postcolonial "language debate," I mean the debate over the possibility and outcome of indigenizing languages like English that are imperial bequests in formerly colonized countries like India. But we might equally have termed the contest in question the "mother tongue" debate: Is the adoption of English by a person of Indian origin a rejection of some earlier tongue spoken by one's mother or grandmother, figurally speaking? Or is, as Sheldon Pollock has argued, the obsession with mother tongues a European obsession? For many Indians, choosing or not choosing to speak English is no choice at all, and cannot be vested with undue significance by the arbiters of Indian authenticity. As Amit Chaudhuri observes, continuing to lament the adoption of English is yet another instantiation of the postcolonial anxiety over India's historical belatedness: "all would be well if we could return to the mother tongue." See Chinua Achebe, "The African Writer and the English Language," in *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1975); Vikram Chandra, "The Cult of Authenticity," *Boston Review* (2000); Amit Chaudhuri, "Introduction: Modernity and the Vernacular; The Construction of the Indian Novel in English; A Note

debate hinges on the answer to one question: Can a language like English, which is a colonial bequest, be "grafted" onto the national bodies of formerly colonized peoples?

This question entails others: Should we accept, as Achebe did in 1965, that the national literature of a country like his Nigeria will inevitably be written in English, and that moreover, English will be able "to carry the weight [of] African experience"?[69] Or should we contest that eventuality with the Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ, who famously "bid farewell to English" in the early 1980s with a vow to write only in Gikuyu and Kiswahili, saying that for an African writer to write in anything but an African language would be to subject himself to "alien cultural values which are meaningless [to his] present needs"?[70] Are the bodies of texts that have been variously known over the past five decades as "Commonwealth," "Third World," "postcolonial," and now "Global Anglophone" literatures the products of *indigenized* colonial tongues—languages made into robust "father tongues," as Chandra claims?[71] Or will these literatures inevitably be characterized, as Mukherjee feared, by an "inability…to face life in the harsh and unflinching light of reality"?[72]

I will have more to say in response to each of these questions in the next chapter on the question of New India's national literature. What is key for the present discussion is how Rushdie's polemic exploits ideas about English's exceptionality that are inextricably tied to ideas about English's relative *neutrality* in India. This is the old neutrality of exception, which I would like to suggest, in a hypothetical vein, was also a form of *literary* neutrality—a regime of distinction that enabled the English language to serve as a privileged translator in India, both of the vernacular languages and something we might provisionally term Indian "truths." The new "call center" neutrality of intermediacy, by contrast, is a functional mode of neutrality for an Indian English language that is stripped of its translational capacity. It is, to anticipate the next section's discussion, a "sterile" hybrid, limited to denotative modes of expression.

IDENTITY: HYBRIDITY AND MIMICRY

In the last section, I focused on how the call center utilizes language, specifically "Indian" and "global" (two terms which are not necessarily mutually exclusive) mediations of English. In this section, I want to think more specifically about the call center agent's role as a service worker within the international division, or global distribution, of labor. When critics argue that call center agents are "cybercoolies," whose work is "old exploitation dressed up in a new costume,"[73] they tend to locate this exploitation in the coercively mimetic imperatives of call center accent

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on the Selection," *The Vintage Book of Modern Indian Literature* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001, 2004); Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1981, 1986), 100; Salman Rushdie, "Introduction," *Mirrorwork: 50 Years of Indian Writing, 1947-1997* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997); Meenakshi Mukherjee, *The Perishable Empire: Essays in Indian Writing in English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Sheldon Pollock, "Cosmopolitan and Vernacular in History," *Public Culture* 12.3 (2000), 591-625.

[69] Achebe, 1975 [1965].
[70] Ngũgĩ , 1981, 100.
[71] Chandra 2000.
[72] Meenakshi Mukherjee, *The Twice-Born Fiction: Themes and Techniques of the Indian Novel in English* (Delhi: Pencraft International 1971, 2001), 155.
[73] Deb, 2011, 7.

neutralization and voice training.[74] In her 2014 work on languaging, for example, Rey Chow equates call center language training with "ideological conversion in Althusser's sense": "If the offshore call center is the scene of a literal calling and vocation in the age of globalization, does not this scene embed in its smooth operability the memory of that earlier scene whereby the colonized were recruited into the ideological state apparatus that was English?"[75]

Similarly, call center ethnographies uniformly register concern over the practice of impersonation. In whose voice does the call center agent speak? Is the Indian customer service agent an imperfect copy of an American or British ideal? Are call center agents "Macaulay's (Cyber) Children"[76]? Kiran Mirchandani's *Phone Clones* and Shehzad Nadeem's *Dead Ringers* give these questions titular pride of place, in a clear return to the postcolonial discourse on mimicry that assumed critical currency through the work of Homi Bhabha. For Mirchandani, Bhabha's well-known account of mimicry speaks to "an effective strategy of colonial power" that finds its contemporary analogue in the managerial mechanisms of the call center and larger BPO industries.[77] Mimicry, she writes, both authenticates the call center's administrative power over workers' lives and admits the possibility of their self-determination. Nadeem quotes Bhabha's famous refrain ("almost the same, but not quite") while also attributing his account of mimicry to Walter Benjamin's assessment of the human "compulsion…to become and behave like something else." In the call center, Nadeem writes, this universal compulsion is "choreographed," regulated, subject to "rational control and the rules of capital accumulation."[78]

On the one hand, it is not hard to see why Bhabha's account of mimicry would have appeal for scholars of the call center. Mimicry is a strategy of power and knowledge that relies on, as opposed to simply producing as an unconscious effect, a subversion of identity and difference. It is not just a colonial imposition, but also an available tactic of the colonized. Bhabha follows Jacques Lacan's definition of mimicry's effect as that of "becoming mottled" (one does not mimic so as to become the other, but one mimics and becomes a mottled version of both self and other), while pursuing Frantz Fanon's provocative argument that the only possible destiny for the black man is "white."[79] The ultimate threat to colonial authority is the simultaneity of mimicry's rearticulation and disavowal of this destiny. The mimic takes up the charge of approximating authority, but with a will to failure. In J.L. Austin's terms, the performative inevitably misfires; in the colony subject to the missionary impulses of the imperial metropole, the pages of the Bible are ironically and subversively used as wrapping paper.[80]

Between the resemblance of "almost the same" and the menace of "not quite," the call center worker has the ability to rupture the neo-colonial international division of labor in the time of globalization—and not only by appearing as a threat to the security of American jobs.

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[74] It is also located in the somatic adjustments the call center agent must make in order to, for example, work the nightshift. In Raka Shome's words, the call center presents "an egregious instance of a new postcolonial re-colonization of the body where the [call center agent's] body's biological functioning is invaded and its innermost recesses intruded upon." Shome, 2006, 117.

[75] Chow, 2014, 8-10.

[76] Shehzad Nadeem, "Macaulay's (cyber) children: The cultural politics of outsourcing in India," *Cultural Sociology* 3.1 (2009), 102-122.

[77] Mirchandani, 2012, 158n33.

[78] Nadeem, 2011, 41-42.

[79] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008 [1952]).

[80] J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962); Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man," *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

Rowe, et al. stress that agents "resist" being cultivated as neoliberal subjects through "little and big ways of maintaining Indianness: taking time back, engaging in fleeting refusals."[81] Nadeem and Mirchandani chart the ways that Indian call centers workers attempt to maximize their performance scores while subverting certain routine procedures and expectations of customer service work. Rather than becoming an "irrevocably subaltern" subject, the call center agent understood as Bhabha's mimic assumes, in Chow's words, the "elements of a resilient—indeed, mobile…selfhood."[82]

On the other hand, these same studies invite a reading of call center impersonation as what Chow has called "coercive mimeticism": the imperative of appearing as oneself, of performing one's ethnic, racialized, gendered, or in this case Indian difference from a putatively unmarked norm. Chow specifically distinguishes coercive mimeticism (which she terms mimeticism-type 3) from Bhabha's "resistance" model of mimicry (which she terms mimeticism-type 2), which has dominated cultural theory while nevertheless continuing to emphasize "whiteness as the ultimate superior value."[83] Coercive mimeticism, by contrast, is a process in which the quantity to be mimicked is a stereotyped ideal of the ethnic (or non-white) subject herself. In this light, call center mimicry can be read as a process whereby the agent must strive not to approximate whiteness or Americanness as the superior value, but rather a form of global Indianness, analogizable to ethnicity in Chow's terms. In the "familiar imagings"[84] of globalization, the ideal customer service agent is in fact an *Indian* subject, a brown subject, and a speaker of Indian English.

To return to Bhabha, "to be Anglicized" or Americanized "is *emphatically* not to be English" or American—but it *is* to be Indian.[85] Aneesh's emphasis on mimesis as "recoding" as opposed to "copying" similarly shows how the call center agent is trained to speak in a voice that sounds "global" and "everyday"—which is to say, Indian—as opposed to American, British, or Australian.[86] Even for Mirchandani, the point is never simply that the Indian call center agent become a "clone" of an American worker, but rather that call center agents are asked to "refashion themselves into *ideal Indian workers.*"[87] Mirchandani terms this refashioning "authenticity work": the Indian agent must become the best version of herself by "emulating, through voice, an ideal transnational call center worker."[88] Or, as Aneesh writes, "cultural simulation [becomes] the basis of authentic performance."[89]

And yet, Bhabha's account of mimicry so dominates the cultural theoretical imaginary of hierarchical (if not definitionally colonial) relations that even Chow, in her recent work on languaging, lapses into a reading of call center mimicry as mimeticism-type 2.

> Not only must the employees become acquainted with the commercial products they are representing, but they must also acquire an aesthetics of performativity, whereby they *sound right* or *sound like* what is deemed acceptable to the customer. If they happen to be

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[81] Rowe et al., 2013, 72.
[82] Chow, 2002, 105.
[83] Ibid., 106.
[84] Ibid., 107.
[85] Bhabha, 1994, 128.
[86] Aneesh, 2015, 68.
[87] Mirchandani, 2012, 1, my emphasis.
[88] Ibid., 3.
[89] Aneesh, 2006, 93.

reserved in their habits of self-expression, for instance, these prospective employees must incorporate—must learn to enact by voice—the preferred American way of sounding cheerful, confident, and enthusiastic, including the not-so-subtle way of pronouncing certain words: 'Sure!'[90]

For Chow, this aural approximation lays bare the operations of linguistic "skin tones"; under the conditions of global telephonic interconnection, the voice becomes the skin, "on which is now inscribed an explicit demand, left over from an unequal historical relation."[91] The authors of *Answer the Call* similarly argue that call center "agents are trained to speak like Americans…in processes of virtual assimilation in which they learn to inhabit whiteness."[92]

Why does Chow not recognize the operations of coercive mimeticism in the call center's scenes of what she calls—in terms reminiscent of her earlier critique of ethnicity—Althusserian "ideological conversion"?[93] My contention is that her critique bears the legacy of postcolonial theory's preoccupation with hybridity's ambivalent approximations. The resultant routinized equation of Americanness with whiteness—and of mimicry as a process of inhabiting or "approximating" that whiteness—misses the significance of the call center agent's necessary approximation and inhabitance of an *ethnicized* global Indianness. If the former is a form of neo-colonial subordination, then the latter may be more simply and openly termed a performance of Indianness, if not a form of transformation.

To wit, if the debate on the language politics of the Indian call center is unable to recognize forms of self-return and self-expression in the agent's vocal performance, it's because of how the questions of linguistic and identitarian mimicry have hitherto animated scholarship on the vexed Anglophonism of the diasporic expatriate writer. The call center agent is frequently figured in criticism and popular culture as a hapless provincial Indian mimic, being forced to speak in a language that is not his or her own. It is assumed that outsourced work involves a kind of violent identitarian and linguistic interpellation, in which Indian Keerthi's become Karen's and Shyam's become Sam's. By contrast, the literary productions of expatriate writers—and here I am thinking about literature as itself an identitarian and linguistic performance—are assumed to be volitional: the writer *chooses* to write in English, to participate in Anglophony. But what the call center agent reminds us of, and what I will underscore further in the next chapter, is that *both* of these figures—not just the "cybercoolies" but the expatriate writers, too—are subject to what linguist Vineeta Chand calls "global ideologies framing them as non-native" speakers of the English language. Notwithstanding differing degrees of volition and constraint, "ALL Indians," Chand argues, must negotiate the "national-level, globally imposed assessments" of fluency, accent, and general linguistic competency to which the call center agent is daily subject.[94]

This dominant ideology around questions of English nativity inflects many well-known works of literary scholarship, especially in debates around world literature. We may recall, for example, the section on "The Postcolonial Novel" in Pascale Casanova's *World Republic of Letters*. In Casanova's account, European languages were "exported" to "outlying lands"; where, "For a

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[90] Chow, 2014, 9.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Rowe et. al, 2013, 68.
[93] Chow, 2014, 8.
[94] Vineeta Chand, "[v] at is going on? Local and global ideologies about Indian English," *Language in Society* 38.4 (2009): 393-419.

language no less than for the literary tradition associated with it, [outsiders] supply a new way of keeping up with modernity."[95] By that same token, she stresses, what seem like "peripheral literary innovations" by these outsiders are often "typically English and largely outmoded [literary techniques]."[96] While Casanova's broader critique is ostensibly aimed at those British literary critics and prize-giving bodies who she claims are exercising neo-imperial authority in claiming postcolonial literatures for the Commonwealth, undergirding her critique is the idea that writers like Rushdie are *outsiders* to English—that they're not native speakers.[97] My point is not to cast aspersions on Casanova in particular for subscribing to the dominant ideology of nativity. What is more interesting, in my view, is how that ideology has also been assimilated by Indian Anglophone literary critics.

In closing, then, I want to recall two well-known arguments about Indian English language and Indian Anglophone literatures that evidence such assimilation: Meenakshi Mukherjee's account of "twice-born fictions" and Tabish Khair's account of "Babu fictions." Both arguments proceed from the assumption that English is a non-native, elite tongue in India, which does not and cannot relate to the Indian everyman. My specific interest is in how Mukherjee and Khair each address the question of the English *language*, over and above the questionable literary uses to which it is then put; for I would like to suggest that the New Indian Anglophonisms of Hinglish and call center English discussed above and in the next chapter return us in an inverse way to the problems set out by the early Mukherjee and Khair.

In *The Twice-Born Fiction*, Mukherjee argues that all "Indo-Anglian" writing, as it was then called, emerges from the space between what the author has differently "inherited" and "imbibed."[98] The problem with Indo-Anglian literature is that it is written in an *acquired* language, not a language spoken from birth, and that it is an attempt to forge a literature in a language that already has "its own" great tradition. Indo-Anglian literature is different from all other modes of English writing outside of England (e.g., in the United States) because the language is "not the first language of the writer nor is it the language of daily life of the people about whom the novels are written."[99]

Why, then, Mukherjee asks, do Indian writers choose to write in English? Is English the language one has to write in because it is a "public language"[100]? Is it because the writer wishes to address a western audience? Is it because the use of English is uniquely reflective of the elite Indian's hybrid subjectivity? Or is it because English is the only "pan-Indian language" in a country in which independence from Britain is the primary shared experience?

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[95] Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M.B. DeBevoise (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004 [1999]), 120.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Related to this is Aamir Mufti's argument that postcolonial writers like V.S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie have come to typify "the non-Western writer [and] the psychology of *assimilation* into metropolitan languages and cultures" because of the widespread assumption that the non-Western text first appears in the world literary field in the 20th century as the text of the colonial periphery. Mufti singles out Casanova's history of non-Western literary cultures in particular, as it essentially begins with the event of decolonization. This periodization overlooks the historical moment and tradition of Orientalist philology, which Mufti, following Edward Said, understands as a deep and mutually transforming encounter between Western and non-Western languages and literatures. Cf. Aamir Mufti, *Forget English! Orientalisms and World Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016).
[98] M. Mukherjee, 1971, 69.
[99] Ibid., 34.
[100] Ibid., 70.

> The duality of culture as it exists in India today can either be a source of strength to the writer, providing him with a double-bladed instrument with which to conquer India's hydra-headed reality; or it may be a serious handicap, because writing about a society in which different sets of values are flowing into each other, each at a different level of internal change, cannot be an easy task.[101]

The conventional reading of the value question set out by Mukherjee is that Anglophone and vernacular Indians have different cultural and social precepts. But the question of literary value underlies these other concerns. The English used by Indo-Anglian writers like Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, Ahmed Ali, and R.K. Narayan inevitably had to be Indianized, whether in dialogical "literal" translations of words spoken in the vernacular and then represented in the English text, or in the whole style of a novel, as in the "tempo of Indian life" that "infuse[s]" the English expressions in Rao's *Kanthapura*.[102] The resulting Indianized English language carried with it the rhythm and cadence of lives lived, the punctuation of breaths taken, the exclamations of events survived, the conjunctions of aspirations, and the conjoined utterances of past, present, and future. Put simply, a certain deliberate and self-conscious Indianization became the mark of literary English, available for uptake and continued transformation by Desani, Rushdie, and heirs.

Similarly, Khair's 2001 polemic on "alienation" in Indian Anglophone writing develops a distinction between what he calls Coolie and Babu classes in India, separated both socio-economically and linguistically. The former is a vernacular class of "economically deprived, culturally marginalized, and, often, rural or migrant-urban" subjects. The latter is an urban and comopolitan Anglophone class Khair described as "Brahminized and/or westernized." It will be clear already that one significant objection to Khair's critique has been his reductive, binaristic account of India's complex arrangement of social classes. And yet, I would argue that there was, and remains still, heuristic utility to the Coolie-Babu distinction (notwithstanding the strategic resuscitation of an imperial slur), in as much as it captures a certain structure of feeling about class in India, especially from the perspective of the Anglophone expatriate writer.

Babu fictions in Khair's account are texts written by either "diasporic [or] stay-at-home Indians" who have more in common with "English[men]" than with the "Coolie" classes, and whose unrealizable goal is not simply to "[mirror] Indian 'realities' but [*to translate* them]."[103] His primary argument against the validity of this effort is quantitative: the majority of Indians do not speak English. How, then, can their reality be represented in English other than through artificial appropriation? Khair tars almost all Indian Anglophone writers with the same brush, arguing that Anand, Rao, Narayan, Rushdie, Roy, and V.S. Naipaul are all just different species of bourgeois Babus who ventriloquize subaltern Indians for an imagined western addressee:

> …the measure of the success of an Indian English novel is not its representation of India or its reception and sale in India or its positioning in specifically Indian cultural debates and discourses. The measure of its success is the hard fact of its sale all around the (Eurocentric) world largely based on the so-called literary quality of the writing, its

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[101] Ibid., 73.
[102] Raja Rao, 1938, vii.
[103] Khair, 2001, 5, 21.

situation within a westernized perception of India and Indian traditions and a belief in its ability to represent India and Indians.[104]

As discussed in the Introduction, the critique of the Western addressee tends to elide the variegation of this subject, which includes both Indians in diaspora and others with earned purchase on India and its plural realities. Khair is guilty of this elision, and it underlies his bad faith dismissal of the "so-called literary quality" of Indian Anglophone writing.[105]

Mukherjee believed that the Indian novel in English would be adequately indigenized if writers could learn to "grapple with the particular, the concrete and the immediate" in India, while asserting the Indian Anglophone novel's relation to the traditions of Indian vernacular fiction. For Khair, Babu fictions were by definition alienated fictions since they emerged from "existing Babu and related bourgeois discourses"[106] and not authentic Indian speech. Put differently, if Mukherjee's Indo-Anglian fiction was the promising product of two parents, then Khair's "Babu fiction" was the sterile hybrid resulting from that coupling. The question is, would the "Coolie" fiction of an authentic, nation-sprung English be any less alienated in Khair's terms?[107] Is English "as a language of creative expression" still "limited to [India's] economic and cultural elite,"[108] or might the call center's "functional English" carry some hitherto untapped narrative force? If the Indian Anglophone novel of Raja Rao was the "twice-born" novel of the elite, then who, in theory, would be the twin parents of an R. Raj Rao novel, or a call center English text?

In this chapter, the call center agent has allowed us to re-see the supposedly flexible and opportunistic movements of the expatriate writer in terms of inflexible ideologies around migration, belonging and language. At the same time, we have been able to re-hear the Anglophony of expatriate writers as the deployment of a putatively "neutral" English that nevertheless renders them susceptible to the charge of mimicry. In the next chapter, we will take up the question of New India's Anglophone literature more directly by exploring two possible heirs to Khair's hypothetical Coolie fiction. First, we will read popular texts that are neither written in English nor in Hinglish, but rather in call center English, a language that has emerged as the expressive medium for New India's low- and middlebrow genre fiction. These novels of the New Indian Anglosphere stage the diaspora-nation encounter through authorial identification with the call center protagonist. Then, we will read a novel that thematizes the elite-subaltern encounter in the ghastly terms of coolie cannibalization by a babu subject emptied of both words and ethics. To what extent are these fictions of encounter alive to the "particular, the concrete

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[104] Khair, 2001, 59.

[105] Khair has recently been at pains to clarify that his argument was never about the English language used by the writers in question, but rather about the social class to which they belong. *Babu Fictions*, however, belies this claim, in that its critique assumes that English is not a living, "spoken language" (2001, 122-123) in India and thus cannot hope to have purchase on Indian truths. Recalling the linguistic nationalism of Amilcar Cabral, Khair argues that language is the central vehicle in the constitution of both subjects and their reality. Tabish Khair, "In No Masters' Voice: Reading Recent Indian Novels in English," *The Indian English Novel of the New Millennium*, ed. Prabhat K. Singh (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 55-61.

[106] Ibid., 343.

[107] I am pursuing this question in one very specific way, through call center English. However, Khair's argument can also be animated in relation to debates on the emerging Dalit literature and new social realisms. Cf. Toral Gajarawala, *Untouchable Fictions: Literary Realism and the Crisis of Caste* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

[108] Meenakshi Mukherjee, "Mapping a Territory: Notes on Framing a Course" (1988), in *The Lie of the Land: English Literary Studies in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 239.

and the immediate" realities of New India? If Indian writing in English was a "Babu fiction,"
then is Indian writing in call center English its belated "Coolie" Other?

Chapter 2

Fictions of Encounter:
Call Centers, Coolies, and the Novel of New India

"'If you want to write about youth, shouldn't you talk about young
people who face real challenges?'"
—*Chetan Bhagat[1]*

"He cannot avoid the flies just as he cannot avoid the poor."
—*Raj Kamal Jha[2]*

      The preceding chapter considered the comparable ways in which both expatriate writers and call center agents, literary and functional forms of Indian English have been subject to dominant ideologies around the questions of nativity and vernacularity. It also discussed a range of social forces and phenomena, including virtual migration and the inauguration of new hybrid subjectivities, that are reshaping the Indian Anglophone literary field, which has long been embattled by ideas of English's inauthenticity. In this chapter, I consider how three novelists of the "New India" have attempted to authenticate their positions of enunciation as Anglophone writers of the New India. I am particularly interested in how their novels stage what the Introduction termed the "East-East" encounter: first, how the authorial personas of two of the novelists under discussion are transmogrified through their fictive call center protagonists; and then, how their assertions of diaspora-nation identification relate to bolder and more graphic depictions of elite-subaltern contemporaneity.

      The starting point for this chapter is the rise of investment banker-turned-writer Chetan Bhagat, who has been credited as "the biggest-selling English-language novelist in India's history."[3] In 2004, Bhagat published his first novel, *Five Point Someone: What not to do at IIT*, transforming the scene of Indian writing in English with his accessible prose and direct address to India's youth—albeit the elite-university-bound segment whose experiences most closely matched his own.[4] His 2005 follow-up, *One Night @ the Call Center* (*ON@CC*), expanded his depiction and audience to another socioeconomic segment of New India—call-center workers—cementing his title as the nation's "paperback king"[5] and as the first author of "truly popular"[6] Indian English books. By 2008, the pair of novels had sold over a million copies.

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[1] Chetan Bhagat, *One Night @ the Call Center* (New Delhi: Rupa Paperback, 2005), 6. Hereafter cited internally as *OC*.
[2] Raj Kamal Jha, *She Will Build Him a City* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 211. Hereafter cited internally as *SC*.
[3] Donald Greenlees, "An Investment Banker Finds Fame Off the Books," the *New York Times* (March 26, 2008). Available online from <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/26/books/26bhagat.html>.
[4] The IIT of the title refers to the competitive Indian Institutes of Technology. Bhagat is himself an alumnus of IIT-Delhi.
[5] Robert McCrum, "Chetan Bhagat: The Paperback King of India," *The Observer* (January 23, 2010). Available online from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2010/jan/24/chetan-bhagat-robert-mccrum/print>. Accessed March 28, 2013.
[6] Rashmi Sadana, "Writing in English," *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Indian Culture*, ed. Vasudha Dalmia and Rashmi Sadana, 124-141 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 137.

To date, Bhagat has written six works of "home-grown"[7] pulp fiction that have vastly outsold the better-known writers in India, including Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Amitav Ghosh, and other favorites of the literary-critical establishment. Five of Bhagat's books have been adapted into very popular Bollywood films, including *3 Idiots,* the second-highest grossing Bollywood film of all time in the overseas markets (it was particularly popular in China). He has published two essay collections (non-ironically titled *What Young India Wants* and *Making India Awesome*) in addition to his ongoing journalism in both English and Hindi. He is a screenwriter and a prolific Tweeter, who has been called "the cultural logic of Narendra Modi."[8] Put simply, if the *New Yorker* were to publish a family photo of India's leading novelists today, Chetan Bhagat might very well be the only writer in the frame.

In 2005, scholars would have had to justify attending to the lowbrow work of Bhagat. At the time of writing in 2016, it has become de rigueur to address his work as either the telos of or pivot in recent Indian writing in English. If, as Suman Gupta wrote in 2012, initial evaluations of the Bhagat phenomenon were that he had "something to do with middle class youth…and something to do with India's growing affluence and presence in a globalised world [and consequently] strengthened sense of national/local identity,"[9] it is now much clearer just what that "something to do" has been. Bhagat has been described as the "voice of the new [Indian] middle class" (Ulka Anjaria and Jonathan Shapiro Anjaria), as having "leveled the playing field between English and the vernaculars" (U. Anjaria), as having redefined our notions of what "good" and "bad" writing are (Urvashi Butalia), even as representing "a new kind of genre and…a new readership" (Rashmi Sadana).[10]

Bhagat has now achieved the symbolic heft in conversations on global Indian literature that only Rushdie had in the postcolonial context.[11] Importantly, he has done this by explicitly and volubly dismissing earlier generations of Indians writing in English. "What is the point of writers who call themselves Indian authors," he asks, "but who have no Indian readers?"[12] Bhagat, who supposedly uses English as if it were "'native' to the Indian habitus,"[13] has sought to strike a chord with Indian youth not only by representing them in novels about college students and call center agents, but also by suggesting that earlier generations pandered to Western

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[7] Ibid., 138.

[8] Saikat Majumdar, "Introduction to Focus: Little India—the Provincial Life of Cosmopolitanism," *American Book Review* 36.6 (September/October 2015).

[9] Suman Gupta, "Indian 'Commercial Fiction' in English, the Publishing Industry and Youth Culture," *Economic and Political Weekly* 47:5 (February 4, 2012) 48.

[10] Ulka Anjaria and Jonathan Shapiro Anjaria, "The Fractured Spaces of Entrepreneurialism in Post-Liberalization India," *Enterprise Culture in Neoliberal India: Studies in Youth, Class, Work and Media,* ed. Nandini Gooptu (New York and Oxford: Routledge, 2013), 200; Ulka Anjaria, "Introduction: Literary Pasts, Presents, and Futures," *A History of the Indian Novel in English* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Sadana, "Writing in English," 138; Butalia, quoted in "Panel: Is English the Language of India's Future?" *Chutnefying English: The Phenomenon of Hinglish,* ed. Rita Kothari and Rupert Snell (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2011), 201-202.

[11] In the new *A History of the Indian Novel in English*, Anjaria suggests that "Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* seems to be playing a similar role in the periodization of the contemporary Indian novel in English as *Midnight's Children* did for the earlier generation, as it features as a key text in a number of different chapters" (2015, 21). I think Anjaria is correct. However, Adiga has not himself—as a celebrity, personality, and literary icon—achieved status or stature analogous to Rushdie, whereas Bhagat, I am suggesting, has.

[12] Quoted in Randeep Ramesh, "Author's mass-market success upsets Indian literati," *The Guardian* (October 8, 2008).

[13] Gupta, 2012, 50.

audiences and delivered an "India" to confirm their expectations. By contrast, he claims, he holds a mirror and a microphone up to the "real" India of the 21st century.

Bhagat frequently touts his relatability to the average Indian, as in this well-publicized tale of interaction. At a book reading in Dehradun, a young woman apparently asked him about his haircut. "She would never have asked that question to Salman Rushdie," Bhagat says. "She would not even have raised her hand."[14] Bhagat's intended audience is the 20-something who will buy his 95-rupee novels (Bhagat insists his books retail at unusually low prices; publishers have complied) in a supermarket checkout line, and then ask him about his haircut. "I want my books next to jeans and bread," he says. "I want my country to read me."[15] By consequence, his novels are marketed and read almost exclusively in India. They are exemplary cases of novels that "stay home" [16]—although this lack of motility is clearly belied by the attention Bhagat's work is now garnering from critics and scholars in the American academy.

Bhagat first became a compelling critical object not because he won any international literary prizes (how Booker-winning Aravind Adiga came to prominence) or because his books are widely circulated in the West (they aren't), but because literary critics and scholars were interested in the very fact of Bhagat's being read. Just *who* in India was (and is) reading Bhagat? As Priya Joshi observes, Bhagat readers are a hitherto unknown demographic: Indians "long ignored by literary writers and respectable publishers."[17] Initial attention to Bhagat thus confirmed the Bhagat novel's primary interest as a species of literary sociology, even if and when critics were self-reflexive about it. "It does not really matter to us *what* Bhagat writes," one critic reflected ironically, in a perversion of Stanley Fish and Janice Radway's work on "interpretive communities."[18] "What matters is that *they* read him prolifically—those Bhagat readers in India."[19]

The assumption here is that we can tell a lot about people by what they are reading—what, how, when, and at what cost—in addition to what those texts are, in turn, saying about them. If the problem of postcolonial native informancy, or what Deepika Bahri calls "native intelligence,"[20] has dogged even highbrow literary texts with observed "cosmopolitan style,"[21] then the risks of reading the low- and middlebrow work of a Bhagat in terms of the demographics of its readership are even greater. Not only is the content of the text in question being read as an "ethnographic" rendering of the people and places it depicts, but also the form of the text is taken as a measure of the linguistic proficiencies and cultural literacy of its implied audience. As

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[14] Divashri Sinha, "Chetanic Verses," *Times of India* (January 1, 2012); available online from <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/books/features/Chetanic-Verses/articleshow/10539267.cms>
[15] Ibid.
[16] I am referring here to David Damrosch's classic understanding of world literature as texts "that travel" and circulate, both in the original language and in translation, in contradistinction to those texts that "stay home."
[17] Priya Joshi, "Chetan Bhagat: Remaking the Novel in India," in *A History of the Indian Novel in English,* ed. Ulka Anjaria (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 311.
[18] Stanley Fish, *Is there a text in this class?: The authority of interpretive communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980); Janice Radway, "Interpretive Communities and Variable Literacies: The Functions of Romance Reading," *Daedalus* (1984): 49-73.
[19] Gupta 48-50 (my emphasis).
[20] Deepika Bahri, *Native Intelligence: Aesthetics, Politics, and Postcolonial Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). Bahri argues that postcolonial literature is a "field constructed on the expectation of intelligence from the native in a form that is intelligible [as] native informancy" (18).
[21] Rebecca Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

Belinda Edmundson has argued, middlebrow cultural production must have both "aspirational" and "authenticating" components.[22] In public appearances, journalism, and interviews, Bhagat has explicitly advertised his work's credentials on both the aspirational and authenticating fronts; in doing so, he actually solicits a reading of his novels as productive of native intelligence and of himself as an ambassador of the readership he intends.

In an effort to move beyond the sociological treatment of Bhagat—which, as I'm suggesting, means taking him at his word—scholars are now reading Bhagat's pulp fictions closely, reading them, in other words, in relation to other works of literature like Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Hari Kunzru's *Transmission*.[23] Anjaria and Shapiro Anjaria argue that Bhagat's oeuvre, despite the seeming artlessness of the lowbrow, actually offers a "subtle framing of the political ethics of enterprise, beyond either celebratory acceptance or straightforward critique."[24] Joshi, who is currently writing the first scholarly monograph on Bhagat, locates his work in a larger "anti-literary" movement in which "book culture and reading culture" in India have substantially separated. "The anti-literary novel," she writes, "elucidates a new phenomenon and future for the novel in India."[25]

As my reading of *ON@CC* will show, I agree that Bhagat's work is attuned to the hypocrisies of the New India narrative and is formally symmetric with a range of other texts. However, to my mind, identifying a critical impetus in anti-literary work only further necessitates vigilance about the anti-literary posture itself.[26] What is the value of a critique that disowns the

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[22] Belinda Edmundson, *Caribbean Middlebrow: Leisure Culture and the Middle Class* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 10.

[23] Mrinalini Chakravorty reads *One Night @ the Call Center* for its "formal symmetry" with Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundament*alist, noting how both novels engage stereotypes regarding terror and labor (203). Liam Connell also focuses on *ON@CC's* representation of "e-terror" in relation to that in Hari Kunzru's *Transmission.* For Connell, what is most significant about *ON@CC* is its ambivalent relationship to Indian nationalism, and how the depiction of Americans (on the other end of the phone line) and the United States (foreign capital structuring the Indian call center economy) "turns contemporary discourses of terrorism onto the very structures of international capitalism that they appear to serve" (289). Mrinalini Chakravorty, *In Stereotype: South Asia in the Global Literary Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014); Liam Connell, "E-terror: Computer viruses, class and transnationalism in *Transmission* and *One Night @ the Call Center*," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing,* Vol. 46, No. 3-4 (Routledge 2010).

[24] Anjaria and Shapiro Anjaria, 203.

[25] Joshi, 2015, 319. It is of note that Joshi's term is "anti-literary," as opposed to "postliterary." For David Damrosch, the postliterary points to an expanding mediascape including cultural production like video games and digital archives that reanimate, re-envision, and re-present literary texts. For Eugenio Di Stefano and Emilio Sauri, the postliterary indicates texts that "[attack] literature and hierarchies of aesthetic value" while disavowing key literary categories. Such postliterary culture (and their example is Latin American *testimonio* criticism) views literature as anathema to, as opposed to enabling of, an inclusive, democratic politics. Cf. David Damrosch, "World Literature in a Postliterary Age," *Modern Language Quarterly* 74.2 (June 2013), 151-170; Eugenio Di Stefano and Emilio Sauri, "Making it Visible: Latin Americanist Criticism, Literature, and the Question of Exploitation Today," *non-site.org* (Issue 13).

[26] What do we stand to gain, or for that matter *lose*, if, instead of reading Bhagat as an artifact of the New India, we take him seriously as a literary writer? Can Bhagat be read closely—or rather, should he be? What would constitute critical distance from this object? In spring 2016, during a job talk partially drawn from material in this chapter, I made the following, spontaneous (if ill-advised) aside: "I'm not sure that I would teach Bhagat." One audience member was incredulous. Surely, if I could spend time writing and thinking and even talking about Bhagat, he would merit teaching in the undergraduate classroom? A discussion ensued, which led me to clarify my position. The question is not whether I would teach Bhagat, but how to teach the lowbrow text beyond assertions of its value as a sociological artifact. The question is not whether I would teach Bhagat, but in what curricular context the teaching of Bhagat would be warranted. I would not, for example, teach Bhagat as a representative "Indian" text in a world

language it uses? What is the value of a future that arrives by disavowing the past? Is the re-valuation of the lowbrow text symptomatic of current literary critical dispensations against diaspora, or does Bhagat have something to teach us (and what)? I am equally skeptical of proclamations of Bhagat as heralding the future for the novel and, conversely, of the idea that Bhagat is a threat to Indian English or Indian literature more generally. Thus, this chapter reads Bhagat as one writer of the New India among others—no more prescient about or proximate to his call center subject matter than a diaspora-based author like Bharati Mukherjee; no more the heir to the Anglophone novel's future than a writer like Raj Kamal Jha, who, in the era of New India, is experimenting with formal returns.

'FUTURE FOR THE NOVEL' OR RUINED INDIAN LITERATURE?

In March 2015, the *New York Times* published a polemical op-ed by memoirist and novelist, Aatish Taseer, that brought together the sociological and literary concerns about English's transformations in New India discussed in the last chapter, while problematizing the rise of Bhagat in particular.[27] Given the prominence of the *Times*, Taseer's essay, "How English Ruined Indian Literature," which was published as part of the marketing push for his latest English-language novel, *The Way Things Were*, received considerable attention. I was sent the article by numerous friends and colleagues in both the United States and India, who felt that it gave them new purchase on the field of Indian Anglophone literary studies. I was perplexed by the attention: What did Taseer's essay say that we didn't already know about the history of English in India? Hadn't we moved beyond such ritual protestations of English's "ruinous" effects?

Taseer's essay begins with the observation that English is not so much a language in India as a class. As a member of the English-speaking and writing Indian minority, Taseer notes, he is complicit in the erection of a linguistic boundary "as unbreachable as the color line [in] the United States." He then repeats the critique offered by Graham Huggan and Tabish Khair, among others, that many celebrated Indian Anglophone writers (he lists "Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh, and Arundhati Roy"; in other words, those writers hailed by the *New Yorker* in 1997) were anointed by prize-giving committees in the West. By that same token, he charges that the supposedly homegrown New Indian Anglophone writers, like Bhagat, produce a form of English writing that is effectively illegible outside India:

> [Bhagat] writes books of such poor literary quality that no one outside India can be expected to read them. India produces a number of such writers, and some justly speculate that perhaps this is the authentic voice of modern India. But this is not the voice of a confident country. It sounds rather like a country whose painful relationship with language has left it voiceless.

Taseer's lament over the poor quality of India's putatively "authentic" literature is, on one level, the latest example of the coercively mimetic protest that Vikram Chandra once termed a "complicated ritual war-dance against the West."[28] The "absolute necessity of Western

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literature class. I might, however, teach Bhagat as a representative "Indian" text in a class on world pulp fiction, or, conversely, a class on the Indian Anglophone novel in which Bhagat could be placed in the context of plural linguistic and literary Indian Englishes.

[27] Aatish Taseer, "How English Ruined Indian Literature," *New York Times* (March 19, 2015).

[28] Vikram Chandra, "The Cult of Authenticity," *Boston Review* (2000).

recognition" is confirmed by Taseer's derisive note about Bhagat's illegibility outside India, and the "simultaneous belief in the corrupting power of such recognition" is confirmed by his earlier critique of Rushdie and co. On another level, it is a strategic echo of V.S. Naipaul's old charge that English will always remain "a foreign language" in India, one which inevitably has a stultifying effect on those who speak it, even though in their "own" languages they "might be quick and inventive."[29] As Bhagat's character Shyam/Sam himself says, "My English is not that great…I suggest you read another book with plenty of long words" (*OC* 14).

The publication of Taseer's op-ed revealed the tenacity of two primary strands of the postcolonial language debate that persists in New India and Indian Anglophone criticism. First, notwithstanding decades of defenses, explanations, and affirmations of Indian writing in English, and notwithstanding the ongoing (albeit uneven) democratization of access to English education and instruction in India, Indian novelists are still ambivalent about writing in English. To some extent, the familiar camps of the old postcolonial language debate have not moved. On one side are those like K.R.S. Iyengar, who announced in 1959 that "English has become ours,"[30] Rushdie, who announced in 1997 that "English has become an Indian language," and Chandra, who, writing in 2000, claimed English as his "father-tongue."[31] On the other side are those who call into question English's ability to access the truths and realities of Indian lives and experiences, like the early Meenkashi Mukherjee, who criticized Indo-Anglian novelists like Chandra for pandering to the west, and Khair, for whom the Indian novel in English is, more often than not, an alienated "Babu fiction."

Second, although it is no longer tenable to write about English-speaking Indians as if they occupy a single class position, writers like Taseer—by their own admission: cosmopolitan, urban elites—still feel compelled to produce and respond to a rhetorical "Babu-Coolie" divide. In New India, there are many, plural shades and forms of the English language vying for centrality, recognition, and column inches in the Indian public sphere. Thus, when Taseer speaks of dividing India along a linguistic "color line," he is actually instantiating a *literary* "color line." To put a finer point on it, Taseer would seem, on the one hand, to be advancing the arguments of critics like Mukherjee and Khair, discussed in the last chapter. However, he does this by pointing to the aesthetic and literary inadequacies of what we might provisionally term Anglophone "Coolie fiction."[32]

The Rushdie-Bhagat binary he deploys is a case in point; it highlights the distinction between English as a literary language and English as a tool of communication. There is a class (here, I am using E.P. Thompson's definition of class as a "social and cultural formation"[33]) of Anglophone Indians for whom "literary" English is also the English in which they communicate

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[29] V.S. Naipaul, *An Area of Darkness* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), 229.

[30] Cited in Priya Joshi, *In Another Country: Colonialism, Culture, and the English Novel in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 205.

[31] Chandra 2000.

[32] Taseer is not valorizing Hindi or vernacular literature but rather questioning, while privileging the literary production of middle-class writers like himself, the possibility of their re-emergence. He observes that in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, writers like Rabindranath Tagore, Premchand, and Allama Iqbal were genuinely multilingual writers (not just readers). Taseer writes, "But around the time of my parents' generation, a break began to occur. Middle-class parents started sending their children in ever greater numbers to convent and private schools, where they lost the deep bilingualism of their parents, and came away with English alone. The Indian languages never recovered."

[33] E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Vintage Books, 1966 [1963]), 11.

(Rushdie and co.), and then there are classes of Indians for whom a strictly "utilitarian" English—a call center English, we might say—is the primary form of the language which they read and/or write (Bhagat and co.). These are differently literate classes of readers and writers, whose behaviors with and toward texts correspondingly diverge.[34]

By calling Bhagat and his ilk "voiceless" Indians, Taseer both impugns the latter form of English and reasserts the value of Western-sanctioned English-literary bonafides in its place. The op-ed is either an act of bad faith (an English speaker and writer, ambivalent about his use of English and its imperial baggage, decrying the quality of English spoken, written, or read by other Indians, who bring to the language a different set of cultural precepts, aspirations, and divergent histories of opportunity) or one of unmasking, in which Bhagat's "voicelessness" can be understood as a ventriloquist's manipulation of New India's massified, commercially-inclined Anglophone reading public through the representation of, to adapt Richard Hoggart's words, sawdust as cake.[35]

We might compare this assessment with related observations by Rashmi Sadana and Urvashi Butalia:

> Sadana: The fact that [Bhagat's] novels are not literary makes most critics dismiss them, but what can't be dismissed is that his novels represent a new kind of genre and, most significantly, a new readership whose relationship to English and to their own class identities is markedly different from before.[36]

> Butalia: …we are schooled in old English and suddenly people are writing in what appears to be 'bad' English. But it has also opened up the market to new writers, new readers, and buyers who are comfortable buying authors such as Anurag Mathur and Chetan Bhagat…They are defeating our old, elite notions of what good writing is.[37]

Like Joshi, who speaks of a new anti-literary future for the novel, Sadana detects in Bhagat the promise of genuinely new genres and readers. She draws our attention to the fact not only that Indian English literary production has, at long last, transcended its "elite, urban-based readership," but also implicitly reminds us that Bhagat himself is an elite, urban-based Anglophone writer who is at once inspiring and capitalizing on a new mode of relation to English prose.[38] Butalia, in marked contradistinction to Taseer, is open to the literary possibilities of this new commercial writing (which is "defeating our old, elite notions of what good writing is"). Such openness suggests that what is at stake is not only a matter of elite comeuppance—of literary scholars having to pay heed to the seductions of Raymond William's "ordinary" culture without impugning the tastes of "ordinary" people[39]—but also the necessity of recognizing new aesthetic forms.

A generation ago, the prevailing concern about Indian Anglophone literature was its usurpation by texts written in and about diaspora. Today, writers like the Hong Kong-returned

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[34] Radway 1984.

[35] Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of working-class life, with special references to publications and entertainments* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publications, 1998 [1957]), 149.

[36] Sadana, "Writing in English," 138.

[37] Quoted in "Panel: Is English the Language of India's Future?", 2011, 201-202.

[38] Sadana, "Writing in English," 137.

[39] Raymond Williams, "Culture is Ordinary (1958)", in *The Raymond Williams Reader,* ed. John Higgins (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).

Bhagat and the Gurgaon-based Raj Kamal Jha appear to have re-claimed center stage for territorially rooted Indians. "Today's stories are those of Aravind Adiga and Chetan Bhagat," Anjaria observes, "authors who lived abroad and returned to India; of Manu Joseph and Arundhati Roy, authors who never left."[40] She is referring, of course, to today's stories *in English*, and, in this context, Taseer's critique of Bhagat's aesthetically impoverished novels emerges as a concern more specifically about the status of the *Anglophone* novel within the multilingual Indian literary sphere and the possibility of a confident" voice for the *Anglophone* species of India's national literature in the 21st century. After all, notwithstanding the title of his op-ed, English didn't ruin "Indian literature"; it is Indian English literature itself that risks ruination at the hands of writers like Bhagat.

In her introduction to the new *A History of the Indian Novel in English*, Anjaria provocatively suggests that writers like Bhagat have "carv[ed] out a new space where English and the *bhashas* can meet again"; "what looks like a crass commercialization might simultaneously be seen as another instance of a renewed relationship between English and the vernaculars."[41] I want to raise a few questions about this suggestion here, for it is reminiscent of R. Raj Rao's optimistic and ultimately untenable account of Hinglish as a language of "compromise" and "unification," discussed in chapter one. What is at stake in the rhetorical gesture of enacting equivalence or leveling between lowbrow, popular, pulp, or demotic forms of English, on the one hand, and the "vernaculars" with which they now vie in the Indian literary public sphere, on the other? To what form of "renewed relation" might such an English-vernacular binary point? *Where* (in India, in the literary field) is this "new meeting space"? Might it look or sound like a New Indian call center, or achieve narrative registration in a "call center novel" like *ON@CC*?

The preceding chapter discussed at some length the call center discourse and the questions it has raised for scholars, pundits, and creative writers in turn: Is the call center an insidious site of Indian abasement, akin to the Chinese sweatshop? Or, is the call center a dynamic space of potential for a generation of aspiring global citizens, an entrepreneurial greenhouse for India's formerly disadvantaged and unemployed youth? Does the call center represent the perfect marriage of tradition and opportunity, or is it an existential threat to India's indigenous lifeworlds? Ethnographic studies of the call center reveal the challenge of attempting to answer these questions through the testimony of call center agents. For every worker ready to decry the call center's alienating and exploitive force is a worker ready to her place. For every ugly American on the other end of the line is one with whom an Indian agent reports developing an easy intimacy.

Here is a condensed schema of the primary elements of the call center discourse discussed in the last chapter:

> 1. The call center is a neo-colonial institution, marker of Indian servility, and scene of Western complicity with exploitation.

> 2. The call center is a sign of India's global ascension, a herald of the post-American world, and scene of Western dependence on the East.

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[40] Anjaria, 2015, 22.
[41] Ibid., 12.

3. The call center agent is a cybercoolie or duped country mouse, alienated from body, family, and community in the New Indian city, where she has succumbed to the trap that is the global economy's gateway work.

4. The call center agent is a virtual migrant and diasporic subject who has propelled herself out of rural provinciality and into a realm of urban promise. She is living the American dream…in India.

There are three primary threads we might extract from this broader discourse: first, the call center signals both agency and debasement, as it is a sign of both India's rise and India's fall; second, the call center is a space of mimicry and menace, in that its agents are at once inferior Americans and threats to be neutralized; and third, the call center is a fake world that nevertheless enables the provisional production of some call center agents' fantasy lives. Taken together, these animating tensions of the call center discourse offer a figural understanding of what a "call center novel" might, in theory, be: a novel whose accounts of India's rise are also counterfactual narratives of a fall; a novel whose neutralized voice at once inaugurates, approximates, and subverts the registers of a neutral, global English; a novel that capitulates to the neoliberal valorization of entrepreneurial self-fashioning, while nevertheless speaking to "real" desires embedded in the cultural logics of our time.

The complexity of this symbolic vocabulary, the promise of these narrative threads, and the ranging metaphoricity of call center technologies of mediation leads me to suggest that, in the growing field of "New India" literature, a call center novel might be something other or more than a novel plotted in a call center.[42] Thus, the three books I read in this chapter have varying relations to the call center, even as I would argue that the call center is central to their imaginings of the New India. The first novel, Bhagat's *One Night @ the Call Center*, is set in a call center; the second, Mukherjee's *Miss New India*, is about the idea of the call center and the identity it confers upon young Indians; and the third, Jha's *She Will Build Him a City*, uses the call center as an authenticating element, or backdrop, of the fantastical New City-scape that stands in for that of the New Indian city, as in, "There's little traffic at so early an hour except for call-centre Toyotas that dart from light to light…" (*SC* 134).

In addition, to return to the mise-en-scène discussed in the Introduction, Bhagat, Mukherjee, and Jha each tell the New India-story as the story of the diasporic subject's encounter with his or her national Other. In each of their novels, that minimal narrative is rendered as one of linguistic failure: betrayal by the globalized idiom of self-help (Bhagat); abortive growth because of the limitations of call center English (Mukherjee); and the cannibalization of coolies by babus who otherwise cannot communicate (Jha). In the two sections that follow, I will consider the relationship between Bhagat's and Mukherjee's call center novels, specifically with respect to the questions of authorial location and voice—how, for example, Bhagat's narrative of repatriation undergirds his articulation of an "Indian *and* global"[43] English (an English supposedly "as unpretentious as a call-centre cubicle"[44]) and how Mukherjee's profession of assimilation has resulted in an "American English" that has "absorb[ed her] mother tongue and

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[42] Cf. Neelesh Misra, *Once Upon a Timezone* (New Delhi: HarperCollins India, 2006); Anish Trivedi, *Call Me Dan* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2010); Shruti Saxena, *Stilettos in the Boardroom* (Zubaan, 2010); Brinda Shekhar, *Bangalore Calling* (Hachette India, 2011). Trivedi, like Bhagat and Amish Tripathi, is also a banker-turned-novelist.
[43] Rashmi Sadana, "Writing in English," 138.
[44] Thottam, 2008.

all [her] stepmother tongues."[45] I am interested in the qualitative aspects of such English prose, but also, and more significantly, how the English language itself is represented as a mediating quantity within their respective novels. In my closing section, I introduce the work of the understudied Jha, whose most recent novel lays bare the coterminance between the violence of neoliberal aspiration in New India and the New Indian call center novel's thinly veiled aspiration to violence.

"DIASPORIC" AUTHORS OF THE NEW INDIA NOVEL

Chetan Bhagat has been so readily accepted as India's native son that it is easy to forget that he is himself a foreign-returned diasporic Indian, a *repatriated* expatriate writer, with a returnee's attachment to country and a returnee's desire for acceptance. He grew up in a middle-class Delhi family, was educated at the illustrious Indian Institutes of Technology and Management (IIT and IIM), and then moved to Hong Kong, where he worked for Goldman Sachs. Living in diaspora, like many of the writers we will encounter in the next chapter, Bhagat "couldn't disconnect [himself] from India." He writes:

> I don't know why…Not a day passed when I didn't keep track of what was happening in India…I had a good life mainly because of the degrees I had earned in my own country and I wanted to do something in return…I was an NRI, someone who earns in dollars and spends his evenings being nostalgic about India.[46]

For Bhagat, doing "something in return" for India first took the form of writing his English-language "entertainers." Then, after returning to India, he started a process of self-indigenization that involved both writing in Hindi (in 2008, he began to publish an opinion column in the Hindi-language newspaper, *Dainik Bhaskar*, an opportunity which he has described as "a chance to reach the majority, the real India"[47]) and traveling throughout the country for literary events. "I was no longer an NRI…who commented on India," he writes, "I was an Indian who spent more than half his time in the heartland interacting with the youth."[48]

The narrative of repatriation is fundamental to Bhagat's self-conception and self-presentation as a writer, in ways that recall and anticipate the positioning of many of those discussed in the next chapter, from Jawaharlal Nehru to V.S. Naipaul to Amit Chaudhuri. Bhagat himself suggests that his novels are compensatory for his former diasporic location, and I would argue that his strategic and self-professed use of bad English (English that is "not that great") is an equally reparative move. In *ON@CC*, this reparative move is made through a series of professions of identification, by Bhagat, with the call center agents, who are described as "the country's youth" (*OC* 6).

In broad strokes, *ON@CC* tells the story of a group of six agents at the failing Connexions call center in Gurgaon, who concoct a false e-terrorism threat to exploit the fears of their

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[45] Natasha Lavigilante, "Globalization and Change in India: The Rise of an 'Indian Dream' in *Miss New India*: An Interview with Bharati Mukherjee," *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the U.S.* 39.3, 178-194 (2014), 190.

[46] Chetan Bhagat, *What Young India Wants: Selected Non-fiction* (New Delhi: Rupa Publications, 2014), xiv-xv.

[47] Ibid., xix. Bhagat has described his column in *Dainik Bhaskar* as yet another opportunity to flout the conventions of the Indian Anglophone novelist: "An English language author in India writing in Hindi was unthinkable. English had to be elitist, and authors especially so" (xix).

[48] Ibid., xviii.

American customers in a quest to "save" the call center and their jobs. During the one night in question, the call center agents get a call from God, who sounds "like a motivational speaker"[49] and encourages the agents, each of whom is dealing with a personal crisis (whether of confidence, marital prospects, adultery, or familial estrangement), to respond to their "inner call[s]" (*OC* 244). At the end of the novel, the call center is "saved"; the agents have each dealt with their respective crises; boy gets girl. For a supposedly localist text, *ON@CC* offers a very formulaic narrative, and there is little, in my reading, to make of the plot itself (I'll have more to say on the deus ex machina later on). What is interesting about *ON@CC* is its frame.

ON@CC is bookended by what affects to be an autobiographical frame story in which a fellow-passenger on a train, a young woman, incites the narrator, introduced as Chetan Bhagat himself, to tell the story of India's youth. She critiques the classism of *Five Point Someone*, which was about youth culture at the elite Indian Institute of Technology, and suggests that the call center is what really represents the New India: "So you wrote a book on IIT. *A place where so few people get to go.* You think that represents the entire youth?" (*OC* 4).

Bhagat demurs, saying that he "had to start somewhere" and therefore chose, for his first novel, to write about his own college experiences. "It could have happened anywhere," he says. "Is that why you're trashing my book?" (*OC* 5). The implication is that the placelessness of *Five Point Someone*, the fact that it could have been about any elite university, disqualifies it from being representatively Indian. IIT students, the woman replies, do not face "real challenges," the challenges of "modern India" (*OC* 6). It is a conversational exchange that returns us to Meenakshi Mukherjee's critique of Bharati Mukherjee, offered as an epigraph to the Introduction: "[T]he problem is," we might imagine the woman saying to Bhagat, "that for those who live at home [and work at call centers], who are not [elite university students and] global migrants, the reality of India has to be daily confronted at a non-metaphoric level."

The woman then offers Bhagat another story, a call center story, on the condition that he use it for his second book: "*This is not about choice.* If I tell you, you have to use it…*as if it's your own story*" (*OC* 8, my emphasis). This second part of the request is dropped without comment by the Bhagat-character, who protests and hedges considerably about the choice of whether or not to use the story for his book. But it is the second part of the request—telling it like it's his "own story"—that is significant: Bhagat the IIT-educated elite, diasporic repatriate-author is being asked to speak in another's voice, to speak as if a call center agent, to perform as a fellow Indian, a *young* Indian, one with *real* problems and challenges. Or, to be more precise, Bhagat the author is writing himself into the narrative as a character called to offer such a performance.

After the frame story, the novel begins (again) with the words of narrator Shyam Mehra, who works as "Sam Marcy" in the call center. "There are hundreds of thousands, probably millions of agents like me," he says.

> But this total pain-in-the-neck author chose me, of all the agents in the country. He…told me to help him with his second book. In fact, he pretty much wanted me to write the book for him. I declined, saying I can't even write my own CV…But this author said he didn't care.…*I had no choice but to do the job.* (*OC* 14-15)

This is Bhagat (the author), writing about Bhagat (the character-author), from the perspective of Shyam/Sam (character), who does not simply voice resentment over having his story told (being

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[49] Connell 287.

spoken for), but rather over having to do the telling himself (having to speak at all). This layered assertion of suspended agency is striking as the authorizing condition of the text given the novel's larger valorization of choice as neoliberal value. Throughout *ON@CC*, the call center agents are trying to become self-helping, enterprising subjects. They must learn how to make choices for themselves; to resist their parents' attempts to arrange their marriages; to choose, against Indian workplace norms, to stand up to their boss. The language of lack of choice—"This is not about choice"; "I had no choice"—is thus both the set-up for the novel's later reclamation of choice and a posture of narrative artlessness intended to lend anthropological veracity to Bhagat's claim that he is simply the medium for an unvarnished story of New India's youth.

Bhagat further threads together the two scenes—of how he came to hear the story, and how Shyam/Sam came to tell it—through an explicit profession of cross-class identification: "I chose to tell the story through Shyam's eyes because, after I met him, I realized he was the most similar to me as a person" (*OC* 11). This is, to return to the dyad of global icons discussed in the last chapter, the repatriated expatriate writer's assimilation of his person with the subject of the call center agent. It is, for Bhagat, a performance of self-return to the youth he might have been, had he not had the opportunity to attend IIT, to work in Hong Kong, and then, from that vantage, to return to India.

If we read Shyam as Bhagat's surrogate, the call center agent's self-descriptions achieve heightened significance throughout the novel. At one point, Shyam describes himself and "[his] status in [his] clan" as "the black sheep"; "no one [in my family] acknowledge[s] me," he says; "the only reason people somewhat talk to me is I have a job and get a salary at the end of the month" (*OC* 17). Such seemingly self-deprecating self-assessments are revelatory of Bhagat's perception of his place in the literary pecking order—or rather, how that place might effectively be marshaled as yet another sign of his identification with and understanding of the "real challenges" of Indian youth. Millions read Bhagat's novels ("wear black sweater")—indeed, often prefer his "sociable" texts to their literary alternative, but the only reason scholars write about Bhagat ("somewhat talk to me") is because of his quantifiable popularity ("salary"). The black sheep-assignment is reinforced in a number of scenes throughout the book, as Shyam, who is in love with a fellow call center agent, Priyanka, fears being overshadowed by (and losing his girl to) "better-qualified" boys (*OC* 156). When Priyanka introduces Shyam to her cousin, a medical doctor, Shyam is embarrassed by his own comparatively blue-collar vocation: "Priyanka told her doctor cousin I worked at a call center and I think he was less interested in talking to me after that" (*OC* 53).

For Shyam, and the other young men with whom he works, the call center is a demeaning place of work. By contrast, for Priyanka and the other young women agents, it is a locus of opportunity, a space through which they can break out of and away from the domestic sphere, and into a realm of comparative freedom, economic independence, and opportunity for individual expression. The call center represents "a *legitimate* reason [for a young woman] to get out of the house," a site for "skill acquisition, working in an office environment, or contributing to the support of the family."[50] By that same token, for a young woman working nightshifts among a coed group of colleagues, a "call center job equals [a] call girl job!"—in both senses of the phrase. In yet another instance of what Partha Chatterjee famously called "the nationalist

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[50] Reena Patel, *Working the Night Shift: Women in India's Call Center Industry* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 142.

construct of the new woman,"[51] the female call center agent bears the responsibility for both embodying Indian modernity and safeguarding its particular Indian difference.

The representative burden placed on women in and by the New India is the subject of the second call center novel I want to discuss, Bharati Mukherjee's *Miss New India*. The author of eight novels and numerous collections of short fiction and nonfiction, Mukherjee occupies a contrarian space in the sphere of Indian Anglophone literature. She has long "satisfied the demand for. . . multiculturalism" in the U.S. academy,[52] and despite her own protestations against the identitarian imperatives of "hyphenation," she is widely credited as the Indian-American literary pioneer.[53] Mukherjee is typically read in multiethnic curricular contexts and her "exuberance about assimilation" has played a significant role in her public and critical reception.[54]

If Bhagat is a writer of the new "global Anglophonism," then Mukherjee is a writer of the old "ethnic America." Importantly, they both position themselves contra-Rushdie and the postcolonial discourse he represents. Mukherjee has written at length about her divergence from the dominant trends in "expatriate" Indian Anglophone writing, in which migration, in her account, is construed as "loss" instead of "gain": "[B]y becoming a U.S. citizen and exercising my voting rights, I have invested in the present and not the past. . . I celebrate racial and cultural mongrelization."[55] Elsewhere, she notes that the immigrant willingly undergoes "the trauma of self-transformation" in order to "belong" in America, whereas the expatriate is, as James Clifford would say, "'not-here' to stay."[56] These distinctions between loss and gain, expatriate and immigrant, and diasporic and ethnic identity provide an instructive contrast to the discussion of Anglophone/expatriate versus vernacular/national literatures and writers offered in the last chapter.

"I am an American writer," Mukherjee has said, "in the American mainstream, trying to extend it . . . I am not an Indian writer, not an exile, not an expatriate. I am an immigrant."[57]

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[51] Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 128.

[52] Lavina Dhingra and Floyd Cheung, *Naming Jhumpa Lahiri: Canons and Controversies* (Lexington Books, 2011), xii.

[53] For more on the question of Mukherjee's immigrant-identity, see Ragini Tharoor Srinivasan, "The Smithsonian Beside Itself: Exhibiting Indian Americans in the Era of New India," *Verge: Studies in Global Asias* 1.2, University of Minnesota Press (2015), 158-191. The Smithsonian Institution exhibit highlights Mukherjee's pioneering achievements in the field of *American* literature (in contradistiction to the field I am calling Indian Anglophone literature). For a discussion of a more obviously nefarious rejection of hyphenation in the Indian-American cultural sphere, see Ragini Tharoor Srinivasan, "Bobby Jindal and the Hyphenated American," *Guernica: a magazine of art and politics* (August 5, 2015).

[54] Susan Koshy, "*Jasmine* by Bharati Mukherjee," *A Resource Guide to Asian American Literature*, ed. Sau-ling Cynthia Wong and Stephen H. Sumida (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2011), 122.

[55] Bharati Mukherjee, "American Dreamer," *Mother Jones* (January-February 1997). See also "Two Ways to Belong in America," *New York Times* (September 22, 1996). That the latter article was collected in *Away: The Indian Writer as an Expatriate* is both ironic and testament to the conceptual slippage between immigrant and expatriate writing which Mukherjee has labored to distinguish. Relatedly, the new *A History of the Indian Novel in English* makes reference to Mukherjee twice, once as part of a club of "postcolonial writers" including Attia Hosain, Anita Desai, Bapsi Sidhwa, and Rushdie, and once as an Indian writer of English like Rushdie who has articulated "the superiority of Indian English writer over bhasha writing" (221, 28n8).

[56] James Clifford, "Diasporas," *Cultural Anthropology* 9(3), 302-338 (1994), 311.

[57] Bharati Mukherjee, "A Four-Hundred-Year-Old-Woman," *The Writer on her Work: New Essays in New Territory*, ed. Janet Sternburg (New York: Norton, 1997), 33-38. Writerly desire for "universality" is a more complex and, I would suggest, limiting discourse than it at first appears. The desire for universality is a desire to attract a broad readership

Such declarations earned Mukherjee the scorn of postcolonial literary critics in the late 20th century, who could not countenance the idea of America as an Indian writer's "object of desire."[58] Inderpal Grewal's robust critique of Mukherjee's capitulation to both American and Indian statist ideologies is characteristic. In *Transnational America*, Grewal argues that Mukherjee is best understood as a "nationalist," one whose rejection of Indian-American hyphenated appellation entails the articulation of both American and Bengali forms of neoliberal, national identification.[59] She further argues that Mukherjee's success, encompassing both commercial success and incorporation into the Asian/American canon, has been related to her ability "to articulate the trope of the Asian woman within the context of a liberal idea of America" in which Asia, and India specifically, represents tradition, repression, and stagnation, while the United States represents modernity, freedom, and choice.[60]

Mukherjee's own pronouncements ("I became a citizen by choice"[61]) confirm her metabolism of a voluntaristic ethic of American national identification. However, I would argue that Grewal too readily attributes Mukherjee's deployment of the liberation-of-the-Asian-woman-in-America trope to the novelist's own "political beliefs." By contrast, and read more generously, Mukherjee's oeuvre raises the issue of migration as a narrative form, registered variously in a novel's emplotment, character development, and temporal structure.[62] *Miss New*

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that crosses identitarian boundaries here and now. It is also a desire founded on the assumption that having a broad readership here and now is some guarantee that one will be read in the future, by those whose incipient identities are yet to come into being. Universality, then, is a desire to be taken up by a plural readership not simply across the space of nations in the present world (a "global" readership for a "world literature"), but by readers in the unknown space and time of a future, emergent one. The mistake here exceeds that fact that writers are going to be read by readers in identitarian terms (to be a "writer" is itself to occupy a specific, legible identitarian position) no matter the rhetorical force of their protest, or the savvy of their publishers. The problem is also that writers are privileging the contours of individual identification (what Benedict Anderson would call "bound serialities") over the experiential glue of shared territorial space. I am choosing these words deliberately, because I want to avoid the misapprehension that I am talking about the privileging of the individual over the community, which is not my point at all. I am not trying to describe a hierarchical form of relation between an individual and the many different demographic populations to which that individual might belong, but rather am interested in the hierarchical form of relation that subordinates air and soil, the elemental-material stuff that renders space as place, to those who, however provisionally, inhabit or hail from it. The fact of "being" from somewhere hails at once all those in the past, present, and future who have been, are, or will be from some version of the same place. In this light, to write the nation is not necessarily to capitulate to the state, but to prioritize *place* as that which precedes and exceeds those who will, for a time, have occasion to avow and disavow their belonging to it. Benedict Anderson, *The spectre of comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the world* (London and New York: Verso, 1998).

[58] Mark McGurl, *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 372. In return, Mukherjee has repaid the compliment, saying: "We need to apply globalization discourse, diasporic discourse, and theories of transnational [and] national identity-formation, not postcolonial theory, to better understand the negotiations necessary in the contemporary era of globalized economies. India became a sovereign nation in 1947" (Lavigilante 185).

[59] Inderpal Grewal, *Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 38-39.

[60] Ibid., 62.

[61] Mukherjee, "American Dreamer," 1997.

[62] By contrast, Timothy Brennan reads Mukherjee as a "Third World cosmopolitan," a line of literary valuation anticipatory of Susan Koshy's recent work on "minority cosmopolitanism." Such is the challenge of writing about diaspora-identified or located Indian Anglophone writers who have been assimilated into the pedagogical and research rubric of global Anglophonism: often, we cannot distinguish our nationalists from our cosmopolitans—which is maybe the point. Timothy Brennan, *Salman Rushdie and the Third World* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 34; Susan Koshy, "Minority Cosmopolitanism," *PMLA* 126.3 (2011): 592-609.

India is a fine example. It continues Mukherjee's project of detailing the transnational processes of migratory "unhousement" and "rehousement," by translating the story of international migration from India to the West (her earlier material) to one of internal or in-country migration within India itself.[63]

Miss New India was originally intended to complete a trilogy, beginning with *Desirable Daughters* and *The Tree Bride*; characters from the earlier two works figure peripherally in *Miss New India*. However, the novel is a clear successor to Mukherjee's *Jasmine* and the short story which preceded it in *The Middleman and Other Stories*.[64] *Miss New India* tells the story of an aspiring call center agent, Anjali Bose's, in-country migration from small-town Gauripur, Bihar, to the virtual cityscape of Bangalore. There, she is inducted into the world of Young India, with its "customer-support service specialists"[65] (don't call them call center agents) who brandish their English and accents as "a sign of competence" (*MN* 165). Anjali is fascinated by these young Indians, excited "just to be part of such a flow" (*MN* 94) and to have arrived in Bangalore, a city that "will accommodate any story line" (*MN* 97). Unfortunately, Mukherjee exploits the idea not only thematically but also in the haphazard plot of the novel, which includes a terrorist scheme, the suicide of one of Anjali's roommates, and Anjali's repeated failures to get a job at a call center, despite her good English.

In a move reminiscent of *Jasmine*'s Jasmine-alias-Jane-Ripplemeyer, Anjali fashions herself as "Angie" well before she imagines working in the call center. And yet, once in Bangalore, she discovers that she does not have the malleable disposition required for customer-support labor. "I think," a call center trainer notes, "you have a great deal of difficulty erasing yourself from the call…Being a call agent requires modesty. It requires submission. We teach you to serve. That's not in your makeup…" (*MN* 241-242). The trainer's critique can be read as a compliment from Mukherjee, a sign of the author's identification with Anjali, as Mukherjee's novels have consistently privileged what she herself calls "rebellion against age-old traditions and [the] headstrong quest for personal happiness."[66] Mukherjee's work specifically champions the migrant's pioneering qualities, qualities that, it bears noting, the author also attributes to herself: "I experience, simultaneously, the pioneer's capacity to be shocked and surprised by the new culture, and the immigrant's willingness to de-form and re-form that culture," she said of herself in 1997.[67] Then, in 2014: "Pioneers have to have a sturdy sense of self to overcome obstacles. . . I wanted [my novels and characters] to reflect the moral complexity and the pragmatic resourcefulness required of a pioneer."[68]

This understanding of and predilection for pioneering is evidenced both in *Miss New India's* thematic continuance of *Jasmine's* project, as well as Mukherjee's professed impetus for writing the call center book. If, in *Jasmine*, India was a place where "identities [remain] frozen,"[69]

[63] Lavigilante, 2014, 179.

[64] Bharati Mukherjee, *The Middleman and Other Stories* (1988); *Jasmine* (1989); *Desirable Daughters* (2002); *The Tree Bride* (2004).

[65] Bharati Mukherjee, *Miss New India* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011), 135. Hereafter cited internally as *MN*.

[66] Lavigilante, 2014, 182.

[67] Quoted in Tina Chen and S.X. Goudie, "Holders of the World: An Interview with Bharati Mukherjee, J*ouvert: a journal of postcolonial studies* 1.1 (1997).

[68] Lavigilante, 2014, 191.

[69] Grewal, 2005, 70.

lacking the flexibility and motility of the United States, then *Miss New India* is a belated attempt to reckon with an India that is thawing out, at least in its urban centers.[70] Here is Mukherjee's description of her experience being on the other end of the line in a telephonic encounter with an Indian call center agent performing as a U.S.-located tech-supporter:

> As we got talking, she seemed to take me into her confidence and said yes, I'm speaking to you from Bangalore. And I was touched by this confession, or should I call it revelation, and at the same time intrigued by the phenomenon of a whole group of Bangalore-based employees assuming American identities during their work shift to earn their livelihood, then presumably reverting to their customary languages and personalities during their off-the-job hours. I didn't know until I conducted several on-site research trips in Bangalore that the call center customer service personnel were young men and women, mostly women, who had migrated to call center 'hub' towns, such as Bangalore, from all over India.[71]

To be clear, this story is not offered within the narrative frame of *Miss New India*; it is a story Mukherjee offered to an interviewer about the book after its publication in 2014. Nevertheless, this catalyzing moment of telephonic encounter sheds light both on the novel and on some of the larger questions this chapter is pursuing. Mukherjee's is an account of a moment of identification ("I was touched") with a woman she recognizes as a fellow Indian, a fellow woman, and, most significantly, a fellow inhabitant of an "American" identity, if only for the space-time of a work shift. Mukherjee reads the Bangalore-based agent in terms of her American identity, as opposed to an *Indian* American identity, because these are the terms on which the diasporic author understands her own performative self-transformations.

The rest of the back-story that Mukherjee shared with her interviewer is familiar as well. Inspired by this virtual encounter, Mukherjee responded to the call that I am variously tracing throughout this dissertation: She went back to India. She did "a lot of research on the history and architecture of Bangalore," while interviewing scores of people, including call center agents, about outsourcing in India.[72] Importantly, Bhagat, too, makes reference to the need for research on the call center agent in *ON@CC's* frame story: "I'll give you the contacts of the people in the story," the woman on the train tells the Bhagat-character. "You can meet them, do your research, whatever it takes…" (*OC* 8). It is as if the New Indian call center agent cannot be imagined from afar; he or she must be apprehended in the flesh, seen up close to be believed, and heard in person to have his or her telephonic voice directed, finally, to the page.

THE LANGUAGE OF THE CALL CENTER NOVEL

One of the reasons the call center has been such a poignant index of Indian globality is that it confirms global imaginings of the Indian service economy.[73] Both *ON@CC* and *Miss New India*

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[70] In her own words, responding to a question about the novel's putative (Asian) Americanness, "*Miss New India* is a novel about change. If 'American' is a metaphor for belief in the primacy of individual freedom and acceptance of personal accountability, then only in that loose, metaphorical sense it is an 'American' novel." Lavigilante, 2014, 182.

[71] Ibid., 179-180.

[72] Ibid., 183.

[73] It is conventionally assumed that India's period of greatest economic growth post-liberalization—its "dream run" from 2003-2008—was led by the service sector, namely Information Technology, software services, and

exploit this cliché by depicting Indians who technically serve the West, while at the same time figuring the tech-supporting call center agents as the ones in need of help: in need of a Western model to complete their journeys into capitalistic self-actualization.

ON@CC inaugurated the "techie lit" sub-genre of Indian Anglophone pulp fiction, but it is also a *self-help novel*, one which unironically assumes the mantle of spiritual guide, business consultant, and personality trainer.[74] The novel narrates the dispositional evolution of the call center employees from assertions like "nothing about me is great" (*OC* 14) to "i) I can do what I really want ii) God is always with me and iii) there is no such thing as a loser after all" (*OC* 284).[75] It also includes a formal, self-help component. On its first page (an unnumbered page before page 1), the novel exhorts its readers to literally join the self-helping call center agents in reflecting on their fears, what makes them angry, and what they dislike about themselves in provided white space. "Have you done it?" the reader is asked. "If you haven't, please do it…If you have, then thanks. And sorry I doubted you. Now please forget about the exercise, or that I doubted you, and enjoy the story."

Mrinalini Chakravorty reads this move as evidencing "skepticism" on the part of Bhagat: "The effect…is to create doubt about any reader's capacity or ability to see their hopes, fears, and desires reflected in this novel about an invisible workforce. That the reader may not be sufficiently invested in making affective leaps between self and other…"[76] Given the identification that Bhagat then stages between himself and the call center agents, I read the direct questions, requests, and thanks as an occasion for Bhagat to reinforce an intimate, proximate relation to his reader—not evince skepticism. This relation then extends to his authorial identification with his characters, the aim being a triangulation of affective relation, and not simply a one-to-one leap. This, after all, is how the self-help genre operates: by offering a reader desirous of help a range of examples of ordinary, everyday others whose self-helping successes are meant to provide a model for the reader's own intended journey.

ON@CC begins with Shyam/Sam's profession of indifference to the call center re-naming politics that has so vexed cultural critics: "give me another name…I really don't care" (*OC* 14).

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telecommunications. But some argue that the economic output of India's service sector has been rhetorically overstated, and that the growth in that sector was only ever a small part of a widespread "world boom" in services. If this is the case, then the story of New India as having been built through services, not manufacturing, through a relation of assistance and subordination, as opposed to the performance of creation and invention, may point to a more insidious discursive structure, one which we can situate in relation to earlier narratives of Indian arrested development and civilizational apprenticeship. The service sector also includes trade, hotels, restaurants, transport, storage, finance, insurance, real estate, and services generally classed as business, communal, social, and personal. For a dissenting view, see R. Nagaraj, "Is Services Sector Output Overestimated? An Inquiry," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 44, No. 5 (Jan. 31 - Feb. 6, 2009), pp. 40-45 . See also Sukumar Mukhopadhyay, "Globalisation and Indian Services Sector," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 37, No. 40 (Oct. 5-11, 2002), pp. 4097-4098.

[74] Bhagat has explicitly assumed these roles himself, while suggesting that reading his new, commercial fiction is itself a method of self-advancement: ""One day a boy wrote to me that he wanted to commit suicide after failing to make it to IIT but when he read *Five Point Someone* he came out of the negative thought. To me this is the success of literature."" Quoted in Aysha Iqbal Viswamohan, "Marketing Lad Lit, Creating Bestsellers: The Importance of Being Chetan Bhagat," *Postliberalization Indian Novels in English: Politics of Global Reception and Awards*, ed. A.I. Viswamohan (London: Anthem Press, 2013), 23.

[75] In *Miss New India,* Anjali internalizes a similar lesson from her alternately stultifying and disconcerting experiences as an aspiring call center agent in Bangalore: "Here I feel I can do anything. I feel I can change my life if that's what I want!" (*MN* 166).

[76] Chakravorty, 2014, 204.

But lest the disavowal of "caring" be read as a post-identitarian discourse, Shyam/Sam is quick to note, "My English is not that great." "…So, if you're looking for something sophisticated and highbrow, then I suggest you read another book with plenty of long words. I know only one big word: 'management'" (*OC* 14). This is a self-conscious internal address to Bhagat's critics, both detractors and celebrants, all of whom focus on the spoken English of the call center characters.[77] Chakravorty takes Bhagat at his word that the book is "written in a colloquial language that mimics call center-speak."[78] Shashi Tharoor acknowledges the limitations of the commercial novel, while praising its "verisimilitude": "Serious critics [will] quibble with the two-dimensional characterization, the pedestrian prose, the plot's contrived *deus ex machina,* and the author's hokey spiritualism. *But none of that matters…the novel evokes, indeed reproduces, the way young call center workers think, talk, eat, drink, dress, and behave.*"[79]

Realism in the form of studied vernacularity is Bhagat's claim to present-contemporary relevance, one that speaks to worries discussed in the last chapter about whether or not English can access, reflect, and represent the "real" truths and knowledges of Indians and India. His is a "gossipy café" of Indian English, one critic writes, with claims of "local rootedness, of national resurgence."[80] In practice, this means that *ON@CC* is stripped of the hybrid, "Hinglish" language markers made familiar by Desani and Rushdie, so much so that the occasional reference to a woman's *kohl* in *ON@CC* seems like a signifier of the exotic.[81] There are no Sanskrit words like "karma," "dharma," and "shanti," which Vikram Chandra used as story titles in *Love and Longing in Bombay*, only to later be accused by Meenakshi Mukherjee of trying to "signal Indianness in the West." There's also none of Rushdie's inventive, syncretic language play. We might recall for example the passage in *Midnight's Children* where he discusses "the fortunate ambiguity of transliteration"—how the Urdu word "buddha," meaning old man, is spelled just like "Buddha."[82]

What Bhagat offers is an approximation of the "linguistically impure and local, yet stylistically global and communicable"[83] English of the call center agent, in which sentences are short, dialogue is stripped down, and there is little narrative description. An agent whose lipstick is "as thick as cocoa" is voted "hottest chick at Connections" (*OC* 23); an irritating mother "should be put in jail and made to watch daytime TV all day" (*OC* 174). "Pass me the next dumb customer," agent Varun/Victor says (*OC* 181); "[R]eality sucks," adds Shyam/Sam (*OC* 182). The conventional argument is that, given that Bhagat's novels are *not* addressed to a Western audience, he does not need to dress up his English in ethnic markers. Nevertheless, I would argue that this dressing down patently evinces the same "anxiety of Indianness" that Meenakshi Mukherjee once identified as endemic to Anglophone writing, an anxiety that is doubly

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[77] Others who praise the unvarnished quality of Bhagat's English do so in similar terms: it is "the Indian English of the street…of the outsourcing generation" (McCrum 2010).

[78] Chakravorty, 2014, 203. It bears repeating that when we talk about colloquial language, we are dealing with problems of nativity and authenticity masquerading as problems about agency: Not only, is this the real language of New Indian youth, but who has the right to speak (for) New India? Can the New Indian subject, can the call center agent, speak for or as him/herself?

[79] Shashi Tharoor, "India Finds its Calling," *Foreign Policy* No. 153 (Mar-April 2006) 79 (my emphasis).

[80] Gupta, 2012, 47.

[81] Vikram Chandra, "The Cult of Authenticity," *Boston Review* (2000).

[82] Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (London: Penguin Books, 1980), 402.

[83] Mathangi Krishnamurthy, "Furtive Tongues: Language Politics in the Indian Call Centre," *Chutnefying English: The Phenomenon of Hinglish,* ed. Rita Kothari and Rupert Snell, 82-97 (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2011), 97.

manifested in the call center novel's professed desire to address the realities (the real realities!) of New India.

Call center English is in fact a far richer object than the language of Bhagat's novel would suggest. When Siddhartha Deb eventually gets a job at a call center in Noida, the call center English he hears is "an idiosyncratic [rendition] of [a] Northern Irish accent…brought back [by the call center trainers] from the BT facility in Belfast."[84] In A. Aneesh's telling, call center English is a highly technical linguistic form that the industry is attempting, however naively, to produce as a form of placeless, neutral, global accent—and he brings back the evidence to prove just how fraught the decision of how to pronounce a word like "laboratory" really is.[85] To some extent, Bhagat knows this. At one point in *ON@CC*, Shyam/Sam discusses the difficulty of pronouncing the letter "T" in an American accent: "T can be silent, so 'internet' becomes 'innernet'…T and N merge…[when] T falls in the middle…'water" is 'wauder.' The last category, if you still care, is when Americans say T like a T" (*OC* 45). Funny, and savvy: And yet, this passage stands out because it is the only one in the novel that attends with any nuance to the language in which it is meant to speak.

That said, my aim is not to measure Bhagat's language, his "laddish style that addresses the reader with endearing intimacy,"[86] against "real" call center speak in order to find it wanting, pack up, and go home. Certainly, Bharati Mukherjee's approximation of call center English is little better: "Landlords are crooks"; "She's a real cutie. Hot and going fast."; "Dudes, dudes, what is this, a bitch session?"; "They got 'tudes…but we got game" (*MN* 88-91).[87] Whether Bhagat is incapable of capturing the nuances of how New India really speaks, or condescending to his imagined surrogates, whether he is a bad writer or an opportunistic one, the point is that his novel offers a writerly and readerly fantasy of call center English that substitutes regional variety for a global neutrality of intermediacy. This is not the New Indian Anglophonism. By consequence, *ON@CC* cannot present or perform the meeting of English and the *bhashas*, the vernacular-English rapprochement, that critics have anticipated.

What *ON@CC* offers, however, is a critique of the globalized idiom of management-speak, a technical vocabulary that is, in Bhagat's telling, devoid of humanity, if not humor. Throughout the novel, Bhagat uses this idiom to comment on the self-help genre toward which the novel is thematically and formally oriented. The Connexions boss, Bakshi, imagines himself a business guru, expounding systems theories and diagramming "strategic variables" (*OC* 58). Phrases from Bakshi's management theory literally appear in boldface throughout the dialogue.[88]

> 'Hmmm,' Bakshi said again and pressed a sweaty palm on my desk. 'Upsetting Boston will not be good at this time. We are already on a **slippery slope** at Connexions. Let's try to be **proactively oriented** here.' (*OC* 78)

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[84] Siddhartha Deb, *The Beautiful and the Damned: A Portrait of the New India* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2011), 10.
[85] A. Aneesh, *Neutral Accent: How Language, Labor and Life Become Global* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).
[86] Joshi, 2015, 315.
[87] Unsurprisingly, *Miss New India* has been read as a failed effort at ventriloquism, a clichéd "parable for the new nation" that fails to "authentically voice the emerging small-town girl." Akash Kapur, "A Parable of the New India," *New York Times* (July 1, 2011). Cf. Kishwar Desai, "Miss Old India," *India Today* (May 6, 2011).
[88] I learned sometime after completing this chapter that the phrases of "management theory" were not boldfaced consistently in all editions of *ON@CC*.

'Excellent. I **empowered** you, and you **delivered the output**…we are under pressure
to **right size** ourselves…a **seasoned management** has to study all **underlying
variables** and come up with an **optimal solution**" (*OC* 96-97).

"Also, Shyam, can you tell the voice agents to come to my office for a team meeting later,
say 2:30 a.m., okay?' Bakshi said... 'I want to share some **pertinent insights with the
resources**" (*OC* 117-118).

This narrative gimmick has the double effect of poking fun at what the agents term Bakshi's
"jargon" (*OC* 78) while offering up the bold-faced vocabulary of business management for
adoption by the interested, ingenuous reader who, as Sadana similarly notes, may be "inspired"
by reading the Bhagat novel, perhaps even made to feel "as though [he is] better at English than
[he is]."[89] The boldfaced text gives *ON@CC* the feel of an instruction manual or self-help guide.
By that same token, the plot of the novel itself provides a caution to readers: being able to speak
the language in a functional sense is not enough. The business jargon is uniquely susceptible to
misfiring, to use J.L. Austin's term. In the end, Varun/Victor's request to his boss that he and
Shyam/Sam be kept "**in the loop**" on a project of their devising is met by Bakshi's unabashed
appropriation of their work as his own (*OC* 118).

Here, I want to return to the idea that *ON@CC* evidences a savvy attunement to the
hypocrisies of the New India narrative and the historical conditions of its present literary critical
reception. As the above discussion indicates, *ON@CC* is in fact self-reflexive. Though the prose
may be anodyne, it reflects on the predicament of young Indians who are asked—by their
families, by their employers, by the media, by and each other—to produce themselves as
resources for a neglectful Indian nation-state which itself "doesn't believe in doing any real work"
(*OC* 209). "The real hooker is me," Varun/Victor says, after having insulted one of his fellow call
center agents for attempting to "sleep" her way into a modeling career. "Yes, this salary has
hooked me. Every night I come here and let people fuck me…The Americans fuck me…[My
boss] fucks me with his management theories" (*OC* 191).

But does this dialogue offer a critique of nationalism, of the nation-state's abdication of
responsibility to Indian youth, as critics like Liam Connell suggest? For an answer to this
question, we have to consider both how Varun's observation is resolved by the narrative and the
larger New India discourse in which it participates. This, I want to argue, is not a critique of the
New India; rather, this is specifically the form of critique that can be accommodated by the New
India—indeed, that is part of its founding mythology. In her work on New India's enterprise
culture, Nandini Gooptu argues that New India is an "an artefact of the imagination,"[90] a fantasy
of an entrepreneurial, aspirational, and dynamic India that is expunging the "autarchic post-
colonial development state, the legacy of which is still believed to persist in corrupt and failed
governance."[91] What is actually new, Gooptu offers, are the Indian subjects who now populate
the development state, a population of "do-ers...[who] do not 'blame' the political system or
infrastructure; instead they take responsibility themselves, roll up their sleeves, and plunge into
action."[92] They participate in the valorization of "self-maximization…self-making, self-

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[89] Sadana, 2012, 139.
[90] Ibid, 3.
[91] Gooptu, 2013, 1.
[92] Ibid.

help…self-development [and] self-advancement" that we have come to expect from market values trafficked in excess of the market.[93]

To put a finer point on it, in passages and dialogues like the above, Varun/Victor is not criticizing his boss, the call center, the Indian state, or even the Americans. He is criticizing *himself*. And the individualization of this burden of self-maximization has clear, devastating effects. In *ON@CC*, the call center agents attempt to maximize returns on class, caste, and nation by utilizing an economically optimized idiom of business development and entrepreneurship that should, in theory, enable them to "get back" more from life than their parents were able. Ultimately, however, attempts to speak the language of management prove insufficient for Shyam/Sam and Varun/Victor to cash in on the fantasy-promises of globalization. Violence becomes key not only for the agents' self-preservation but also for their self-appreciation, in both senses: for them to value themselves and to increase their net worth.

In the closing pages of the novel, Bhagat's agents frame their greedy, exploitive boss, Bakshi, for sexual harassment, and then blackmail him into leaving the call center. Already, these threats and demands reduce Backshi to "trembl[ing]"; "…his voice sounded like a hapless beggar's. He looked as if he was about to cry" (*OC* 265). But then, as if to drive the point home, Shyam selects "a thick management book" from Bakshi's shelf and "bang[s it] hard on his head" (*OC* 265-266).

"Don't destroy me," Bakshi pleads, "I'm human too" (*OC* 266). After making a series of further demands, Varun and Shyam continue with the gratuitous physical assault:

> "[Varun]…slapped Bakshi's face. Bakshi's face turned sixty degrees from the impact…His facial expression had a combination of 90 percent pain and 10 percent shame…
> 'May I?' I said…
> Slap! I gave Bakshi's face a good slap, too, and it swung sixty degrees in the other direction" (*OC* 267).

The scene is written as the novelistic rendering of a cheesy Bollywood fight sequence. The reader is meant to laugh, even celebrate the turning of the proverbial tables in favor of the call center agents. Compared to Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, in which driver Balram bludgeons and slits his diaspora-returned employer's throat on his way to becoming a Bangalore-based-taxi-company-owner, or Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, in which "you" enlist a bodyguard to shoot a rival on "your" way to becoming a bottled-water titan, this is tame stuff.[94] However, the comedic nature of the hitting and slapping in *ON@CC* should not distract from the fact that, while violence is always an underlying condition of the neoliberal narrative of self-appreciation, the cross-class encounter is being written here as one that requires the assertion of an upper (slapping) hand.

Mukherjee's *Miss New India* is also a novel of aspiration and barely repressed violence, on a number of registers, from the comparable violences of exploitive mentorship and familial

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[93] Ibid, 8-9.
[94] Like Jha's *She Will Build Him a City*, Adiga's *The White Tiger* features the call center as urban backdrop. Bangalore, in Adiga's telling, is a city where you "can't get enough call-center-workers, can't get enough software engineers, can't get enough sales managers" (45). Aravind Adiga, *The White Tiger* (New York and London: Free Press, 2008); Mohsin Hamid, *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2013).

rejection, to competing desires for and fears of capital, to an explicit scene of sexual assault. The first part of the book describes Anjali/Angie's life in Gauripur, where she is taken under the wing of Peter Champion, a former Peace Corps-volunteer who also teaches an English conversation class. In the early pages of the novel, Champion encourages Anjali, who speaks good English ("the language of fantasy" [*MN* 136]), to move to Bangalore, "to leave this place before you [get] trapped in a rotten marriage" (*MN* 17).[95] Champion emotionally manipulates and attempts to strong-arm Anjali into leaving Gauripur, but Anjali resists. She is concerned about doing right by her parents. That changes when she is sexually assaulted by her would-be arranged marriage match, Subodh Mitra.

Tellingly, the scene in which Mitra violates Anjali is written as a power struggle between languages. Mitra at first impresses Anjali's parents with his "chaste, mellifluous" Bengali (*MN* 57). But when Mitra takes Anjali out alone for a drive, he "burst[s] out in English…[that is] no match for hers" (*MN* 57). Mitra then parks his car in a deserted grove, reverts to Bengali, "a language that [robs Anjali] of power and nuance" (*MN* 59), and accuses Anjali of illicit relations with her English teacher: "I know about you and your so-called professor" (*MN* 60). He rapes Anjali and forces her to perform oral sex on him: "If there had been any way of cleaning her mouth, she would have done it. If she'd had a can of bug spray, she would have swallowed it" (*MN* 62).

This literal violation of Anjali's supposedly wayward tongue has stultifying effects later in the novel. In return for a new cell phone, she allows herself to be initiated into an exploitive sexual relationship with an older journalist, because, she reflects, "She could not be held responsible for anything that happened in her life because she was not an initiator of actions" (*MN* 224). She describes herself as "terrified, tempted, and corrupted by the infusion of vast sums of new capital" (*MN* 306) in India, but does not know how to respond or behave. When Anjali meets Monish Lahiri, a Wharton MBA who returns to India "because this is where the money is, money and opportunity" (*MN* 216), and Rabi, a "trust-fund…photographer" from Atherton, California, who "play[s] at slumming" in Gauripur (*MN* 260), she is struck that her country has been "overrun with repatriates and immigrants. India had become a land of milk and honey for everyone except young people born and raised in Gauripur" (*MN* 216). Faced with these inheritors of her India, Anjali, who is not submissive enough to become a call center agent but not assertive enough to speak her mind, "seethe[s]," wordlessly, "with envy and rage" (*MN* 321).

NEW INDIA FROM THE NEWSROOM

The call center novel can acknowledge envy and rage, write it into comedic scenes of boss-bullying and even as a response to an aberrant sexual assault. But it raises a number of questions about the limits of authorial identification and studied vernacularity as a means of accessing the social conditions of New India. Can a novel of the New India unmask the counterfactuality of the narrative of global ascendance? Can it grapple honestly and self-reflexively with the meeting of Anglophone subjects staged by and through the nation's discursive rise?

I want to turn now to Raj Kamal Jha's *She Will Build Him a City*, a novel that envisions the most brutal consequences of a land made milk and honey for some, while others waste away for

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[95] Later, in a bizarre reversal that is not resolved by the narrative, Champion shows up in Bangalore to caution Anjali that she is "the specimen" in the Bangalore-lab "where a clutch of scientists" who owe her nothing are conducting experiments with her life (*MN* 171).

want of water—a novel that moves beyond the tepid critique of cyber-cooliesm to depict a predatory, cannibalistic, and ultimately self-annihilating relation between the Anglophone elite and its Others. Together with Mukherjee's immigrant and Bhagat's call center agent, Jha's characters, like a trainee-nurse with TB and street urchin selling ten-rupee balloons, are figures that, as Rachel Lee reminds us, belong to "the category of the not-quite-human."[96] They are all also figures who we might read as displacements of the "Coolie," a coterminance I pursue, in the final section, with respect to Khair's argument that Babu fictions, written by "diasporic [or] stay-at-home Indians," cannot possibly translate or represent the realities of "Coolie" lives.[97]

Like Bhagat, Jha is an IIT-graduate, a resident of Gurgaon, and a writer who wears multiple hats, including novelist and journalist. That's where the similarities end. Jha is primarily known for his work as the Chief Editor of *The Indian Express,* one of India's leading English-language newspapers, alongside *The Hindu* and *The Times of India.* Dubbed "the novelist of the newsroom,"[98] Jha's fictions draw on stories he has written and edited. In an interview with the *New York Times*, Jha described his own impetus thus: "When I go home from work I see at every intersection 5-year-olds coming to my car and tapping on the window for some loose change. I can't escape that reality. It deeply affects me. And at the same time I feel very impotent, because I can't engage with it. And one simply must."[99] To date, his most well-known work is *The Blue Bedspread*, a disjointed narrative of domestic violence, child abuse, and incest, which won a Commonwealth "Best First Book" Award.

She Will Build Him a City, Jha's fourth novel, continues the project established in *Blue Bedspread* of depicting an urban India that is "lonely, jarring, crawling with life, yet shadowed by an existential aridity."[100] It is set in Delhi and the "New City" that sits twelve stops away from Rajiv Chowk Station on the Delhi Metro. The renomination as "New City" of what readers might reasonably assume is meant to be Gurgaon—India's paradigmatic "nonplace," a "city of glass . . . defined by its future"[101]—is an obvious gesture toward the global form of the nation. It is also part of Jha's larger strategy of selectively evacuating many of the novel's people and places of characterological specificity, while allowing certain of their identifying traits to assume protonymic proportions. The novel unfolds as a series of short, rapidly-shifting chapters alternately focused on the stories of "Woman," "Man," and "Child," interrupted with brief "Meanwhiles" centering on other minor characters, whose stories contribute to the novel's panoramic portrait of metropolitan Indian life.

We've seen this minimal and playful form of denotation used to address an allegory of Indian subcontinental globality before, most recently in Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, in which "Asia" is the novel's only proper-named character or place. Hamid's aspiration is

[96] Rachel Lee, *The Exquisite Corpse of Asian America: Biopolitics, Biosociality, and Posthuman Ecologies* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 20.

[97] Ibid., 5, 21.

[98] Rajni George, "Novelist of the Newsroom," *Open* (January 16, 2015). Available online from <http://www.openthemagazine.com/article/books/novelist-of-the-newsroom>

[99] Quoted in Mervyn Rothstein, "India's Post-Rushdie Generation: Young Writers Leave Magical Realism and Look at Reality," *New York Times* (July 3, 2000). Available online from <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/07/03/books/india-s-post-rushdie-generation-young-writers-leave-magic-realism-look-reality.html?pagewanted=2>

[100] Akash Kapur, "12 Million Strangers," *New York Times* (April 9, 2000). Available online from <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/04/09/books/12-million-strangers.html>

[101] A. Aneesh, *Neutral Accent: How Language, Labor, and Life Bcome Global* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 14.

the elevation of entrepreneurial placelessness to universal relevance, but Jha is aiming for something different: a placelessness and facelessness particular to New India and of a fragmented, specifically Indian body politic struggling to constitute itself as a society of shared interests. While the evocations of "Woman," "Man," and "Child" initially suggest the disassembled component parts of a nuclear family, which the narrative promises to recompose, the novel ultimately flouts the desire for familial wholeness, in ways that make salient each individual's thoroughgoing isolation in New India's New City.

Woman is a mother who has lost her husband (in a bus collision) and very nearly her daughter, too, a returned-runaway who spends much of the novel as a sleeping non-presence, and whose awakening the Woman eagerly awaits. Man, a wealthy, educated resident of Apartment Complex in New City, is given to lurid fantasies of violence, sex, and death. His is an aestheticized erotics of murder: "No knife, no thick rope, no iron rods" (*SC* 5). He imagines his fellow Metro-riders "slit open" and is aroused in anticipation, just as long as there is no unsavory "wet …spray or splatter" (*SC* 5). Finally, Child is an orphaned infant abandoned on the steps of Little House and cared for there by a nurse, Kalyani Das, until a stray dog, Bhow, whisks him away to The Mall. There, amidst 208 stores featuring "one kilometre of shopping experience" (*SC* 168), Orphan makes his home in the Europa theatre. He is looked after by the "cinema woman," Ms. Violets Rose (an anagram for Love Stories), who transports the child into the filmic worlds shown on screen (*SC* 205).

She Will Build Him a City flits between the stories of motley citizens, from news anchor, to child-laborer, to mysterious cinema sprite. But its most provocative depictions center on encounters between Babus and Coolies, elite Indians and putative subalterns. "He cannot avoid the flies just as he cannot avoid the poor," reflects Man. "At traffic lights, they tap and claw at his windows. Leave trails on glass. Of sweat and slime, like the dead do in movies. They even look like the dead, many of their faces half-eaten by disease. Some have noses missing, their lips chewed off" (*SC* 211). The primary relation of this sort is between Man and Balloon Girl. It is also a diaspora-nation relation, both because Apartment Complex is written as an island within (and therefore also outside) New City, and because Man "leaves" and "returns" to New City multiple times throughout the narrative on imagined jaunts to Paris and Singapore, among other global cities.

In an early scene, Man (probably?) rapes and murders Balloon Girl. That parenthetical question is the reader's, but it is also Man's; after their initial meeting, he cannot recall if he has indeed committed the crimes he later hears about on television. As he watches the grisly report, a self-doubting monologue merges with the news ticker, flying off the TV screen, into the air, and onto his skin:

> CHILD RAPED, KILLED, MOTHER SEVERELY ASSAULTED . . . IF HE DOES RAPE HER, IF HE DOES KILL HER, HOW DOES HE RAPE HER? . . . HE DOES NOT USE A GUN BECAUSE HE DOES NOT HAVE ONE DOES HE STRANGLE HER? . . . SHE WILL BITE, SHE WILL SCRATCH, BUT THEN WHERE ARE THE MARKS, THE CUTS AND THE BRUISES? (*SC* 186-188)

Aware that he desired—and desires still—to ingest her ("He wants to swallow her lips" [*SC* 98]), but unsure if he has killed her, Man is haunted by visions of Balloon Girl, who, as the novel progresses, goads him into at least one other murder. Man's fantasies are ugly, pornographic, but his savage impulses are, the novel provocatively suggests, really just the other side of the

charitable coin. On the one hand, Man "wishes to hurt [Balloon Girl], drink her blood"; on the other hand, he desires "to take her off this city's streets . . . share with her his own good fortune . . . [his father] would be proud if he took in a child from the street, cleaned her up, gave her his love, made her his own" (*SC* 324).

The humanitarian intervention (taking the child "off this city's streets") is belied by the possessive urge that precedes it, revealing the extent to which the philanthropic mission can—perhaps even often does—mask an underlying misanthropy. Man evinces a "combination of revulsion and fascination" toward subalterns like Balloon Girl.[102] But rather than neutralize this affective disposition in a familiar slumming narrative, Jha develops it to the extreme, so that middle-class class anxieties can not, finally, be "resolve[d], manage[d], or repress[ed]."[103] In a form of reverse sublimation, such anxieties eschew taking sanctified moral form in favor of expression as cannibalistic desire: to consume the Other; to be one with Other; to make the Other disappear. The consummation of the elite desire for the subaltern is, in the final instance, self-annihilating. Eventually, spectral visions of Balloon Girl, dancing and beckoning to him from over the ledge outside his apartment window, lead to Man's guilt-ridden suicide.

Since the publication of *The Blue Bedspread* in 2000, Jha has been read, along with the subject of the next chapter, Amit Chaudhuri, as part of a "post-Rushdie" generation seeking to emerge from the shadow of magical realism. And yet, there is more than a little "magic" in Jha's novels, especially *She Will Build Him a City*, which simultaneously confounds linear plot-ordering, spatio-temporal location, everyday logics of animal behavior, and the laws of gravity (there is no self-helping God here, but there is a flying dog). Chakravorty's recent work on postcolonial dystopian fictions provides a vocabulary with which we might approach Jha's text. Postcolonial dystopias as she defines them "turn on a negative dialectics . . . that shuttles between thick scenes of grotesque-yet-mundane material damage and their more stylized or aestheticized translations into delirium."[104] Such novels, including Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* and Jeet Thayil's *Narcopolis,* derive their "dystopian force . . . from a repudiation of humanity itself."[105] Where Jha's novel seems to diverge from the form of the postcolonial dystopia as Chakravorty defines it is in its retention of a certain escapism associated with the magical realist novel—for example, in the romantic and occasionally comedic story of Orphan's adoption by Ms. Violets Rose.

It might be more accurate, then, to read Jha as offering a commentary on what Anjaria terms "new social realisms." Anjaria proposes that contemporary Indian Anglophone fiction is marked by a simultaneous return to realism and a reformist impulse to lay bare the structural inequalities in global India. This new social realism "maintains a commitment to representing social injustices through a materialist lens" while eschewing, or transcending, the familiar "politics of visibility."[106] It is a "perplexing," not revealing, mode of literary capture, a mode "invested more in sounding out the dialectic between communication and obscurity than in

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[102] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London and New York: Routledge, 1981, 1983), 177.

[103] Ibid., 173.

[104] Mrinalini Chakravorty, "Of Dystopias and Deliriums: The Millennial Novel in India," *A History of the Indian Novel in English,* ed. Anjaria, pp. 267-281 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 268.

[105] Ibid., 271.

[106] Ulka Anjaria, "Realist Hieroglyphics: Aravind Adiga and the New Social Novel," *Modern Fiction Studies* 61.1, 114-137 (2015), 115.

conveying a transparent truth."[107] *She Will Build Him a City* offers a similar "aesthetics of indeterminacy"[108]—Did Man rape and murder Balloon Girl? Is there in fact an Orphan living in The Mall?—with a somatic spin. It commits originally to a politics of corporeality that, depending on your reading, either reduces or elevates each subject to the determinate wonders and horrors of the physical body.

This multiplicity of meaning is most evident in the figure of Kalyani Das, a nursing student with ambitions of moving to America. The daughter of Baba the rickshaw-wallah, she lives with her parents and siblings in one room in a Delhi slum. "[N]urses will always be in demand," she tells her superior, Dr. Chatterjee, "[because w]ho is going to clean you up when you wet your bed? . . . I am learning not to smell the smells . . . it doesn't matter if I do this here or in America because shit, piss, blood, they all look and smell the same wherever you are, whoever you are" (*SC* 21–22). Kalyani's confident pronouncement comes early in the novel, and for good reason: This idea that bodies are all the same—that despite differences of geography, culture, location, and color, shit, piss, and blood all look and smell the same—will be tested, and found wanting, many times. For despite the commonsensicality of this seeming sameness, not all bodies move and migrate with equivalent freedoms—a lesson we have also learned from the painful somatic adjustments, identitarian gymnastics, and virtual time travel of the call center agent.[109] Bodies carry the colors of caste, the sweat of sun exposure, the skeletons of labor, and the blood of disease—in Kalyani's case, that most banal and brutal "coolie disease" of the developing world: tuberculosis.[110]

"He watches the birds begin to peel her skin, tear her earlobes away . . . He wants to put his mouth there, where she bleeds, drink it all in, feel the wind from the flutter of the birds' wings in his face" (*SC* 152). Not since Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance,* in which tailors Ishvar and Om end up amputated and castrated, respectively, has the caste-marked body been subject to this kind of violence in the Indian Anglophone novel: from fantasies of Balloon Girl's dismemberment to a brutally visualized gang rape of a low-caste girl, Nidhi, by her lover's

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[107] Ibid., 130.

[108] Ibid., 123.

[109] In *Working the Night Shift*, geographer Reena Patel reports experiencing Mumbai as a "nightmare":

> I felt like a caged animal, mobility ripped away, unable to speak, unable to drive. Eventually I stopped wanting to go out. The simplest aspects of upper-middle-class life—such as figuring out where and what to eat—were an ordeal merely because I didn't want to take a twenty-minute walk that would leave me grimy from the pollution, agitated from the noise, and hypervigilant from the aggression of drivers, beggars, and street children…Although I had the money to get on a plane and leave…I felt suffocated and trapped, and was often looking for a way out. (150)

Patel, who was in Mumbai to conduct a study of women call center agents, related her own feelings of entrapment to those of the agents with whom she interacted and who, she argued, were inducted into regimes of temporal mobility while remaining severely restricted in terms of their physical mobility—not only because of their sex but because of financial limitations. Deb reflects that while he often felt the need to escape India's cities for the hills of Uttaranchal or Himachal Pradesh (and did), his female informants, especially young women of the service industries, did not have that freedom: "Women did not have it easy in Delhi" (2011, 227); "Esther didn't have [the] option" of going away on holiday (2011, 247). See Patel, 2010; and J.K. Tina Basi, *Women, Identity and India's Call Centre Industry* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

[110] See James Francis Warren, *Rikshaw Coolie: A People's History of Singapore, 1880-1940* (Singapore University Press, 2003), especially Chapter 15, "Morbidity and the Environment" for one discussion of tuberculosis as a "coolie" disease.

brother and friends, who leave her for dead before going to eat Chinese food at The Leela, one of Delhi's posh hotels. This is what Tabish Khair described in *Babu Fictions* as the Anglophone literary practice of "devouring Coolie bodies," but in far more literal terms than he probably had in mind: "…the fleshing of a particular (textualized and centric) Babu worldview [is] a legitimate enough activity in itself, but for the fact that such fleshing is often a cannibalistic act, shall we say, of devouring Coolie bodies, of stripping non-Babu worlds to (at the most) a bare skeleton."[111]

In the decade-plus since Khair's polemic, the Indian Anglophone novel has become far more self-reflexive about the English language's putative alienation from the overlapping social formations of vernacular subjects and Coolie classes. Given their internal critiques of good and bad Anglophonisms and the global idiom of self-help, Jha's and Mukherjee's call center novels discussed in this chapter are an example of this progression.[112] They allow us to ask not only whether or not the English novel can "represent India and Indians," but rather *which* Indians can be represented in *which* forms of Indian English, and *how* that representation accounts for and metabolizes English's vexed historical legacy and efficacy as a mechanism of social advancement.

In this context, *She Will Build Him a City* emerges as a critique of the premise of linguistic veracity—whether in English or the vernacular languages—as a tool of literary capture in the realist mode. The novel matches its somatic focus with a kind of hallucinatory wordlessness. When Man brings Balloon Girl and her Mother to his Apartment Complex in New City and invites them to shower in his palatial bathroom, "Neither mother nor child says a word" (*SC* 45). Later, he feeds them, allows them to sleep in his air conditioned guest room, and watches them as they do, silently examining the crevices in their heels. He tips the Taxi Driver who brought them to his apartment "for not speaking throughout the ride, for not asking any questions" (*SC* 46). By novel's end, we learn that a woman named Kahini is at the nexus of the three stories: daughter to Woman, former lover to Man, and mother to aborted Orphan/Child. Her name signals the Hindi word *kahaani*, or story, and yet she, the enabler of the story, speaks not at all. Finally, the elite Babu body's failure to speak the violence it enacts is also subject to critique. Over and above having committed the unspeakable rape and murder of the Balloon Girl-child, Man's body confounds him with its seeming imperviousness: "IF THIS ACTUALLY HAPPENED . . . HE SHOULD HAVE SIGNS, SYMPTOMS ON HIS BODY . . . TRACES OF HER BLOOD . . . TISSUE UNDER HIS NAILS … " (*SC* 187).

The call center novel is limited both by the authorial identification with fictive call center protagonists, whether Bhagat's nomination of Shyam as his surrogate or the reappearance of Mukherjee's familiar pioneer in Anjali, and by the imperative of writing Indian youth as speaking in their "real" voices. The question is, does Jha's focus on the ineluctable corporeality of the Coolies' *bodies* in any way restore or revive their humanity, given that they cannot speak? Is the social-critical impulse on offer in the macabre aesthetic of *She Will Build Him a City* ultimately more honest and incisive than the call center novel's attempts at studied vernacularity?

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[111] Tabish Khair, *Babu Fictions: Alienation in Contemporary Indian English Novels* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 117.

[112] Adiga's *The White Tiger*—in which chauffeur-turned-entrepreneur Balram Halwai slyly opens his first letter to Wen Jiabao with the note, "Neither you nor I speak English, but there are some things that can be said only in English" (1)—is another good example of this progression, though one that, as Snehal Shingavi points out, still fails to produce a progressive critique of caste. Cf. Snehal Shingavi, "Capitalism, Caste, and Con-Games in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger,*" *Postcolonial Text* 9.3, 1-16 (2014), 14.

In the call center novel, the English language is both possibility and treachery. In *She Will Build Him a City,* this agential capacity is restored to the body, which is at once the primary organ of sensation, the locus of meaning, the enabling condition of social advancement, and the repository of social and biological disease. Heir to familiar preoccupations with the question of the speaking subaltern, here rendered as the tech-supporting cyber-coolie, the call center novel offers popular depictions of lower-middle-class striving in the New Indian Anglosphere that mute the apparent and latent violences of globalization through a seductive politics of identification. By contrast, Jha gives us subaltern, Coolie bodies, whose violation, cannibalization, and devouring ultimately voids ideas of vernacular-English rapprochement with a depiction of co-presence itself as a form of vulnerability, danger, and mystification.

Chapter 3

**Nonfictions of the Future:
The Repatriate and the Genre of the Emergence**

"India itself is the site of literary futurity."
—*Ulka Anjaria*[1]

"It was a work of non-fiction he wanted: Indian non-fiction was
going to be the new Indian fiction."
—*Amit Chaudhuri*[2]

In 1999, the novelist Amit Chaudhuri returned to India from Britain with his wife and daughter. Years later, in *Calcutta: Two Years in the City*, he described this return, and his plan to live henceforth in Calcutta with his parents, as a determined exercise of personal volition:

> …I didn't want to discover one day that I was old, not far from death, and still living in England…it didn't seem like the right ending for the story my imagination had constructed of my life. I'd seen it happen to others…always deferring the day of departure, always behaving as if they were temporary residents who'd been in England for only the last few months…[3]

Chaudhuri had not only seen it happen to others; when he moved back to India, he was in the midst of writing a fictional account of deferred-return that would become his fourth novel, *A New World*. In that work, the Iowa-returned protagonist, Jayojit Chatterjee, on holiday at his parents' Calcutta home, seems to comment on the author's alternate diasporic imaginary:

> What would happen in the future? Jayojit couldn't see himself returning once his parents weren't there, or ever settling down here himself—he'd gone too far into the continent of his domicile and been absorbed by it; and imagine the foolhardiness of returning to India![4]

Jayojit is recently divorced, and he would benefit from the family support available to him in Calcutta. Nevertheless, reverse migration seems out of the question. As if to corroborate his sentiments, his father comments on the impossibility of Jayojit's returning to India to live: "I wouldn't advise *you* to come back to it" (*NW* 61). A neighbor, Dr. Sen, broaches the subject with similar rhetorical emphasis: "You're not thinking of settling here *permanently*?" (*NW* 172).

Dr. Sen's question, though it reads as a cheeky internal address to its recently repatriated author, might well have served as the motivating provocation for a significant subset of popular, Anglophone narrative nonfictions about the ascendance of a global "India Calling," "India Rising," "India Becoming"—a genre that comprised a veritable international publishing boom in the first two decades of the 21st century and to which Chaudhuri's *Calcutta* tenuously belongs.

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[1] Ulka Anjaria, "Introduction: Literary Pasts, Presents, and Futures," *A History of the Indian Novel in English* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 22.

[2] Amit Chaudhuri, "My New Perspective on Calcutta," *The Guardian,* February 2, 2013.

[3] Amit Chaudhuri, *Calcutta: Two Years in the City* (New York: Knopf, 2013), 247. Hereafter cited internally as *C.*

[4] Amit Chaudhuri, *A New World* (New York: Knopf, 2000), 59. Hereafter cited internally as *NW.*

Books like Gurcharan Das's *India Unbound: The Social and Economic Revolution from Independence to the Global Information Age* celebrated the emergence of a New India after the liberalizing market reforms of 1991. More critical works like Siddhartha Deb's *The Beautiful and the Damned: A Portrait of the New India* attempted to temper such exuberance. Meanwhile, a spate of books emerged on the subject of the New Indian city, starting with Suketu Mehta's Pulitzer-finalist, *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found*, which details the American returnee's search for Bombay in New India's "Mumbai" and is one of the works against which Chaudhuri explicitly situates his own nonfiction text.[5]

By his own admission, Chaudhuri did not intend to write *Calcutta*. Rather, his market-savvy agent, Peter Straus kept after him until he acquiesced: "My agent called and asked me if I'd write a book on Calcutta. It was a work of non-fiction he wanted: Indian non-fiction was going to be the new Indian fiction."[6] Straus's interest in nonfiction was predicated in part on the runaway success of *Maximum City*, but it reflected equal attunement to developments in Indian Anglophone fiction that year. Chetan Bhagat, the New Indian "paperback king" discussed in the last chapter, had just published his second novel, *One Night @ the Call Center*, cementing literary critical suspicions that something new was happening in the sphere of Indian letters, beginning with a "a de-fetishization of the diaspora" in Anglophone literature. "At long last, India is no longer a place one must leave in order to live the good life," critics would write. "India itself is the site of literary futurity."[7]

The preceding chapters have discussed this literal and figural return to the nation as one enabled by, and that has entailed in turn, transformations in Indian Anglophonism. The postcolonial linguistic phenomenon understood as the indigenization of English in India—a phenomenon that had its early literary registration in Raja Rao's rhythmic interjection of the Indian spirit into the English language of *Kanthapura*, then in the "rigmarole" tongues of G.V. Desani's *All About H. Hatterr* and, later, what Rebecca Walkowitz calls the "tactical syncretism" of Salman Rushdie's "cosmopolitan style"—has now, in the present-contemporary moment, culminated in the pulp fictional invention of a vernacularized "call center English" à la Bhagat.[8] New India has seen the democratization and, some would attest, bastardization of Indian Anglophone fiction, as best-selling writers like Bhagat, Anuja Chauhan, and Preeti Shenoy publish novels in a language that makes readers "feel as though [they] were better at English than [they] were."[9] In the wake of these developments, scholars of the Indian Anglophone novel have made an about-face from the study of national-allegory-writing expatriates in the tradition of Rushdie, to national-pulse-taking repatriates like Bhagat, as well as to the genres of Indian chick lit, lad lit, techie lit, detective fiction, self-help, and the distinctly Indian innovations that E.

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[5] To date, no less than three New Indian "city-series" have been commissioned by major Indian publishers: Penguin India's ten city-focused anthologies, Aleph Book Company's half-dozen city "biographies," and Oxford University Press India's two-volume *The Oxford Anthology of the Modern Indian City*.

[6] Chaudhuri, "New Perspective," 2013.

[7] Anjaria, 2015, 13, 22.

[8] Raja Rao, "Author's Foreword," *Kanthapura* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1947, 1938), vii; G.V. Desani, *All About H. Hatterr* (New York: New York Review of Books, 1948, 1951, 1970), 36; Rebecca L. Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 132.

[9] Rashmi Sadana, "Writing in English," *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Indian Culture*, eds. V. Dalmia and R. Sadana, 124-141 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 139.

Dawson Varughese terms "crick lit" (fiction about cricket) and "Bharati fantasy" (fantasy fiction drawing on epics like "The Mahabharata" and "The Ramayana").[10]

Against this changing landscape of Indian fiction, this chapter offers an inquiry into the concurrent rise of Anglophone nonfiction on and after New India. Straus approached Chaudhuri with the idea for *Calcutta* in 2005. By 2012, nonfiction works about the rise of a New India were so numerous that, as mainstream press noted, they could be grouped into titular sub-categories reflecting the exuberance of uncritical works like *India Unbound*, the critical impetus of works like *The Beautiful and the Damned*, and the significance of the city as a driver of the emergence narrative.[11]

If one were to club together celebratory books on India's rise, critiques of the New India, and works on the New Indian city, a striking commonality emerges: a significant number of authors are, or once were, Non-Resident Indians in diaspora whose respective "returns" to India, transitory or permanent, serve as the occasion for the writing of their nonfiction works: Amit Chaudhuri and Suketu Mehta, but also Siddhartha Deb, Rana Dasgupta, Anand Giridharadas, Akash Kapur, Amitava Kumar, Shoba Narayan, Somini Sengupta, and Shashi Tharoor.[12] Some of these writers were raised in India; others were born in India but brought up abroad. Some spent formative years in the United States; others, in the United Kingdom. Some went back to India as adults with their own children, determined never to leave again. Others returned to India on assignment, only to emigrate once more.

Despite these different migratory itineraries, all of these writers pursue in their emergence texts the counterfactual pasts and futures that they might have had, had they, or their parents, not left India in the first place. Sengupta, who grew up in California and returned to India as the New Delhi-bureau chief for the *New York Times,* aims to understand "[w]hat I would have known how to handle, had I grown up there…"[13] Kumar is "haunted," "struck by the fact that I left

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[10] E. Dawson Varughese, *Reading New India: Post-Millennial Indian Fiction in English* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

[11] "Option 1) "India," followed by an action verb or adjective, with a sweeping subhead; Option 2) Something with "Elephant" in the title; Option 3) "India," followed by a colon and a noun (note, should be at least 400 pages); Option 4) Something kicky, fun and a bit random (particularly good if you're foreign and female); Option 5) Beguiling or provocative phrase, followed by colon and description of what it will tell you about India (only if you are a literary writer, please)." See Heather Timmons, "Naming Your India Book: A Pocket Guide," *New York Times*, India Ink (March 22, 2012).

[12] In chronological order of publication, these works are Suketu Mehta, *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found* (2004); Siddhartha Deb, *The Beautiful and the Damned: A Portrait of the New India* (2011); Anand Giridharadas, *India Calling: An Intimate Portrait of a Nation's Remaking* (2011); Akash Kapur, *India Becoming: A Portrait of Life in Modern India* (2012); Shoba Narayan, *Return to India: An Immigrant Memoir* (2012); Amit Chaudhuri, *Calcutta: Two Years in the City* (2013); Rana Dasgupta, *Capital: The Eruption of Delhi* (2014); Amitava Kumar, *A Matter of Rats: A Short Biography of Patna* (2014); Somini Sengupta, *The End of Karma: Hope and Fury Among India's Young* (2016). For his part, Shashi Tharoor has written four books on the rise of India: *India: From Midnight to Millennium* (1997); *The Elephant, the Tiger and the Cell-Phone: Reflections on India in the 21st Century* (2007); *Pax Indica: India and the World of the 21st Century* (2012); and *India Shastra: Reflections on the Nation in Our Time* (2015). The latter is being reprinted next year as *India Sutra: Reflections on the World' Largest Democracy in the 21st Century* (2017). Tharoor is in many ways the paradigmatic returnee; after a three-decades long career at the United Nations, during which he was based in Singapore, Geneva, and New York, Tharoor returned to India in 2009, where he has since been twice elected a Member of Parliament and held other high-profile positions within the Indian government. Full disclosure: Tharoor is my maternal uncle, and I have thought it prudent not to deal with his writings directly in this dissertation. That said, I intend to reckon with it in future work.

[13] Somini Sengupta, *The End of Karma: Hope and Fury Among India's Young* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2016), 4. Hereafter cited internally as *EK.*

Patna in search of a life of comfort"[14] and strives to see the city as if he had never left, "to search for that which would have engaged me most fully if I were living and working in Patna" (*MR* xiii). This "would have" is the animating impulse of all of these repatriates' works, which narrate movements in space (out of India, into India, back out of India again) as "migration across the plains of time."[15]

These are diasporic texts about "generation," in the Boyarins' sense of the term.[16] Consequently, familial piety is a crucial underwriting condition of the return narrative. Professed motivations for return include "to be with parents" (*C* 246), "to see how much older my parents look" (*MR* 107), and to experience "a different kind of family love."[17] Many of these writers seek to give their children the Indian futures they themselves lost, or forsook, years ago. Living in New York, Suketu Mehta and his wife think, "We have to take the children home. Our children must have the experience of living in a country where everyone looks just like them."[18] Amit and Rosinka Chaudhuri "were both fairly sure we were happy to give our daughter the childhood I'd never had, a Calcutta childhood" (*C* 248). "My girl is at home here," Sengupta muses while contemplating returning to New York from Delhi. "I wonder if she will one day ask what I still sometimes ask: Who might I have been had I stayed?" (*EK* 81).

The last chapter explored the limits and possibilities of imaginative self-identification by New India novelists with their own protagonists. It concluded with a depiction of elite-subaltern encounter that lays bare the limits of such identification, while raising anew the question of the embodied encounter. In this chapter, I consider the generic conventions of nonfictional texts that narrate the individual's return to India as both a consequence and enabling condition of New India's rise. I am specifically interested in how these works stage the narrative of repatriation through a series of encounter with "others" who are meant to authorize the diasporic perspective of the nonfiction text. Then, focusing on Chaudhuri's *Calcutta*, I locate residues of fictionality in this literary nonfiction of New India. Chaudhuri's apprehension of the event of Calcutta's rebirth as New India's Kolkata, for example, derives from his novelistic accounts of the event of the everyday. These residues secure, as opposed to evacuate, the emergence genre's purchase on the "real," while laying bare the Indian Anglophone novel's comparatively shallow efforts to create narrative space for the subaltern.

In contradistinction to the last chapter, which took inspiration from the meteoric ascendance of India's "paperback king," I focus in this chapter on a figure who has not captured critical attention on the scale of Bhagat and yet is a far better barometer of key trends in Indian Anglophone literature.[19] The author of six novels, two collections of short stories and poetry, multiple volumes of essays, and a scholarly monograph on D.H. Lawrence, Chaudhuri is a

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[14] Amitava Kumar, *A Matter of Rats: A Short Biography of Patna* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 84. Hereafter cited internally as *MR*.

[15] Rana Dasgupta, *Capital: The Eruption of Delhi* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014), 48.

[16] Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin, "Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity," *Critical Inquiry* 19.4 (Summer 1993).

[17] Anand Giridharadas, *India Calling: An Intimate Portrait of a Nation's Remaking* (New York: Henry Holt, 2011), 227. Hereafter cited internally as *IC*.

[18] Suketu Mehta, *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 12-13. Hereafter cited internally as *MC*.

[19] For example, in the 2015 *A History of the Indian Novel in English* (ed. Anjaria), Chaudhuri is referenced only as a literary critic. Yet, in 1997, he was featured alongside Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Amitav Ghosh, and other Indian Anglophone luminaries in a group photograph of "India's leading novelists" in the Golden Jubilee issue of *The New Yorker* discussed in chapter one.

polymath known equally for his literary, academic, and musical careers. He is also known for having volubly dis-identified himself from the normative literary projects of Indian Anglophone postcoloniality over the years, whether the magical realism of Rushdie and Vikram Chandra, the naturalism of Vikram Seth and Rohinton Mistry, or the historicism of Amitav Ghosh.[20]

If and when Chaudhuri does feature in relevant scholarship, it is as the exception who proves the reigning rule; his many books have variously diverged from formal trends in Indian Anglophone literature.[21] By that same token, they have also kept time with the field. In 1991, in a moment dominated by *The Satanic Verses* and the idea of "exile [as] a dream of glorious return,"[22] Chaudhuri's first novel, *A Strange and Sublime Address*, rehearsed a series of returns to Calcutta, while resisting the lure of the transformative (and transmogrifying) "event" that was central to Rushdie's corpus. By the time Mehta's *Maximum City* and Bhagat's *One Night @ the Call Center* were published, Chaudhuri had already, by moving to Calcutta in 1999, led the wave of return-to-the-nation that would come to define the global moment.

Chaudhuri is not the only novelist to have written emergence nonfiction, and his *Calcutta* is not the most well-known of the "rise of India" texts.[23] Its distinction, however, resides in its being a species of emergence narrative that also offers a self-conscious commentary on the genre. It is a text through which we can understand both the critical impetus and vantage of the genre as a whole. Whereas the call center novels of Bhagat and Mukherjee forced presentism through authorial identification with fictive characters, and whereas Jha's dystopian New India novel envisioned the encounter with the other as certain death, the emergence genre offers a more subtle mediation of the problems of intersubjective proximity and distance—one that help us to acknowledge that the problem which Indian Anglophonism must overcome is neither diasporic

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[20] The critical consensus on Chaudhuri is that he values the inhabitance of the quotidian over the disruptive force of events like Partition and Emergency, which have made routinized appearances in novels by writers including Rushdie, Anita Desai, Bapsi Sidhwa, Kushwant Singh, Shashi Tharoor, Rohinton Mistry, and, most recently, Aatish Taseer. His fragmented and episodic novels resist the collapse of private and public spheres essential to the postcolonial national allegory and offer instead explorations of the mundane everyday; they are are weighted with minor details that do not immediately lend themselves to allegorical extension: the landscape of a folded sari, overflowing gutters, the violet-black necks of copulating pigeons on a humid afternoon. See Saikat Majumdar, *Prose of the World: Modernism and the Banality of Empire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013); Anu Shukla, "Such Stuff as Amit Chaudhuri's Song Is Made on," *The Novels of Amit Chaudhuri: An Exploration in the Alternative Tradition* (Sarup and Sons: 2004); Subir Dhar, "*A Strange and Sublime Address*: Amit Chaudhuri and the Fiction of Sensibility," *The Novels of Amit Chaudhuri: An Exploration in the Alternative Tradition* (Sarup and Sons: 2004); Myriam Bellehigue, "Everyday horizons in Amit Chaudhuri's *A Strange and Sublime Address*," *Commonwealth Essays and Studies* 33.1 (2010); Patrycja Magdalena Austin, "Amit Chaudhuri's Poetic Dwelling in *A Strange and Sublime Address* and *Afternoon Raag*," *Postcolonial Text* 6.2 (2011).

[21] When scholars were preoccupied with Rushdiean post-modernism, Chaudhuri offered an alternate genealogy of literary modernism routed through Bengali Renaissance humanism, both in his literary and critical writings. In a much-cited essay, Chaudhuri critiques the fetishization of the post-modern, arguing that a myopic interpretive aesthetic has been applied to the Indian Anglophone novel because of the shadow cast by the "gigantic edifice" of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. "Indian life is plural, garrulous, rambling, lacking a fixed center," goes the strand of uninspired criticism, "and the Indian novel must be same" (115). See Amit Chaudhuri "Huge Baggy Monster: Mimetic Theories of the Indian Novel After Rushdie," *Clearing a Space: Reflections On India, Literature and Culture* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008). By that same token, Saikat Majumdar, who has offered the most substantive critical treatment of Chaudhuri's work to date, argues that Chaudhuri's novels are the exceptions that prove Fredric Jameson's "rule" that all third-world texts are necessarily allegories of the nation. Majumdar, 2013. Cf. Frederic Jameson, "Third-world literature in the era of multinational capitalism," *Social Text* (1986): 65-88.

[22] Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1988), 205.

[23] Deb, Dasgupta, Kumar, and Tharoor have all written novels as well.

location nor the alienation of an elite language, but rather the nostalgic treatment of the social distance of class.

THE GENRE OF EMERGENCE

The "emergence genre" is a phrase I've taken from Manu Goswami, who, in a brief but generative review essay, suggests that nonfiction works on the rise of New India update the magical realist tradition of postcolonial Indian Anglophone writing by delivering instead a vision of "The American Dream Outsourced." In this "neoliberal genre of emergence," she writes, the magic of India is vested, not in the nation's ineluctable difference from the West, but in the "natural wonders of market capitalism":

> Works as individually diverse as Pico Iyer's lyrical *The Global Soul*; Anand Giridharadas's memoir of his return to the home of his parents, *India Calling*; Edward Luce's much-heralded *India: In Spite of the Gods*; and Patrick French's *India: A Portrait* share a common historical narrative. Since History and the Market are understood as one and the same thing for the neoliberal faithful, India only enters the global stage and history proper in 1991, with the inauguration of market reforms and the geopolitical tilt towards the U.S.[24]

By painting with a broad brush that sees similarity in Iyer's "expense-account cosmopolitanism,"[25] Giridharadas's life-writing, Luce's policy-oriented journalism, and French's dizzyingly ambitious response to a self-posed question ("why is India like it is today?"), Goswami is able to propose that *capital* itself has become the main character of Indian Anglophone writing—a capricious agent who alternately motivates, thwarts, and enables the entrepreneurial activities of the New Indian subject—as opposed to the *nation*, the ostensible agent of history in the earlier postcolonial mode.[26] By that same token, she misses the dominance of the diasporic return narrative to a significant subset of the emergence genre, which I read as primarily matching, not History and Market, but grandiose estimations of India's rise with intimate accounts of an author's memories, family history, and encounters in everyday life. These encounters enable the emergence genre's significant triangulation of the author's return to India (a migratory itinerary), the emergence of New India (a macrohistorical narrative), and the extra-"ordinary" lives of other, ostensibly more rooted Indians (from call center agents to bar dancers, farmers to real estate moguls), whose personal itineraries and entrepreneurial aspirations are

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[24] Manu Goswami, "The American Dream Outsourced," *Public Books,* 2012.

[25] Graham Huggan, *Extreme Pursuits: Travel/Writing in the Age of Globalization* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 16.

[26] Some of the texts in the broader emergence genre (though not return-writing as such) offer breathless avowal's of the redeeming power of capital. Robyn Meredith attributes India's "stunning" transformation and "overwhelming" changes to "capitalists from corporate America… [who] did not set out to help Asia's downtrodden, but they did" (11-12). Cf. Robyn Meredith, *The Elephant and the Dragon: The Rise of India and China and What it Means for All of Us* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007); Others don't necessarily duplicate Meredith's historical erasure but nevertheless do center capital as Goswami describes: Gurcharan Das, *India Unbound: The Social and Economic Revolution from Independence to the Global Information Age* (2000); Arvind Panagariya, *India: The Emerging Giant* (2008); Nandan Nilekani, *Imagining India: The Idea of a Renewed Nation* (2009); Aseem Shrivastava and Ashis Kothari, *Churning the Earth: The Making of Global India* (2012); Atul Kohli in *Poverty Amid Plenty in the New India* (2012); Dilip Hiro, *The Age of Aspiration: Power, Wealth, and Conflict in Globalizing India* (2015).

meant to illuminate India's experiments with globality in ways otherwise unavailable to the diaspora-returned.[27]

Apart from a handful of essays like Goswami's, there has as yet been no sustained scholarly treatment of the emergence genre. This is in part because of the genre's *popularity*; with few exceptions, these are trade books, published by major American, British, and Indian publishers for general audiences. The emergence genre is a "public" genre, which effects a Janus-faced address to the Indian insider and the non-Indian outsider, the reader in the know and the reader only now encountering India through the accessible, English prose of the genre. Publicity can, of course, be a pejorative assignment, one which gives rise to coercively mimetic readings reflecting the ongoing burden of representation borne by non-Western authors and texts. However, it has also enabled the emergence genre to assume a pedagogical role in the global Anglophone public sphere. Along with celebrated works of fiction by writers like Hanif Kureishi, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Arundhati Roy, these are the texts to which a majority of English-language readers outside the academy—from politicians to foreign correspondents to high school history classes—turn in order to "understand" the Indian subcontinent.[28] In my view, the genre's accessibility and broad diffusion both within and outside the academy only make more urgent the task of assessing its epistemological and political claims, its narrative form and research methodology, and its relation to the broader field of Indian Anglophone writing.

There is also the fact of the genre's *contemporaneity*, in the two senses established in this project's Introduction. First, at time of writing in 2016, many of the works mentioned above were published in the past five years. This chronologic contemporaneity, however, belies significant continuities between the genre's thematic and formal concerns and those of at least three other genres: "idea of India" books (dating back to Jawaharlal Nehru's 1946 *The Discovery of India*), "home to India" narratives (including books by Dhan Gopal Mukerji, Ved Mehta, and Santha Rama Rau), and India "travelogues" (most notably V.S. Naipaul's India trilogy). Thus, I read the

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[27] As I discuss elsewhere, the majority of "return-writers" are male. This has less to do with the demographic phenomenon of reverse migration itself than with the specific narrative form of the return-writing subgenre and the "walking and talking" methodology of encounter employed in its production. It is almost too obvious to note that women and men do not have equal access to public space in urban India. Women do not experience the same freedoms as their male counterparts, including the one that is most necessary for the apprehension of New India: the freedom to walk unmolested in the city. The 2012 gang rape and murder of Jyoti Singh Pandey in Munirka, South Delhi, has only heightened consciousness of the visibility and vulnerability of women in the city, many of whom experience the streets as spaces of potential danger, crowds as threatening menaces, and unknown men as possible assailants. See Shilpa Phadke, Sameera Khan, and Shilpa Ranade, *Why Loiter? Women and Risk on Mumbai Streets* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2011); Melissa Butcher, "Distinctly Delhi: Affect and exclusion in a crowded city," *Urban Theory Beyond the West*, ed. Tim Edensor and Mark Jayne (New York: Routledge, 2012); Ragini Tharoor Srinivasan, "The Rhetoric of Return: Diasporic Homecoming and the New Indian City," *Room One Thousand* 3 (2015) and "Unmoored: Passing, Slumming, and Return-Writing in New India," *Postcolonial Urban Outcasts: City Margins in South Asian Literature*, eds. M. Chakraborty and U. Al-Wazedi (forthcoming from Routledge).
[28] When the *New York Times* appointed a new foreign correspondent to India in May 2012, they chose Gardiner Harris, who had never before been to the country. In a blog, Harris asked *NYT* readers to recommend books of any genre "for a new arrival desperate to begin 'understanding' India." The recommendations he received were overwhelmingly those that this chapter engages: non-academic, nonfiction accounts of the emergence of New India. By that same token, as the anthropologist Orin Starn notes, books like Katherine Boo's *Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life and Death in a Mumbai Undercity* are increasingly "end[ing] up on [academic] syllabi, replacing writing by our colleagues" (8). *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* was gifted to all faculty and the entire incoming/transfer class of 2015 at the University of California, Berkeley, as part of the summer reading program. See Gardiner Harris, "Meet the NYT's New Foreign Correspondent in India," (India Ink, the *New York Times*, May 11, 2012); and Orin Starn, "Introduction," *Writing Culture and the Life of Anthropology*, ed. Starn. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

emergence genre as an intertextual web of relation and reference to both earlier and contemporaneous works of Indian Anglophone nonfiction, as well as an occasion to plumb the difference the narrative of global ascendance has made to contemporary narratives of discovery, travel, and return.

Second, and more significantly, the problem the genre presents is that of accessing the contemporary: of apprehending and writing the present that is India under the conditions of globalization. This is not a problem unique to nonfiction; as Anjaria notes in an essay on the state of Indian Anglophone novel criticism, "contemporaneity," in contrast to the contained narratives of normative history, "implies…an uncontrollable mess of synchronous elements that are ever-unfolding and, by their very nature, impossible to contain and classify."[29] However, the problem of contemporaneity takes on heightened significance when the writers in question are returnees from diaspora, drawn back to India by the facts of birth and heritage and confronted with the nation's global transformations. For these writers, the constitutive unruliness of the contemporary is coupled with the perspectival blinders of personal enmeshment—what we might call an internalized Raj nostalgia. They must cope with the eruptive and disruptive presence of what Suketu Mehta terms "memory mines," sudden and jarring recollections of the past that make it particularly challenging "to deal with the India of the present" (*MC* 38).

How are these return-writers, as I will call them, to see New India as it "really" is, given the inevitability of seeing it, in Amitava Kumar's words, "in terms of their own lives"? (*MR* 106). Expatriate writers go back to India to experience and participate in India's rise, but the ensuing narratives suggest that the nation's newness can only emerge through the testimony of the reverse migrant. This testimony is overdetermined by the returnee's idiosyncratic experience of time's passing, his individual perception of change. The India-returned writer finds an India transformed relative to the country he, or his parents, once left, in most cases, for higher education in the United States or the United Kingdom. Traversing the New Indian city, he looks in vain for a house that has been built over, a dirt road that has become a highway, or a temple that has become a shopping mall.[30] New India can thus be said to emerge from the conflation of the diasporic returnee's re-encounter with home—the newness he perceives in the flyover where there was once a cricket pitch, the newness he perceives in the gray hairs of his aging parents—and the nation's present relationship to its history and the world. The result is both a problem of abstraction for the writer—which he attempts to address by focusing on provincial, subaltern, and exceptional New Indians, whose life stories dominate the genre—and a problem of reception for the reader, faced with a text that alternates between ethnographic and literary modes.[31]

Finally, this *generic hybridity* of the emergence genre—which variously exploits the narrative conventions of memoir, ethnography, oral history, travel writing, and journalistic reportage—

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[29] Anjaria, 2015, 20.

[30] An early scene from Dasgupta's *Capital* illustrates this: "We set out, [my father] and my mother and I, for Karol Bagh. '15/64 Western Extension Area, Ajmal Khan Road,' he chanted momentously in the back of the car. We drove through the wide, fluid streets of the bureaucratic area…the entire area was bursting at the seams: shops and warehouses extended out onto the streets, apartments had grown upwards and outwards into every possible gap, and parked cars filled in the rest. We missed our turn and had to do a U-turn, a mistake that cost us half an hour…My father became increasingly upset as we penetrated deeper and deeper into the end-of-day clamour. 'Karol Bagh used to be a bagh,' he said, 'a garden. I used to ride my bike on these streets. What happened?'" (46-47).

[31] Given these generic contours, it is no coincidence that some of the writers under discussion here came out of creative writing programs, like Suketu Mehta, whose literary career began at the Iowa Writer's Workshop. Cf. Mark McGurl, *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

poses a particular challenge to scholars of Indian Anglophone literature, who have tended thus far to focus on how works like *Maximum City* can be read as "semi-autobiographical novel[s]."[32] Ankhi Mukherjee suggests that these narrative nonfictions "[subscribe] to the humanitarian aims and objectives we relate with the rise of English novel: social circulation and mobility, redistributive justice, articulations of equivocal forms of national belonging," thus "mak[ing] the distinction between fiction and nonfiction seem untenable."[33] The comparison with fiction also underlies Goswami's suggestion that emergence nonfiction "updates the once-dominant fictional genre of magical realism, both mixing the actual and the imagined, the observable and the invisible."[34]

In my view, the critical challenge is that novelistic and ethnographic genres are not mutually exclusive. While we might read Suketu Mehta's or other return-writer's "insider-outsider" narratives as offering novelistic treatments of the New Indian urban multitude, their highly textualized interpretations of encounters with other Indians equally reflect an ethnographic mode of realist apprehension and an anthropological imagination, in Anand Pandian's terms: a belief that, when confronted with the ordinary individual, "there are many others like him, scattered here and there . . . and beyond."[35] As Sengupta describes one of her subjects, Anupam, "Anupam is a prodigy…Likewise, he is an emblem…There are millions just like him…" (*EK* 56). Both for the anthropologist, Pandian, and the journalist, Sengupta, the identification of an individual as type is central to his or her hailing as informant.

Return-writers of the emergence genre produce other New Indians as informants—as the *native's* informants—and as tour guides, whose purchase on Indian "reality" is intended to redeem their own limited perspectives. Individual New Indians are rendered in this genre as character types, which in turn appear across texts. New India has its Gatsbys, do-gooders, professional women, suiciding farmers; there are poet-revolutionaries, artists-in-exile, CEOs, and petty politicians. Siddhartha Deb's Abdul Jabbar, an activist in Bhopal who runs an organization for widows, is Rana Dasgupta's Meenakshi, the self-appointed representative of Bhalswa settlement. For a moment, or a few pages, the entrepreneurial life trajectory of each New Indian seems, in Giridharadas's words, "to distill, in a single being, the new sense of hope gusting through India" (*IC* 32). In return-writing of the emergence genre, the informant's

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[32] Ipshita Ghose, "Bombay, Multipli-city: De-Marginalizing Urban Identities and Activities," *The Idea of the City: Early-Modern, Modern and Post-Modern Locations and Communities,* ed. Joan Fitzpatrick (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 204.

[33] "Interview with Dr. Ankhi Mukherjee, Author of *What is a Classic?*" (January 15, 2014); available online from <http://criticalmargins.com/2014/01/15/interview-ankhi-mukherjee-what-is-a-classic/>. Mukherjee is making reference to a broader discourse on the relationship between humanitarianism and the novel. Cf. Elizabeth Anker, *Fictions of Dignity: Embodying Human Rights in World Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012); Joseph Slaughter, *Human Rights, Inc.: The World Novel, Narrative Form, and International Law* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007).

[34] Goswami, 2012.

[35] Anand Pandian and M.P. Mariappan, *Ayya's Accounts: A Ledger of Hope in Modern India* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 164. In Pandian's own generically hybrid New India book, *Ayya's Accounts,* he translates his subject's, his grandfather's, words but also interprets them, returns to them, tries to tell the reader what they mean, and he does this "out of fairness" and professional calling (150). Instead of such mediated ethnographies, what we get from return-writers are texts that by and large allow their subjects to speak for themselves. By way of example, Dasgupta's *Capital* unfolds through a series of interviews in which Delhi's über-rich, from a real estate scion who calls himself "the chosen one" to a shopping-mall titan with "imperial" plans for shipping Punjabi farmers to plantations in Ethiopia, are allowed to voice their tragicomic visions of the world with little to no authorial pushback. See Ragini Tharoor Srinivasan, "Complicity and Critique," *Public Books* (October 15, 2014); and Srinivasan, "A Small Place in the World," *American Book Review* 36.6 (2015), 10, 15.

representativeness as type is all the more significant given that the return-writer is passing the proverbial baton of informancy on to this other, more supposedly authentic, global Indian—even as s/he, the returnee, continues to be interpellated as an informant in the West.[36]

To be clear: This is not an implicit or unconscious passing of the baton. It is a purposeful, deliberate strategy, and one that is itself narrated within the frames of the works in question. Sengupta describes *The End of Karma* as "a highly personal chronicle of today's India, told through the stories of ordinary Indian men and women who represent the yearnings of India's most transformative generation…I know they don't represent the whole of India. They are only seven in a billion" (*EK* 22). Siddhartha Deb takes the avowal of method one step further, by acknowledging that "when the writers needs the stories of people's lives…he or she depends on people who have a sense of their own trajectories and who are willing to impose form on the chaos of their experiences and memories.[37]

I am interested in emergence nonfiction's debt to fiction, as I will discuss in my reading of Chaudhuri's *Calcutta*. But reading emergence nonfictions solely in terms of novel-predecessors risks obscuring the vexed processes of information gathering and amateur participant-observation that precede each account of repatriation. It also risks obscuring the long tradition of Indian Anglophone nonfiction on which the emergence genre draws, and which, I would argue, is itself a case for more critical attention to be paid to these popular, journalistic works. The emergence genre is about the New India—but its thematic, political, and literary concerns are in no way *new*. Return-writing in particular has three generic antecedents that also pivot on the production, apprehension, and transmission of encounters with Indian Others: "idea of India" books, "home to India" narratives, and V.S. Naipaul's trilogy of India travelogues, which I will now discuss in turn before returning to Chaudhuri.[38]

"Idea of India" Books

What I am calling "idea of India" books are not necessarily those that advance their own ideas of India, but rather works, both scholarly and journalistic, concerned with the idea of India *as* idea, or as the name for the ideas of contradiction, plurality, and multiplicity. In *Imagining India*, a scholarly assessment of "ideas of India," Ronald Inden distinguishes between ideas of India issuing from "empirical realists" and "Romantic idealists."[39] For the empiricist, India is characterized by the paradoxical historical "fact" of having been subject to repeated conquering throughout the ages and yet "its ancient civilization [has] survived into the present more or less unchanged"; the "essence" of this civilization, it is further assumed, is the caste system, which is

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[36] To quote the title of a *New York Times* Sunday Book Review section last year which included works by Suketu Mehta, Amitava Kumar, Rana Dasgupta, and Anand Giridharadas: these are the books through which "India Explains Itself." John Williams, "India Explains Itself," *New York Times* Sunday Book Review (May 8, 2014).

[37] Deb, 2011, 14.

[38] This tri-part distinction is not hard and fast—many "home to India" narratives offer an "idea of India"; the latter two works of V.S. Naipaul's India trilogy were by definition narratives of return—but it is offered heuristically and with an eye to future studies of this ranging nonfiction field.

[39] Hegel interestingly merits a place in both camps. Ronald Inden, *Imagining India* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1990), 51. Cf. Balachandra Rajan, *Under Western Eyes: India From Milton to Macaulay* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999). In Rajan's reading, India actually marks a conceptual limit or obstacle to the philosophy of world history: "Hegel forgets his book in writing of India because India is another traditional name for forgetfulness. It is the place where the will to move on is challenged…history has passed through it and willed itself out of its snare. It remains vulnerable to its residual blandishments" (101).

an obstacle to India's progress.[40] The idealist comes to similar conclusions about Indian history and civilization, but attributes it to "an internal, spiritual nature"; in this view, the caste system becomes "the embodiment of a holist, organic vision of human community."[41] There is more than one way to skin the proverbial cat, and Inden shows how India has throughout history been imagined, read, and written in each of these forms and others: as an "area of darkness" and a beacon of light; as the product of Orientalist projection and of anti-colonial assertion; as a manifestation of nationalist critique and of diasporic nostalgia; as an imperialist project and an occupying force.

More journalistic "idea of India" books—including Sunil Khilnani's *The Idea of India,* Nandan Nilekani's *Imagining India: The Idea of a Renewed Nation,* and Shashi Tharoor's trilogy, *India: From Midnight to Millennium, The Elephant, the Tiger, and the Cellphone: Reflections on India, the Emerging 21st Century Power,* and *India Shastra: Reflections on the Nation in Our Time*—are also explorations of the idea of India as a land of exceptional and plural contradictions. "The old joke [is] that anything you say about India, the opposite is also true," writes Tharoor. "Quite often, the opposites exist quite cheerfully."[42] "[O]ur contrasts are clichés," Nilekani observes.[43] In fact, the idea of the contrast as the defining element of India is itself the cliché. This is important not only because it allows us to identify the common trope of *New* Indian contradiction as an extension of older imaginings of India (the New India discourse posits the nation's contest with China in the same moment as it declares India's inevitable defeat, and celebrates Indian billionaires on the *Forbes* list while lingering "behind the Beautiful Forevers"), but also because it foregrounds how India's *identity*—not its military, exports, natural resources, but its identity; in the language of foreign policy, its "soft power"—has been conceptualized as its primary political, social, cultural, and economic asset, its advantage and potential contribution to the world.

Idea of India books like Khilnani's produce India as an identity object of study, one on which the knower-writer must first confer "coherency" in order to produce knowledge about it. The resulting texts often proceed as apologias for the impossibility of coherency and the historical problem of figuring India as a functional totality, before then celebrating democratic India's ultimate triumph over illegibility. Idea of India books thus plumb the space between realism and idealism, between contradiction and coherency, between the impossibility of India and the fact of its real, tenacious hold on its subjects.

Idea of India books are also finally self-referential, involved in the naming and production of their own literary antecedents. In his exploration of Indian modern political history, Khilnani observes that almost all of the Indian nationalists—M.K. Gandhi, Vallabhbhai Patel, Subhash Chandra Bose, B.R. Ambedkar, Jawaharlal Nehru—"created and expressed [their public selves]" through the genre of the didactic autobiography which "fused picaresque personal adventures with the odyssey of the nation."[44] Gandhi's "personal adventures," styled as experiments with truth, were offered through narratives of return, as I discuss in the next sub-section. For Nehru, the personal adventure was the means by which to assert an ethics, politics, and philosophy of nationalism adequate to what would become postcolonial India.

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[40] Inden 55-57.
[41] Ibid., 73-74.
[42] Shashi Tharoor, "The Arriving Millions," *Outlook*, May 6, 2013.
[43] Nandan Nilekani, *Imagining India: The Idea of a Renewed Nation* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008), 1.
[44] Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 7.

Although he does not say so explicitly, what Khilnani calls "didactic autobiographies" were the first idea of India books: books that sought at once to assert the importance of an idea of Indian identity for the nation and for the Indian individual. The "discovery of India," as Nehru called it, required a return to the village masses, to India's "countryfolk." Traveling through the country in the 1920s and 1930s, Nehru discovered that "[India] was like some ancient palimpsest on which layer upon layer of thought and reverie had been inscribed, and yet no succeeding layer had completely hidden or erased what had been written previously." He wrote of his meetings with peasants, from the northern Pathan to the Tamil of the south, and his inculcation in them of an idea of "*Bharat Mata*," or Mother India: "this idea slowly soaked into their brains, their eyes would light up as if they had made a great discovery."[45] He tells them, "what counted ultimately were the people of India, people like them and me."[46]

In the well-known passage quoted above, Nehru is the generator of the idea of *Bharat Mata*. While he acknowledges the inspiration of the peasants, he nevertheless figures them as subjects of *his* nationalist tutelage. By contrast, return-writers—who do not bear Nehru's world-historical burden of national consolidation; who are heirs to the postcolonial critique of Nehruvian developmentalism; who are by and large chroniclers, not statesman, of the New India—forward ideas of India gleaned from the modern-day analogues of Nehru's peasant subjects, like Ramdas, a sixty-year-old Dalit cow-broker, driven out of his profession and into the ranks of the aspiring entrepreneur, whose story "was a quintessentially Indian story . . . of ruin and reinvention."[47] Nehru gives an idea of India to the ordinary people he meets; the return-writers derive India from their everyday encounters.

The differences of authorial position and address are clear. And yet, the popular nonfictions under discussion in this chapter evince a clear debt to Nehru, the didactic autobiography, and the "idea of India" text more generally—even if, as will become clear later one, that debt is routed through Naipaul's "re-discovery" of India. Return-writing of the emergence genre shares with the didactic autobiographies the allegorical twinning of the individual's narrative of awakening and that of the nation, what we might call, following Gérard Genette, the simultaneous presentation of two minimal narrative forms.[48] In the didactic autobiography, the macrohistorical narrative of India's achievement of independence is sutured to the nationalist's narrative of the nation-people's self-discovery. In return-writing, the macrohistorical narrative of India's economic rise is sutured to the narrative of return. Return-writing further shares Nehru's discovery-through-travel method and even, at times, his faith in the cross-cultural and cross-caste mutual intelligibility of all Indians. In speaking to the peasants, Nehru felt the embrace of their mutual recognition; it was, he wrote, a deep understanding between kinsmen.

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[45] Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (New York: Anchor Books, 1960 [1946]), 29-30.

[46] Ibid., 29.

[47] Akash Kapur, *India Becoming: A Portrait of Life in Modern India* (New York: Riverhead, 2012), 285.

[48] In *Narrative Discourse*, Genette proposes that every narrative has a minimal form. For example, the minimal form of Marcel Proust's *À La Recherche du Temps Perdu* is "Marcel becomes a writer." Every iterative passage and each extended metaphor in the *Recherche* contributes, in the final instance, to the telling of that story. If we extend Genette's argument to the level of genre, then every genre can be understood as a set of works sharing a minimal narrative form. "Boy and girl fall in love," is the minimal form of chick lit; "man or woman becomes an artist," is the minimal *Künstlerroman*. I am invoking Genette as an alternative to simply reading these works as nonfictional analogues to the national allegory or *Bildungsroman*, an idea I hope to complicate by also drawing our attention to what is equally the genre's *triangulation* of nation, writer, and informing Other. Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983).

We are accustomed to a certain postcolonial discourse on exile and the expatriate, what we might shorthand as the "imaginary homelands" discourse of the Rushdie moment.[49] Thus, in his introduction to *Away*, an edited volume of "expatriate" Indian writing, Amitava Kumar makes this observation:

> …I am struck once again by how often Indian—or desi—writers in the West return to India in what they write. This is not simply a case of nostalgia. Distance produces a shift in perspective, and the immigrant writers find that they are discovering not only the new country, but also the place that they have left behind. A new India is explored and mapped in the imagination of the writer abroad…[50]

Return in the above account, as in the "imaginary homelands" discourse, is imaginative and literary; it is return from a distance ("in the imagination of the writer abroad") and predicated on distance ("the place that they have left behind"). It is also return as a compensatory mechanism for migration; fearful of the loss of authenticity, the Indian writer "returns" to India as subject matter. What it is not, and what I want to draw our attention to in the below discussion, is return as a practice of physically, corporeally closing the temporal and spatial gap between India and Britain, India and the United States, or wherever else the writer in question has also put down roots. To be clear: this "real" return is not non-literary or unimaginative; rather, it results in a different form of literary registration.

What I am calling "Home to India" narratives, after Santha Rama Rau's 1945 book of that name, continue, or consummate, the stories of "Away" collected in Kumar's edited volume. But this is not, I want to stress, a periodizing move on my part; rather, it is a thematic one, a critical description of a different form of literary return. If the exile of *Away* was a figure preoccupied with the vantage afforded by departure, then the "home to India" writer seeks to actually reclaim the Indian life s/he might have lived, in addition to the Indian man or "woman I might have become" (*EK* 60). Both they and the return-writers are not only interested in understanding India, and articulating ideas of the nation, but also in understanding who they might have been had they stayed in India, or been born there, or who their children would be, if they could commit to return.

"There was a great deal about India that was worth learning," Rau writes, recalling her 1939 return to her grandmother's home in Bombay after years in London, "but somehow I didn't have the equipment to begin…I wasn't a 'real Indian.' The truth faced me at every turn…"[51] For Rau, the challenge is how to contribute to the negotiation of the terms of India's independence from the British empire, when she herself has been brought up in Europe and educated in England. She seeks to prove herself to India, to establish herself as worthy of participation in an independent Indian public sphere:

> Brought up in Europe and educated in preparatory and public schools in England, we felt that [Indian] conventions were not only retrogressive and socially crippling to the country, but also a little ridiculous. We thought at the time that one needed the perspective of travel to see these things. But we were only flattering ourselves, for later we

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[49] Cf. Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile and other essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 186; *Representations of the Intellectual* (London: Vintage Books, 1994), 59.

[50] Amitava Kumar, "Introduction," *Away: The Indian Writer as an Expatriate* (New York: Routledge, 2004), xiv.

[51] Santha Rama Rau, *Home to India* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), 98-99.

found many young Indians who had lived at home all their lives and had a far clearer picture of India's social problems and, moreover, were doing a great deal more toward solving them than we ever thought of doing.[52]

Rau's memoir is a narrative of going home that strives, above all, to be worthy of home.[53] In Rau's writing, there is a tacit self-critique of having left India in the first place, as well as a humbling awareness that the nation, India, is capable of functioning, thriving, and arriving into the future *without* her presence. As Rau realizes, it is not that India has to "prove itself" to the returnee, so much as the returnee has to have "something to contribute to Indian life."[54] Over half a century later, Sengupta will similarly struggle to square the idea that "[India] had done just fine without us [N.R.I.s]" (*EK* 81).

"Home to India" narratives are explorations of diasporic expendability.[55] They express a desire for authenticity that is also a desire for a position of legitimacy from which to speak and act. It is desire that emphasizes the action-oriented contours of ethno-national identification, while closing the distance-gap that enables the long-distance nationalist politics of diasporic unaccountability. "Home to India" narratives thus evince both their subject's vulnerability and opportunism, their simultaneous pursuits of responsibility and negotiation of the exilic perspective. In this light, we might also read Dhan Gopal Mukherji's *Disillusioned India* and Ved Mehta's *Walking the Indian Streets,* as well as M.K. Gandhi's *The Story of My Experiments with Truth,* as "home to India" narratives.[56] Since Gandhi's memoir is frequently read as a nationalist, or didactic, autobiography in Khilnani's terms, let me offer a few additional thoughts on that particular text.

As he travels between Britain, South Africa, and India, Gandhi experiences an awakening "sense of duty to [the] motherland"; after years in South Africa, he feels "that [he] should be of more service in India."[57] This realization is stressed again and again throughout the text, as Gandhi describes multiple scenes of what we might term "passing" and "slumming."[58] As a civil

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[52] Ibid., 25.

[53] Cf. Bakirathi Mani, *Aspiring to Home: South Asians in America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012). For Bakirathi Mani, "aspiring to home" is a mode of managing the affiliative imperatives of normative multicultural nationalism with the desire to participate in specifically, legibly "South Asian" modes of popular culture and expressive relations. By contrast, becoming "worthy of home" is arguably what motivated Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak to found the Pares Chandra and Sivani Chakravorty Memorial Literary Project in 1997, which runs schools in rural West Bengal, and diplomat-writer Shashi Tharoor to stand for election as a Member of Parliament from Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, in 2009.

[54] Rau 189, 143.

[55] Such expendability is reflected in lines like this: "A well-heeled editor in Delhi had snorted that N.R.I. should really stand for Not Required Indians…She was right" (*EK* 81).

[56] Chetan Bhagat, *What Young India Wants* (Blaft, 2014)); *Making India Awesome: Essays and Columns* (Rupa Publications, 2015).

[57] M.K. Gandhi, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (Beacon Press, 1957), 218-219.

[58] In a related essay, I argue, following a provocation from Snehal Shingavi, that Suketu Mehta's *Maximum City* is fundamentally about the co-habitance of "passing" and "slumming" as mechanisms through which the outcasted returnee, Mehta, might stage his literary apprehension of the New India. Terms such as "passing" and "slumming" are not typically used to describe the activities of the Mahatma, but I would argue that Gandhi's text has more in common with Mehta's than at first meets the eye. For the discussion of *Maximum City,* see Srinivasan 2016. On slumming, see Tony Seaton, "Wanting to Live with Common People…? The Literary Evolution of Slumming," *Slum Tourism: Poverty, Power and Ethics*. Ed. Fabian Frenzel, Ko Koens, and Malte Steinbrink, 21-48 (New York: Routledge, 2012), 28. Cf. Snehal Shingavi, "Capitalism, Caste, and Con-Games in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*." *Postcolonial Text* 9.3 (2014): 1-16.

rights activist in South Africa, where he lives and works over a period of two decades in the late 1800s and early 1900s, Gandhi learns to adopt the dress of the Indian indentured laborers. Years later, in Bombay, he again modifies his clothing in order to "pass muster as a poor man."[59] At various points in the narrative, he describes his desire to make "a tour through India travelling third class, and of acquainting [himself] with the hardships of third class passengers."[60] Through these performances, Gandhi—the paradigmatic global icon of authentic Indianness[61]—both produces himself as an Indian native and seeks access to those subjects who can instruct him in the appropriate disposition, dress, and demeanor of a "real" Indian. What emerges, I would argue, is the difference between the arguably essentialist pursuit of native truths from the Other and, contrastingly, the pursuit of an Other who gives one purchase on another version of oneself. Put differently, this is the distinction between the mediated articulation of the informant's experience, on the one hand, and the articulation of a relation to an individual serving as a native's informant, on the other.

We see this distinction at work in *A Matter of Rats: A Short Biography of Patna,* Amitava Kumar's own entrant into the emergence genre, in which he explores how proximity, as opposed to the "distance" he explored in *Away,* can produce shifts in perspective.[62] In *A Matter of Rats*, he ends up "search[ing] for that which would have engaged [him] most fully" if, instead of moving to the United States, he had never left India (*MR* xiii). Kumar, like Rau, is fascinated by those of his peers who stayed behind in India, who resisted the lure of the West, finding ways to live in and even contribute to the developing nation. He visits a friend who started a school for low-caste Musahar children and describes the work of Samta Rai, an activist who performs street plays and organizes arts festival in Patna. "I am struck by the fact that I left Patna in search of a life of comfort," Kumar writes. "I am haunted by the zeal and affection of a person who came to Patna and stayed there in the hope of bringing about social change" (*MR* 84). By contrast, he is keenly aware of the limits of his ability, as a foreign-returned writer, to bring about change in India: "[Neither] the *chappals* that I had photographed, nor anything else written about their wearer, were going to get toys for Shakeel Ahmad's five-year-old in time for Eid (*MR* 59).

V.S. Naipaul's India Trilogy

V.S. Naipaul's trilogy of India travelogues—*An Area of Darkness: A Discovery of India*, *India: A Wounded Civilization,* and *India: A Million Mutinies Now*—mediates the emergence genre's relation to both the "idea of India" and "home to India" narratives. Thus, while return-writers do not avow or seem aware of their debts to Nehru or Gandhi, nor to Ved Mehta and Rau, they uniformly credit Naipaul as inspiration. For Shashi Tharoor, Naipaul is the "True Writer," one who has never allowed competing attachments, professional or personal, to interfere with his vocation.[63]

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[59] Gandhi, 1957, 377.
[60] Ibid., 238.
[61] Cf. Bishnupriya Ghosh, *Global Icons: Apertures to the Popular* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).
[62] Kumar distinguishes between three versions of Patna, the city to which he returns frequently from the United States in order to visit his aging parents. The first is the Patna of diasporic subjects who emigrated from India and now treat Patna like an unwanted "leftover": "As soon as they land at Patna airport, they show how uncomfortable they are in their hometown—such humidity! Such filth!" (*MR* 50). Residents of the first Patna are non-residents like Kumar, or rather, the ugliest version of the non-resident. The second Patna belongs to those who stayed in India, who belong "nowhere else" and who alone understand daily life in the city. The third is the Patna of those for whom it is "a matter of life and death," i.e., those for whom Patna either represents an activist calling or a state of abjection. A resident of the first Patna, Kumar strives to see the city as if he lived in the second.
[63] Shashi Tharoor, *Bookless in Baghdad: Reflections on Writing and Writers* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2005).

Amitava Kumar attributes to Naipaul his desire to take up the writer's vocation; in *A Matter of Rats*, he responds to both V.S. and his brother Shiva Naipaul's writings on Bihar.[64] "My discovery of Naipaul," Amit Chaudhuri says, "became part of my discovery of myself as a writer."[65] While writing *Maximum City,* Suketu Mehta reportedly read the India trilogy "like a textbook."[66]

It has already been observed that Naipaul is "a prototype [who has] been cloned many times over in the Indian subcontinent,"[67] with Dom Moraes, Pankaj Mishra, and Aatish Taseer employing the familiar tropes of the India trilogy (e.g., amateur ethnography, cynical history, hysterical realism[68]) in their own travel writing. The return-writers' professions of affiliation are striking, then, not because they are unusual, but because the emergence narrative of India's *rise* has been so closely modeled on Naipaul's famous critiques of India's *fall*. Critics have long noted Naipaul's tendency to, in Edward Said's words, "indict guerrillas for their pretensions rather than indict the imperialism and social injustice that drove them to insurrection."[69] Beyond Naipaul's seeming quietism, there is the fact that he has never seemed to like much of the world outside his chosen England. The India trilogy is particularly well known, and has drawn repeated censure, for each volume's indictment of India's mimicry of the West, the tenacity of the caste system, the Indian penchant for symbolism over action, and the failures of Gandhian social reform, among other ills.

But the scholarly tides are now turning toward a reconsideration of the origins, force, and effects of Naipaul's critical impetus. Sanjay Krishnan argues that while Naipaul may have played "the role of prejudiced if self-pitying returnee," he was also working through and against "layers of hidden emotions associated with indenture."[70] What earlier critics, like Rob Nixon, read as Naipaul's willful dismissal of the significance of subaltern histories becomes in Krishnan's account a "heavily ironic" commentary on the author's own "historical derangement."[71] Naipaul's India trilogy can in this light be understood as a commentary on the author's personal, familial, and communal history, since his total oeuvre is an attempt to acquire the knowledge—of

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[64] Amitava Kumar, *Bombay-London-New York* (New York: Routledge, 2002),118.

[65] Amit Chaudhuri, "Nobel Thoughts," *The Guardian* (October 12, 2001).

[66] Karan Mahajan, "Interview with Suketu Mehta." *The Believer* (Feb 2008).

[67] Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Where Does He Come From?" *London Review of Books* 29.21 (November 2007), 7-9.

[68] Cf. James Wood, *The Irresponsible Self: On Laughter and the Novel* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004). Suketu Mehta begins *Maximum City* by detailing the indignities Bombay visits upon his family after their return. "You are not from here," the city says, "you are not Indian, so you deserve to be ripped off" (*MC* 29-30). Worse still, Mehta's children contract dysentery: "The food and the water in Bombay, India's most modern city, are contaminated with shit," he writes. "We have been feeding our son shit" (*MC* 28). In Amitava Kumar's words, this is a classic example of "hysterical realism" or "hysteria as travel writing" (*MR* 39), a narrative form Mehta borrows from Naipaul and his brother, Shiva.

[69] Said, 2000, 100.

[70] Krishnan, 2012, 439.

[71] Ibid., 435-436. Cf. Rob Nixon, *London Calling: V.S. Naipaul, Postcolonial Mandarin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). In *London Calling*, the classic assessment of Naipaul as a "postcolonial mandarin," Rob Nixon charges that Naipaul's turn to travel writing enables the novelist to adopt and exploit a "semiethnographic, distanced, analytic mode" of writing, on the one hand, and "an autobiographical, subjective, emotionally entangled" mode, on the other (15). The Naipaulian travelogue effects at once a critically disinterested posture toward the world from which the writer is always already an exiled "outsider" (in his own self-description), as well as an intimate, implicated relation to the postcolonial societies in which he travels as an "insider." Nixon reads this dual posture, coupled with the "suspect" adoption of "para-ethnographic" methods in the tradition of Victorian travel writing, as having duped Anglo-American critics, who eagerly embraced Naipaul as an authority on the non-West, over protests from scholars ethically and authentically located in the "Third World."

self, community, history, world—that "wasn't there," to excavate "the epistemic fracturing in which he is implicated."[72]

Krishnan's reading informs my take on the India trilogy as a deeply personal, even anguished, attempt by Naipaul to account for India's tenacious pull on far-flung, "doubly diasporic"[73] subjects like himself. "India is for me a difficult country," he famously wrote. "It isn't my home and cannot be my home; and yet I cannot reject it or be indifferent to it; I cannot travel only for the sights. I am at once too close and too far."[74] This congenital ambivalence motors the India trilogy. Naipaul feels "contempt" for many of the Indians he meets, but also "straining love."[75] He deplores India's "creative incapacity . . . intellectual depletion . . . defenselessness" and, in a pointed riposte to nationalist writers, "the inadequacy of every Indian's idea of India" (*WC* 121). At the same time, "I did not want India to sink," he writes, "the mere thought was painful" (*AD* 263).

At the heart of this tension is the fact that the Indian with an inadequate idea of India is Naipaul himself—and he knows it. In the prelude to *An Area of Darkness*, Naipaul describes the tragicomic, bureaucratic nightmare of trying to secure the proper permits to reclaim two liquor bottles that were seized from him at customs upon his arrival in Bombay. It is stiflingly hot; nobody seems to know from whom Naipaul needs to secure which permit; everyone gives out half information. Naipaul is aggrieved. When he shares this misadventure with a businessman "friend of a friend," however, Naipaul himself is berated. "Always the heat or the water with you people from outside," the Indian businessman says. "You make up your minds about India before coming to the country. You've been reading the wrong books" (*AD* 15-16).

This accusation, which Naipaul internalizes as "an injustice," then motivates *An Area of Darkness.* No, he responds in the opening pages of the first chapter to the businessman who is now his imaginary interlocutor: "I had read any number of the [right] books" (*AD* 21). The trouble is that books do not give Naipaul adequate purchase on the India that he grew up with in Trinidad, an India apparent in the Hindi spoken by the Indo-Trinidadians, an India that "lay about us in things" (*AD* 23) and yet was "featureless" (*AD* 24). For Naipaul, return is an attempt to make up for the inadequacy of textual representation and the vexed pull of a place that exists only in "phantasmal memories" (*WC* xi). Return fulfils a lifelong desire to recover, revisit, and re-inhabit the past, and yet it is a moving horizon, an impossible aspiration, which, when attempted, doesn't entirely live up to its promise.

Like Naipaul, who sat in the British Museum reading Spanish documents about his Trinidad, a world away, each return-writer seeks "to activate…feeling[s] of unease,"[76] to move out of the "darkness" of ignorance about history, home, and heritage into the light of self-knowledge. This re-discovery of India first takes auto-didactic form. Giridharadas fills his shelves with books about India, "as though their presence alone would teach [him] about caste, Indian democracy, Kashmir, the leading industrialists" (*IC* 23). Suketu Mehta takes "commissions from the West" to write articles about India at the close of the twentieth century; eventually, he realizes he has "to live there again…to update my India" (*MC* 13, 38). "There are many

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[72] Krishnan, 2012, 451.
[73] I am indebted to Nasia Anam for this phrase.
[74] V.S. Naipaul, *India: A Wounded Civilization* (New York: Knopf, 1976), x. Hereafter cited internally as *WC.*
[75] V.S. Naipaul, *An Area of Darkness: A Discovery of India* (New York: Vintage Book, 1964), 249. Hereafter cited internally as *AD.*
[76] Krishnan 451, 436.

Bombays," he writes, "I wanted to find *mine*" (*MC* 13, my emphasis). In *Calcutta*, Chaudhuri occasionally interrupts the primary narrative to offer teacherly passages, like this one on the rise and fall of the Bengali language: "Let's take a brief look at the word 'Bengali,'" he writes, given "the decline and marginalization of the Bengali language, through the disappearance of the *bhadralok* class; through the processes of globalization" (*C* 95). It is simultaneously a mode of self-address and urgent pedagogy.

To be clear: If, reading Naipaul in 2016, *he* sounds like *them* ("The Bombay stock market had boomed. Papu, a twenty-nine-year-old stockbroker, had made more money in the last five years than his father had made in all his working life"[77]), it is because *they*, the return-writers, have made conscious and unconscious efforts to sound like *him*. For instance, return-writing of the emergence genre draws on Naipaul in its attitude to history: For Naipaul, India's primary ill is its "intellectual depletion" (*WC* 7), owing to the "established destitution" (*WC* 20) of a nation "often invaded, conquered, plundered" (*WC* 36). In Dasgupta's *Capital*, Delhi has had its "values destroyed" repeatedly throughout history; its people are characterized by an "anxiety of loss" and bear a "traumatized culture" (*CD* 149, 150, 193).

By way of another example, consider this passage from *India Calling:* "At first, India had felt alien to me: alien in its crowds and strange phraseology, alien in its probing of my native place, alien in its lack of enthusiasm for my arrival. My old lenses were still in place—India the exhausting, difficulty country—and so I saw only what I had always seen" (*IC* 22). This is *Naipaul's* lens, Naipaul's descriptive apparatus. Naipaul, too, writes constantly of being "of the crowd"—"Bombay is a crowd" (*MM* 1); "Always in India this feeling of a crowd" (*MM* 426)—in an India that is indifferent to him: "I entered a shop or a restaurant and awaited a special quality of response. And there was nothing" (*AD* 39). His India is also enervating; "To be in Bombay was to be exhausted" (*AD* 9). The question of sight, too, is one fundamental to Naipaul's oeuvre. In addition to the trope of darkness which animates the trilogy, there is the problem of apprehension endemic to migration itself. When Giridharadas laments his inability to see more than what he "had always seen," he invokes Naipaul as well. As Naipaul writes in *The Enigma of Arrival,* "I saw what I saw very clearly. But I didn't know what I was looking at."[78]

Such echoes of Naipaul are no mere marketing-ploy, I want to suggest, nor simply another instantiation of Harold Bloom's "anxiety of influence."[79] Rather, the echo emerges from the fact that, for the new diasporic repatriate, as for Naipaul, the rise of India is ultimately an epistemological break: an occasion to learn about India and its New Indians, to reclaim "the knowledge [that] wasn't there."[80] But the return-writers do not share Naipaul's history of derangement. The formal congruence between return-writing and the trilogy thus begs two different, but related responses: first, it demands that we view critically the return-writer's ventriloquism of Naipaul's critical impetus; second, it demands that we read Naipaul more generously, with an eye to the professions of affiliation, identification, and belonging that the return-writers in turn have offered and pursued.

Though the India trilogy predates India's official economic liberalization, the rise of India is Naipaul's subject as well. *A Million Mutinies Now* explicitly derives its critical force from India's aspirations of global emergence. As Naipaul would reflect in 2011, the volume "was dedicated to

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[77] V.S. Naipaul, *India: A Million Mutinies Now* (New York: Viking, 1990), 9. Hereafter cited internally as *MM*.

[78] V.S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival* (New York: Vintage Books, 1987), 7.

[79] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

[80] V.S. Naipaul, "Two Worlds," *PMLA* 117.3, 479-486 (May 2002), 482.

[the idea] that India was, in the simplest way, on the move, that all over the vast country men and women had moved out of the cramped ways and expectations of their parents and grandparents, and were expecting more."[81] This, at the risk of overstatement, is the narrative of the emergence genre, what in 2016 is still being described as a narrative of young Indians, whose "demands are reshaping the country" (*EK* 12). Deb writes, "A country that has seen a sudden infusion of wealth and a rapid disengagement with its past tends to throw up people who are travelling very quickly and seem to have no clear antecedents."[82] It is as if the present-contemporary emergence genre is still seeking to tell the stories that Naipaul found, and told, in 1988: "The new world was so new…people had travelled so far so fast that many active people had a success story to tell, their own sometimes, or that of someone in their family" (*MM* 171).

Return-writing thus shares with Naipaul's trilogy the narrative logic of ethnography: the writer-narrator enters the field of New India, apprehends the lives and cultures of a set of subject-informants, and then leaves the field in order to metabolize and write about it. The writer becomes a knower by "demonstrating distance from a reality once held in close observation."[83] By that same token, both Naipaul and the return-writers are attempting to "[close] the distance…between the subject and object of knowledge," ever constrained by the fact that "to legitimately speak for an identity object of study one must be able to speak *as* it, even as such speaking threatens to strip subjects of epistemological authority over everything they are not."[84] What is at stake here is not only a form of amateur ethnography, but also a form of identity knowledge, a literary practice, and an exercise in horizontal relation, through which the diasporic subject attempts to identify and identify *with* his national Others—those he might have been, and those he could still be.

We are not accustomed to reading Naipaul as enacting any kind of horizontalism. He is the consummate individual and champion of literary autonomy, one whose voice can be heard in that of the narrator of *A Way in the World*, who rejects a man who appeals to him on the level of identity politics by saying, "I wished…to belong to myself."[85] "I found myself at an early age looking inwards" (*MM* 159). This rejection of identification with others is marshaled to considerable effect in the travelogues, though it is often conflated with what for Naipaul is the horror of Indian poverty. Driving past Dharavi slum in Bombay, he writes: "It had been hard enough to drive past the area. It was harder to imagine what it was like living there" (*MM* 59). Visiting a Sena official in a millworkers' tenement, Naipaul feels "so demoralized, so choked, driven so near to a stomach-heave, by the smell at the entrance…and then, in the suddenly dark passage, by the thick warm smell, catching at my throat, of blocked drains" (*MM* 60).

Such passages have led readers like Kumar to note that Naipaul's "dismissal of India is no ordinary dismissal: it is an act of willful negation, an attempt to find an identity that sheds all its former psychological baggage" (*MR* 38). In Nixon's view, Naipaul takes "rhetorical advantage" of his readers, especially Anglo-American critics, overemphasizing his otherness from India and his exilic standpoint in order to mask his metropolitan locatedness. "A narrative of dislocation," Nixon charges, "ultimately bolsters the myth of [Naipaul's] detachment."[86] Nixon is right to

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[81] V.S. Naipaul, "Preface (2011)," *India: A Million Mutinies Now* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011 [1990]), xv.
[82] Deb, 2011, 41.
[83] Patricia Clough, *The End(s) of Ethnography: From Realism to Social Criticism* (Peter Lang, 1992), xiv.
[84] Robyn Wiegman, *Object Lessons* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 7.
[85] V.S. Naipaul, *A Way in the World* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 18.
[86] Nixon, 1992, 18.

question Naipaul's detachment; in the India trilogy, Naipaul's posture of detachment is at best a mask, held shakily aloft. Unlike Nixon, however, I don't believe that Naipaul can or does ever "escape" what he critiques.[87]

In the first and third volumes of the trilogy, Naipaul is consistently engaged in performative relations of identifications with and to other Indians. As he listens to the stories of "ordinary" Indians, he makes particular note of observations and revelations to which he can then respond, "I understood what he meant. It was what I felt—in a lesser and different way— about my own Indian family background in far-off Trinidad" (*MM* 157). Or, listening to an elderly publisher discuss his first encounters with a printing press in Delhi in 1911, "I felt he was speaking for me" (*MM* 414). Equally, Naipaul requires friends in India, connections to whom to return, and people who can attest publically that he, Naipaul, isn't "a three-day tourist" (*MM* 512), but someone who belongs.

Return-writers also seek to be seen as locals, not tourists—to communicate, in their comportment, that, in Suketu Mehta's words, "[w]e are Indian, and we will pay Indian rates!" (*MC* 30). By way of another example, the final pages of *India Calling* are an extended effort by Giridharadas to write himself into the Indian story, by "imagin[ing] and reimagin[ing]…places" with one of his subjects. He compares himself to Ravindra, who, "began in a *mohalla* in Bhiwapur, and had fought to reach Umred, then Nagpur, then Bombay, and through it, the outer world. I was born in that outer world and had come to Bombay, then Nagpur, then Umred, and, finally, Bhiwapur" (*IC* 253-254). Inverse spatial journeys are resolved here through an assertion of temporal, spatial, and experiential contemporaneity that echoes both Nehru's search for "unity"—his location of "that tremendous impress of oneness" that sustains not despite, but through India's "diversity and infinite variety"[88]—and Naipaul's desires to see, cathect, and belong.

An Area of Darkness is bookended by two scenes of recognition and misrecognition, striking in their contrast and congruence. In the first chapter, while describing his childhood in Trinidad, Naipaul describes his identification with a fellow student of Indian origin in his Port of Spain class. He feels at once the "pleasure" of recognition and with it "a new tenderness for that boy, and a sadness for our common loss" (*AD* 30)—the loss of India. In the second to last chapter, Naipaul recounts a visit to his ancestral village, where a man name Ramachandra appeals to Naipaul for financial assistance in order to pursue some litigation related, supposedly, to a parcel of Naipaul's own grandfather's land. Naipaul refuses diplomatically; then,

> Outright refusal didn't release me. Release would come only when I left…Ramachandra kept up with me, smiling, bidding me farewell, proclaiming his possession of me till the last…Too much had been assumed; I felt overwhelmed; I wished to extricate myself at once. (*AD* 285-286)

Here is the language that the narrator of *A Way in the World* will later echo: an assertion of self-possession, a denial of ancestral ties, the rejection of the Indian other's claims on him, at once familial and material. And yet, this scene remains one of identification, for, in rejecting the interpellation by Ramachandra, Naipaul must both acknowledge and react to being hailed. Yes, his response is to leave the village, which he does with a measure of "self-reproach" (*AD* 286), but

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[87] Ibid., 28.
[88] Nehru, 1946, 27.

what is most significant, what cannot be overstated, is that Naipaul then returns to India, again and again. Naipaul writes two more volumes on India. He continues to respond to the call.

If Naipaul were an anthropologist, he might be credited with what Kiran Narayan calls "regular returns to a field site": returns that enable "a better understanding of how individuals creatively shape themselves and their societies through time."[89] In fact, this "better understanding" is what Naipaul himself is after throughout the trilogy, particularly in its final volume, *A Million Mutinies Now*, which he, on reflection years later, described as an attempt to understand "what I hadn't understood in 1962…the extent to which India had been restored to itself" (*MM* 517).

Two narratives of repeat encounter in *Million Mutinies*—one with a "friend," Sugar, and one with Aziz, a man first identified in *Area of Darkness* as "a servant" (*AD* 121)—exemplify this point, and reveal a Naipaul engaged not in acts of rejection and dismissal, but repeat efforts to connect, spanning decades. Sugar and Aziz are both subjects of Naipaul's and his friends; they are others and at the same time connections who remember things about Naipaul's past visits to India, aspects of Naipaul himself, that Naipaul "had forgotten" (*MM* 216). In 1988, Naipaul has known Sugar for over twenty years, having met him and seen his parents' house in Madras in the early 1960s, and visited him again on repeat trips that decade. But it is only in the late 1980s, after two decades, that Naipaul is ready to acknowledge the strength of this bond: "for the first time since I had known him I asked him directly about his life" (*MM* 214). Just as with Sugar, it takes over two decades for Naipaul to ask Aziz this simple question: "Where had he been born?" (*MM* 511). While Naipaul professes to hold Sugar at a distance, the questions he asks Sugar bespeak a desire for intimacy: "whether he had had a happy life" (*MM* 214); "Why did you like me in 1962?" (*MM* 242). These are questions that reveal Naipaul's desire to belong to a community, to a nation, to a people, and not, finally, only to himself.

CALCUTTA'S CALLINGS

Six years after Chaudhuri returned to India, his agent pressed him to mount the emergence genre bandwagon. Chaudhuri demurred. Having fictionalized Calcutta in three previous novels, he feared he could no longer "tap the magic of its neighborhoods" (*C* 82-83). His agent wanted a book like *Maximum City,* which Chaudhuri read as a "creation-myth" for global India's "unprecedented, amoral provenance."[90] In his view, it would be impossible to write such a creation-myth for Calcutta[91], which, with its Left politics, stagnant economy, and outdated brand of urban modernity, plainly did not belong to the "new universe" of New India.[92]

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[89] Kiran Narayan, "How Native is a Native Anthropologist?" *American anthropologist* 95.3, 671-686 (1993), 677.
[90] Chaudhuri, "New Perspective."
[91] In order to assimilate the city's English name to its Bengali name and pronunciation, Calcutta was officially renamed and spelled "Kolkata" in 2001. This name-change was part of a wave of nationalist vernacularization that had, for example, earlier substituted "Mumbai" for Bombay and "Chennai" for Madras, and, in 2016, "Gurugram" for Gurgaon.
[92] Calcutta/Kolkata has always had a complicated relationship with the neoliberal currents of privatization and global capitalism embraced by the Indian national government. The city exists within the nation's borders, but as an internal "Other" that presents a counter-vision to the neoliberal imaginary on display in cities like Bombay/Mumbai and Delhi. West Bengal in general is considered "a laggard in terms of industrial growth" in India, despite having been the nation's most industrialized state at the time of independence. See Raka Ray and Seemin Qayum, *Cultures*

Two years later, Chaudhuri committed to the nonfiction project, which would take shape as a collection of nine interlocking essays. In *Calcutta's* opening essay, "A Purchase," he describes his change of heart as the result of a provocation from the poet Utpal Kumar Basu. Utpalda, as Chaudhuri calls him, recounts conversations overheard in 2003, or thereabouts, involving an unnamed homeless woman, who the poet calls "khurima" in Bengali, or aunt. Chaudhuri swiftly transposes the generic noun into a proper name—"Khurima"—and refers to the woman as such. People like Khurima, Utpalda tells Chaudhuri, are actually full of street wisdom. "We may be beggars," she reportedly told a policeman, "but we aren't mad" (*C* 4).

"*Erai amader nagarik*," the poet tells the novelist. "*These* are our citizens" (*C* 4). Chaudhuri professes having internalized Basu's comment as a revelation and a command:

> The fact that stories could circulate about, and emanate from, people who lived here now, including those I didn't notice, perhaps pointed to a sort of subtle but vigorous regeneration. And was my move here—to a city I no longer admired—as a sort of reluctant 'citizen' one of these stories too? (*C* 4)

Perhaps, to a reader encountering Chaudhuri for the first time, this might seem like an ingenuous question. Close readers of his oeuvre, however, will know that as a novelist, Chaudhuri has always been attentive to how the circulation of fragmentary and aphoristic narratives—"the irrelevances and digressions that make up lives," as the narrator of *A Strange and Sublime Address* puts it[93]—gives texture and shape to urban life. Thus, his questioning gesture of dawning self-awareness ("And was my move here…one of these stories too?") is an ironic one, reflecting, not his surprise that other inhabitants of the city (non-writers, locals, those without social standing) might seek to give narrative form to their experiences of it, but rather the fact that he, a returnee from diaspora, might belong to the same time-space as Khurima, the policeman, and the eavesdropping Utpalda—that they are actually *contemporaries*. It also reflects a writerly disposition that Chaudhuri, at this point in the narrative of *Calcutta's* formation, shares with Naipaul: "the idea of the writer as a man with an internal life, a man drawing it all out of his own entrails, magically reading the externals of things" (*MM* 511).

Growing up in Bombay, Chaudhuri "thought constantly of Calcutta" (*C* 45). Later, from his diasporic vantage in England, he experienced "random and involuntary yearning[s]…a desire, like a muted undercurrent, to go to [Calcutta's] Park Street" (*C* 44-45). He satisfied these yearnings in the writing of his first three novellas set, to greater and lesser degrees, in Calcutta— *A Strange and Sublime Address*, *Afternoon Raag*, and *Freedom Song*. (His next three novels, *The Immortals, A New World*, and *Odysseus Abroad* were set in Bombay, Calcutta, and Oxford, respectively). All books keep time with their authors, but Chaudhuri's have been particularly attentive to the vagaries of his physical and psychic maturation, as well as invested in tracking his affective and spatial relations to Calcutta, India, and home. From the child's perspective of "return to Calcutta" in *Sublime Address,* to the college student's returns to Calcutta and Bombay in *Afternoon Raag,* to the middle-aged Jayojit's return to India in *A New World*, the novels mirror Chaudhuri's own development and migrational itineraries. In so doing, they invite renewed inquiry into the nature of the autobiographical occasion as a resource for the development of the fictional

of Servitude: Modernity, Domesticity, and Class in India (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 36. Cf. Indrajit Hazra, *Grand Delusions: A Short Biography of Kolkata* (Delhi: Aleph, 2013).

[93] Amit Chaudhuri, *A Strange and Sublime Address* (London: Picador, 2001 [1991]), 54. Hereafter cited internally as *SA*.

world—and, equally, into the nature of literary fictionality as a resource for the apprehension of (real) life.

A Strange and Sublime Address details a young boy's, Sandeep's, holidays in the Calcutta home of his uncle, Chhotomama, where he has "liberty" and "pulse[s] into life" (*SA* 31). Compared to the dreary solitude of life in Bombay, where Sandeep, an only child, resides with his parents, life in Calcutta is marked by the cherished intimacy of familial sociality, of "body rubbing against body" in a shared bed, "like triplets inside the safe obscurity of a womb" (*SA* 106). Upon his return to Calcutta, with which *Sublime Address* opens, Sandeep's first thought is that Chhotomama's house has not "moved" since he was last in here, a year ago (*SA* 7). He is "impatient" to "begin something quickly" (*SA* 7), to begin again, in other words, where he left off.

This sense of arrested life in the place forsaken is characteristic of diasporic consciousness; for the migrant, India is always the India of the past. Yet, can we read Calcutta as a metonym for India? The city exists within the nation's borders, but it has always existed as an internal "Other," a city that presents a counter-vision to the neoliberal imaginary on display in cities like Bombay/Mumbai and Delhi. As Indrajit Hazra writes, "It isn't so much that [Kolkata] marches to a different drumbeat. It's just that its favoured activity is lying down, a radical act that has its expected consequences."[94] A similar belief in Calcutta's resistance to the nation motors Chaudhuri's writing of the city. Nevertheless, in *Sublime Address*, this Indian city, Calcutta, represents to the young boy, a returnee from another Indian city, what the nation will one day represent to the reterritorializing diasporic subject.

Sublime Address was published in 1991, at the dawn of India's liberalized era, and the novel comments on this transformation through the character of Chhotomama, who is by turns the "heroic and serene" patriarch, in control of his dominion (*SA* 33), and an agitated counter-nationalist sympathizer of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. It is to Chhotomama's house that the family returns; his bread is broken; his dreams inspire Sandeep, while inviting disdain from his own peers. The tensions and aspirations of liberalizing India on the world stage coalesce in the figure of Chhotomama: A passionate and earnest "Communist" in his youth, believer in the redemptive unfolding of History, Chhotomama in middle age imagines himself "a businessman" (*SA* 28). This belief enters Chhotomama into what the narrator terms an "imaginary world of numbers," in which all that is solid melts into air, or, in Sandeep's imagination, "burst[s] into balloons" (*SA* 28). Despite the cynical caution of friends that he "doesn't have a head for business," he confidently dreams up new ventures. Each, though it will inevitably fail, sounds to Sandeep "like a never-before weapon capable of conquering the world" (*SA* 27).

In an early scene, which thematizes attempted, frustrated, and threatened liberalization, Chhotomama's car, India's iconic Ambassador, refuses to start and he must enlist "a few idle men" to help push it:

> People . . . were watching with sympathetic curiosity. Their eyes followed the car's reluctant progress; their lips parted to pass a few well-considered comments; husbands and wives who had quarreled the previous night were reunited in their avid appreciation of the spectacle; brothers who could never agree about a single point reached a brief consensus about the condition of the vehicle; astonished children who had never spoken anything but thickly meditative nonsense uttered, to the delight of their mothers, their first word as the car belched twice into motion and then stopped again. (*SA* 32-33)

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[94] Indrajit Hazra, *Grand Delusions: A Short Biography of Kolkata* (Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2013), 139.

The Ambassador here represents the seductions and perils of India's "belated" embrace of the world market: the promise of forward movement, the uncertainty of success, the embarrassed recognition of inferiority. "Why don't we stick to horse carriages?" Chhotomama's wife asks ashamedly as she observes the spectacle of her husband and his spluttering car (*SA* 33). The car serves as a reminder of Calcutta's constitutive belatedness in liberalizing India, despite its attempts to "domesticate" the capitalist beast. What's notable about this passage is that it is not offered as a scene of failure; rather, the car's reluctant spluttering is a catalyst for domestic harmony, fraternization, and the magical pronouncement of children's first words. Chhotomama maintains his cool in the face of threatened disaster.

It is almost as if, in Chaudhuri's treatment, the Calcuttan is one who revels in the city's and India's incomplete modernization, one who views the present as an opportunity for remembrance, as a moment of potential return to the past, and not as an occasion for longing or despair. Chhotomama's coolness is at once his greatest strength and a reflection of his inability to see clearly that, although the Ambassador may start this time, his business ventures are doomed to fail. If Chhotomama can also be read in metonymic relation to the city, then Calcutta is that part of India which is resistant to the lure of capital. It refuses to take capital, and India's embrace of it, seriously.

This is the Calcutta that Chaudhuri has in mind when he returns to India in 1999, where he finds that he is unable to make himself at home, unable even to apprehend the reality of the city for which he has longed. At the turn of the 21st century, the city is "already no longer Calcutta" (*C* 96)—certainly not the Calcutta of *Sublime Address*. Utpalda's provocation sets him on a journey of discovery and rediscovery: What would it mean to really see the ordinary men and women who, as he does, call these urban streets and windows home? Can he set aside his search for the living quality of Calcutta's modernity to grapple with the emergent globality of New India's Kolkata, instead? [95] Chaudhuri knows well the conventional mode of return-writing in the emergence genre; he knows that he, like Suketu Mehta before him, is supposed to "[retell] into existence" his lost city, Calcutta, "through the telling of its story" (*MC* 38).

Not only *Calcutta* and *Maximum City*, but many works of return-writing report on the post-liberalization condition of a particular New Indian city, whether or not it belongs to the "new universe" of New India. And yet, even as each city serves as its returnee's incomparable locus of attachment (e.g., Dasgupta's Delhi and Kumar's Patna), it also serves as the primary spatio-territorial, conceptual, and cultural site in which he might observe the effects and processes of economic liberalization unfolding in New India more generally. India's cities are, on the one hand, the nation's most legibly and normatively cosmopolitan spaces, where Baristas and Café Coffee Days serve English-speaking, jeans-wearing customers, who are subjects of gendered, linguistic, and occupational privilege. On the other hand, for the majority of Indians, the cities are among the least accommodating spaces in New India.[96] As scholars studying India's

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[95] Chaudhuri defines the modern *against* evocations of the "new." Modernity is a certain disposition towards the past, "a self-renewing way of seeing, of inhabiting space, of apprehending life…a way of conferring life upon things" (*C* 10-11). Cf. Jameson 1998. Jameson observes that one of the fundamental social transformations wrought by consumer capital is "the disappearance of a sense of history" (20). Kolkata is not modern as Calcutta was because it is not conscious of itself as such, not aware of and preoccupied with its historicity.

[96] I observed in note 27 that the fact that women do not walk in and through the city with the same freedom as their male counterparts is key to why the majority of return-writers in the emergence genre are men. Then, there is the irreducible question of class: not only who *has* to walk (while others drive), but who can walk *where*? Who has access to which road, what colony, and when? Walking is how today's cosmopolitans, "the flâneurs of our age," secure their

emergent middle class have shown, the comfortable inhabitance of the Indian city is an achievement to which the upwardly mobile continually aspire.

If India's cities were once the playgrounds of affluent, English-speaking, elites, now, the same cities have taken in millions of rural migrants, entrepreneurial young New Indians, who are vying to establish *their* rights to the city. Ordering a coffee in Barista is itself a challenge for many newcomers to the city; aspiring New Indians have to be instructed in and habituated into such "bodily performance[s] of competency . . . which [signal] belonging within a particular social geography."[97] Chaudhuri does not need to be instructed in practices like iced-coffee-ordering and escalator-riding; nor does he take his coffee at Barista. Nevertheless, he, too, has to come to grips with a lack of "embodied knowledge" about the transformation underway in New India's cities, specifically his own Calcutta.[98] Bodily performances of competency thus concern Chaudhuri throughout *Calcutta*—both his and that of his fellow travelers, the aspiring New Indians.

Food becomes a primary preoccupation, from the relative merits of the prawn cocktail at Skyroom and Mocambo, to the dreaded "kormaisation" of international cuisines—an Indian analogue to the Coca-colonization of the developing world observed in the free market heyday of the 1990s.[99] He people-watches at the iconic tearoom, Flurys, with its cake and rissole, its "chicken croissant[s]. . . sliced through the middle, buttered, patted with mustard, and filled with shreds of roast chicken" (*C* 25). Observations like these interrupt each of the nine essays that comprise *Calcutta*, building subtly to a reflection on the city's lost singularity. In a poignant chapter on the decline of Calcutta's Ingabanga, or Anglicized elite—whom he distinguishes carefully from both the more well-known *bhadralok* class and eccentric Bengali Anglophiles, like Nirad Chaudhuri (no relation)—Chaudhuri focuses on Anita Mukherjee's otherworldly sandwiches, with "canonical fillings…chicken and mayo, egg, cheese, and tomato…on occasion…the idiosyncratic, very personal yoghurt and chives" (*C* 161-162). He notes, too, Anita and her husband's calculated divestment of their personal belongings (including antique jewelry and paintings in the style of the seventeenth-century Dutch painter, van Ruisdaal) in times of financial need, as well as the curiosity of their late Victorian English pronunciation, which has none of the "Anglo-Saxon consonantal hardness, and became a liquid murmur in their mouths" (*C* 156). But, in a profane variation on the old Urdu *shahr-i-ashob*, it is for the loss of these sandwiches that he particularly laments—sandwiches and the Calcutta they represent in which,

identity, "their mastery of global cultural flows and their secure place within it"; thus, not being able to walk freely in the city is a major obstacle to female subjects who seek to perform their "engagement with others" (Gikandi 32). Simon Gikandi, "Between roots and routes: cosmopolitanism and the claims of locality," in *Rerouting the Postcolonial: New directions for the new millennium,* ed. Janet Wilson, Cristina Sandru, Sarah Lawson Welsh (New York: Routledge, 2010); Cf.

Cf. Malvika Singh, *Perpetual City: A Short Biography of Delhi* (New Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2013).

[97] Meredith McGuire, "The embodiment of professionalism: Personality-development programmes in New Delhi," *Enterprise Culture in Neoliberal India: Studies in Youth, Class, Work and Media,* 109-123 (London: Routledge, 2013), 113. Unsurprisingly, Bharati Mukherjee exploits the Barista-phenomenon in *Miss New India*: "Angie felt cool. . . She would splurge on a tall iced coffee with a scoop of ice cream . . . But when it was her turn to place her order, she asked for the cheapest, smallest hot coffee listed on the board above the counter" (*MN* 87).

[98] Ibid., 122.

[99] These are iconic locations, not idiosyncratic haunts of Chaudhuri's. Sengupta begins her emergence writing thus: "By the time I turn eight, with a cake from Flury's patisserie on Park Street, my parents have hawked some wedding gold, hustled for passports, and procured three plane tickets out of Calcutta…My parents are not among the country's deprived…They make enough to rent a two-room flat of our own, but not enough to splurge at Mocambo as often as they would like" (*EK* 1-2).

"in a sort of ritual transubstantiation, you were constantly consuming the flesh and blood of urban modernity" (*C* 25).[100]

This is the Calcutta to which Chaudhuri rehearsed his return, year after year, as a child growing up in Bombay. This is the Chaudhuri of the quotidian and banal that critics like Saikat Majumdar cite in the modernist tradition of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce.[101] But *Calcutta* also features a parallel narrative track in a book of essays that moves back and forth and sideways in time, while insisting on its diegetic containment as the record of "two years." The first track includes the aforementioned observations of the mundane. In the second track, Chaudhuri, the novelist, spurred by Utpalda into recognition of himself as a reluctant citizen of Kolkata, begins to doubt the firm separation he has erected between the city he lives in and the Calcutta of his memory; the city on the map, and the city in his books; the city of Anitadi's sandwiches, and the city of korma-ised Chinese food; the city he left behind, and the city to which he has returned. He also questions the relationship between the city he lives in and the nation to which it ostensibly belongs. Finally, he admits, "There's indeed a 'new India' in Calcutta, although we place it generally in Bombay and New Delhi" (*C* 206); "Globalisation…has nevertheless entered people's bloodstreams; it makes them behave in certain ways" (*C* 212).

New India slips into *Calcutta* surreptitiously; Calcutta becomes Kolkata, and Chaudhuri a Kolkatan, without his ever really registering the events of these transformations—in addition to the ways in which they correspondingly modify his own behavior. Again, a clue to this disposition can be found in *Sublime Address*. Chhotomama's heart attack is the primary event of that work; it occurs in the novel's closing pages and reads as a happening like any other: Chhotomama does not die; he is released; the boys go looking for a kokil bird…which is to say, life goes on. In fact, Sandeep and his cousins, Abhi and Babla, only dimly register the gravity of the threat to Chhotomama's life: "It had been an eventful day, but already the children had forgotten its sadness, except in a remote, abstract way. They surrendered themselves to the sensation of the present, to this ship with white sails raising its anchor and drifting toward another harbour" (*SA* 107).

The children's non-registration of the event of the heart attack (they innocently experience the hospital as "an inexhaustible playground" [*SA* 105]) is coupled with their experience of the attack as an occasion to flex their mounting powers of perception, to practice playing the part of engaged social interlocutors. What is at stake here is the difference between acknowledging and *knowing*, between the factual registration of life and death, and a more instinctual apprehension of how they are expected to reflect that registration in their comportment:[102]

> Abhi and Babla knew that their father was ill, but deep down they were convinced he was
> immortal. So, when their faces became serious, it was less because they were worried on

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[100] Cf. Nakul Krishna, "How Can I Describe the Desolation?" *The Caravan* (June 1, 2014).

[101] Chaudhuri has been called a "realist" (Shukla) in the traditions of everyone from Rabindranath Tagore to Jane Austen, as well as a "modernist" (Majumdar) in the molds of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. He is considered both the purveyor of the realist type against the reductions of the modernist allegory, and the modernist to Rushdie's post-modernist fabulist. Majumdar attempts to get around these slippages by calling Chaudhuri a modernist who nevertheless does *not* make "a drastic break with realism" (160) but he stops short of an assessment of how Chaudhuri's modernist apprehension of the real might inflect his ability to question global capitalism and New India's metropolitan realities. Cf. Shukla 2004; Majumdar 2013.

[102] Das, 2007, 6.

account of their father and more because they enjoyed imitating the serious expressions on the grown-ups' faces. It was a strange and new experience for them, this seriousness. (*SA* 97)

On one level, Chaudhuri is commenting on the construction of the "event" of the heart attack; like the event of market reform, it disappears into the everyday, giving way to the seductions of the present. And yet the event also asserts itself as an occasion for the performative registration of the incredible fact of Abhi and Babla's being alive, present, and participants in a shared family and national history: "it makes them behave in certain ways" (*C* 212).

Writing *Calcutta*, too, is a form of behavior, a disposition and practice, one that merits meta-commentary in the text itself. In the second essay of the book, Chaudhuri describes himself having a cup of coffee at Flurys, contemplating the nonfiction work he has set out to write. Emerging from the tea shop, he looks, as if for the first time, at Free School Street. "I can remember a time when these businesses didn't exist in this location," Chaudhuri muses, unable to avoid the pejorative language of the dispossessed: "Ramayan Shah and two other low-level entrepreneurs . . . have appropriated the terrain here" (*C* 22). As he approaches Shah's pavement food stall, he reflects:

> Earlier, I would have denied this place its existence, would have seen it but shut it out, would have looked upon it as a stubborn aberration . . . Now, for the first time, I studied it properly, not for the sake of ethnography, or from a sense of duty, but to experience again the ways in which people belonged to the city I lived in. (*C* 30)

It is by now well observed that class and caste privilege blind subjects not only to the lives of the dispossessed and marginalized, but to the fact of their very existence. In the public sphere, pavement dwellers and the homeless may be "shut out," as Chaudhuri writes, if not pushed out by local ordinances. In the domestic sphere in India, as Raka Ray and Seemin Qayum have argued, the ideal servants are "everywhere and nowhere . . . their presence . . . unobstrusive."[103] For Naipaul, the area of darkness that was the India he did not know became the area of darkness that was the India he could visibly see. For Chaudhuri in this passage, the area of darkness that was the India he refused to see becomes the area of darkness that, gradually, he must begin to know.

Like his incredulous response to Khurima's story, then, Chaudhuri's suggestion that he would have denied the food stall its existence—that the people who populate it would previously have been invisible to him, taken for granted as part of the material artifice of the human world, and not living actors, characters, and subjects in their own right—is offered for its rhetorical effects. The transformation in question is not actually one of vision—he already sees what he did "not" see, and knows what he needs to know—but rather a transformation in how this problem of vision-apprehension is to be written, and how, in turn, he is to be implicated in his narrative. Chaudhuri's novels have always included and been attentive to a minor cast of domestic workers and servants, from the unnamed narrator's apprehension of maidservant Chhaya's burgeoning sexuality in *Afternoon Raag*—"I have seen the younger one, Chhaya, a girl with two protruding teeth who leaned wistfully between chores against a door to listen to my mother practice, or ran to snatch the bag of rubbish from Ponchoo…grow to a young woman with kaajal around her

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[103] Ray and Qayum 146.

eyes, and unexpected breasts, two small, painless swellings"[104]—to the narrator's indifference toward domestic workers in *A New World*.

A New World is the novel introduced at the top of this chapter, the one that Chaudhuri wrote immediately upon returning to India. A fictional rejection of repatriation, the novel at once anticipates, inverts, and mirrors the thematic and formal content of *Calcutta*, by telling the story of Jayojit Chatterjee, an Iowa-based economics professor on holiday at his parents' Calcutta home. Over the course of the novel, which details the holiday's unfolding through the daily rituals of newspaper reading and *luchi* frying, Jayojit reflects on the impossibility of moving back to India after having made his life in the United States. Walking the Calcutta streets, Jayojit feels "conspicuous," "strange and doubtful," and "assailed by traffic"; nevertheless, the unnerving experience "[settles] his thoughts" (*NW* 50). As Majumdar observes, the scene indexes both "a concrete remooring into the city's environment" and is a reminder of Jayojit's "dislocation" from it.[105] This is the familiar account of diasporic experience: that an attempted remooring—that which fixes a subject in place, enabling feelings of security—also entails the experience of being and feeling unmoored.

Ultimately, for Jayojit, return to India seems "foolhardy" in part because he has lost the ability to make himself at home there, but also because he lacks the will to make the impossible *choice* to return. Whereas, from his perch at an American university, Jayojit is able to "[keep] track of everything that happened [in India]" and "his thoughts about [India] had a completeness" (*NW* 60), he finds physically being in India bewildering. Although he had been an economic advisor to Indian policymakers in the early-1990s, responsible for laying "an early and important cornerstone" in the "brickwork" of the country's liberalized economic order, he has "neither the means nor the confidence" to advise his retired father about living and investing in New India (*NW* 29). India seems "louder and more real to him than normal" (*NW* 50-51).

This surfeit of reality, a too muchness that many observers of India note, including Naipaul, is reflected in Jayojit's attitude toward the minor cast of laborers, domestic servants, and street vendors he meets during the course of *A New World*. As the maidservant, Maya, washes dishes in the kitchen, Jayojit asks his mother, "Where do you get them from?" "They sit downstairs and work in the flats in the building," she responds. "They're just a bunch of shirkers who pretend to be friendly with each other" (*NW* 18-19). This depersonalization—the rendering of Maya as one of "them," a type, a social class, and a category of others, as opposed to a woman in her own right—extends throughout the novel, confirming through depictions of everyday relations and conversations how employers in Calcutta "enact the immutability of class through discourses and labor practices of home…assumption of control over the labor of others, and perception of servants as being distinctive."[106] The narrator does not even attribute knowledge of Maya's name to an interaction with Jayojit himself; instead, there is this parenthetical note: "(Her name was Maya—Jayojit had overheard his mother call her this)" (*NW* 31).

Maya is not really *real* to Jayojit—by that same token, she is all too real, and not acknowledging Maya itself becomes a preoccupation for Jayojit. When she arrives tardy one day, Jayojit's mother resolves to "be rid of her at the first opportunity" (*NW* 143). Later, in a moment that marks a unique shift from quoted dialogue to free indirect speech, Jayojit's parting thought

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[104] Amit Chaudhuri, *Afternoon Raag*, collected in *Freedom Song: Three Novels* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 163.
[105] Majumdar 2013, 163-164.
[106] Ray and Qayum, 2009, 10.

for Maya is that the next time he returns to Calcutta from the United States he'll "have a larger paunch": " . . . and you may not be in this job any more, thought Jayojit" (*NW* 184). Jayojit's professed indifference toward Maya is part of a larger shift in the system of relations that has hitherto undergirded the pact between domestic servants and their middle-class employers in India, which means it is not indifference at all.[107] In *Calcutta,* similar scenes play out between Chaudhuri, his parents, and their domestics, but the nonfictional form demands that the author meet his character, Jayojit's, repressed and "unspoken" thoughts with the direct production of and reflection on his own. Observing a boy, a pot-scrubber, twitching in pain on the side of the road, Chaudhuri gives him fifty rupees, then "check[s] once again to see that he [is] genuinely suffering" (*C* 31). In other scenes, he admits the "contrived and implausible" nature of the returnee's impulse to "have a conversation" with a beggar girl, or a pavement dweller (*C* 46). When he does speak to these supposed subalterns, the conversations are "desultory . . . conversations that I imagined were going to be at once rigorous and illuminating, but have turned out to be desultory and opaque in retrospect" (*C* 37).[108]

Chaudhuri might insist in *Calcutta* on representing himself as callous, distant, almost too privileged to apprehend what and who is right in front of him. And yet, this posture is belied by the fact that he has previously, in his fiction, been alive to the epistemic violences, ironies, and performative nature of such literal ignor-ance. Perhaps he represents himself this way because, to adapt Graham Huggan's words on travel/writing, he knows that the "self-reflexivity" that characterizes return-writing "is not a way out of this"[109]—not a way out "in a country in which farmers frequently subsist on mango leaves and every other day kill themselves" (*C* 205). On the subject of his own family's reliance on servants, the *kaajer lok*, Chaudhuri is unflinchingly forthright: "I'm complicit not in a local mode of exploitation, but in a global arrangement" (*C* 266). Here, as in other passages, he admits to the aversion that tacitly characterizes the elite Indian apprehension of New India's ordinary inhabitants. He acknowledges, neither sentimentally nor with Jha's morbid fascination, the Indian Anglophone writer's participation in the cultivation and establishment of social distinction.[110]

One afternoon on Free School Street, Chaudhuri finds himself in conversation with a young woman, Baby Misra, who asks for money to buy medicine. As he walks with her to the closest pharmacy, he recalls thinking, "there was something else I was supposed to be doing, which I was being kept from…" until he realizes, chastened, that this—engaging with Kolkata's *nagarik*—is "exactly what I'd set out to do" (*C* 51). Later, Chaudhuri questions a man dicing vegetables on the street about his wages, "since," he reasons mirthfully, "sociological rigour is essential when you're writing of a city" (*C* 60). He recounts getting distracted from a prospective "interview" with a street-dweller because he wants to secure a table at posh Flurys. He expresses irritation over the incursions of beggar children, and even the overfamiliarity of the servant's child in his own home. These monological textual asides are indicative of the thought process

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[107] Where, in an older "feudal" system of domestic servitude, servants would live with their employers, employers in the new modern system are dependent on part-time workers, who "have the greatest space of autonomy and cause the employers the greatest anxiety" (25). See Ray and Qayum, 2009.

[108] Lest the reader think that the desultory nature of these exchanges is entirely attributable to his informants, Chaudhuri reports the questions he asks in different contexts: "What was the fare like," he asks of Inder Kumar, a daily diner at Ramayan Shah's street canteen (*C* 38); "Do you sometimes think you might need to leave Bengal for better opportunities?" (*C* 144), to domestic workers waiting in line to vote in Rajpur and Bantala.

[109] Huggan 24.

[110] Ray and Qayum 27.

that Chaudhuri-the-writer attributes retrospectively to his reporting self; moreover, they confirm that *Calcutta* is not only a performance of, but also a critical commentary on, the emergence genre's attempt at ethnographic presentism.

As he moves from pavement stall to a ledge outside Flurys, awkwardly interviewing people of "a different class background" (*C* 61), Chaudhuri reflects on the contingency and idiosyncratic nature of his own relation to Calcutta. The result is a nonfictional elaboration of reality with modernist traces, of reality as having its fullest expression in the workings of memory, of the real as that to which one is attached, as opposed to that which can be empirically observed. Chaudhuri tries, haltingly, to cognitively map see the city he is in—"You have Free School Street on one end, Middleton Row, narrower and shorter, on the opposite side, and, at a right angle to these two, Park Street…" (*C* 23)—and to draw parallels to the city he recalls. He strains to inhabit "both *the 'real' Calcutta I'd visited as a child*…and the city in which I found myself this afternoon" (*C* 30-31, my emphasis). For Chaudhuri, because he is a novelist, participating in the rise of "nonfiction as the new Indian fiction," ultimately means excising the "real," not excavating it, for despite his efforts to be present, the Free School Street that existed a quarter-century ago continually interrupts his thoughts, threatening to conceal from him "the ways in which people belon[g] to the city" *now* (*C* 30-31).

Chaudhuri's "real" Calcutta is the lost, "modern" city, in which even a neon street sign and tangled wig were invested with "inwardness and life" (*C* 11). New India's Kolkata, by contrast, is a city in which "the liberalized Indian's lack of interest in any one thing" has led to the transformation of a "fusty" bookshop into an indiscriminate, "bright retail site" (*C* 32). Present-day Kolkatans do not share Chaudhuri's sensibility, his interest in things like the "French windows" that have come to uniquely signify "Bengaliness" (*C* 13). Rather, he observes with studied ingenuity, they seem to feel most at home "in the mall" (*C* 216). By contrast, Chaudhuri experiences Kolkata's South City Mall as "bewildering" (*C* 217), and everyday encounters with the *nagarik* impress on him that, while his middle-class life is comparatively inured from precarity, he, unlike them, has to struggle to assert his provisional belonging to the city in which he has chosen to live and which he endeavors to write. Even the homeless, he muses, are more "intimate with the piece of pavement they [possess]" (*C* 30). And yet, the homeless, the mall-goers, they of the bright retail sites, are Chaudhuri's contemporaries. "This is the new breed," he marvels at the escalator-wary Kolkatans he finds at the city's new mall, likening them to "inexperienced swimmers by a poolside, wanting, but hesitant, to take the plunge" (*C* 216). He then offers this parenthetical qualification: "…this new breed (to which you yourself belong)" (*C* 216).

Chaudhuri's fictional rehearsals of return to Calcutta and nonfictional consummation of the repatriation narrative serve as a reminder that diasporic subjectivity is not reducible to a subject's dual locations in the East and West (whether an India-based virtual migrant, or a Western subject longing to return "home"). Rather, it is about movements between sites of comparative modernity and urbanity, and toward new possibilities for recognition, belonging, and identification: whether through a call center agent's aspirational somatic adjustments or an expatriate writer's move to the metropole; whether a Bombayite's eager apprehension of arrested life in Calcutta, or a Calcuttan's reluctant apprehension of life in the Kolkata to which he has returned. Against the currents of repatriate fiction and Indian Anglophone literary criticism—the former staking its analytic purchase on location; the other looking back to the nation for the conventions of new and future literary forms—*Calcutta* affirms the criticality of diasporic distance: "To be in [the city] was not to be any closer to comprehending it than when I'd studied it from

the airplane window" (C 148). And yet, the proof is in the passport. Like Naipaul, like the other return-writers of the emergence genre, Chaudhuri goes back to India.

Conclusion

Redeveloping India

"In seeking to rise, India had undone itself."
—*V.S. Naipaul*[1]

"The nation is shining, poised, glowing or whatever."
—*Sarnath Banerjee*[2]

A macabre chapter in Rana Dasgupta's *Capital: The Eruption of Delhi* tells the story of Surender Koli, a housekeeper and cook, who, in 2006, was found guilty of luring children into the home in which he worked, before then raping, murdering, and eating them. Koli, Dasgupta speculates, had observed the indulgent, rapacious lifestyle of his employer, a wealthy businessman named Moninder Singh Pandher: "Koli wanted exactly what Pandher had, which was the power to consume the poor. And if he could not consume them with Pandher's abstract appetites, he would—literally—eat them."[3]

When I first read this story, I wondered if it was the news item that had inspired Raj Kamal Jha to write his New India novel, *She Will Build Him a City.* Then, I paused. Here again was the narrative of New India rendered as a narrative of "devouring coolie bodies." Here again was an image of India literally eating itself. Had this been the underlying form of the "East-East encounter" all along? If this *was* the New India, if this *is* in fact India risen, what could India have been, before it rose?

In *Capital,* Dasgupta writes that from the moment he arrived in Delhi from New York in late 2000, he sensed he had "landed in an extraordinary place and time":

> [T]he anticipation of those years had a much larger scope than the city itself. It sprang from a universal sense: *What will happen here will change the entire world*…there was a feeling that…it would be possible to imagine new, hybrid forms of capitalism that [would] provide inspiration not just here but everywhere.[4]

A decade later, however, "this utopian clamour was no more."[5] Somini Sengupta prefaces her rise of India book similarly: "The euphoria that greeted me in 2005…would give way to disenchantment, anger, even bitterness."[6] Anand Giridharadas writes that he "will never be able to relay the fullness of what it was to live in India in that dawn."[7]

Why "no more," we might ask, and why "never"? Because, in fact, day never breaks on the New India. The new, hybrid forms of capitalism do not materialize, or do not make enough

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[1] V.S. Naipaul, *India: A Million Mutinies Now* (New York: Viking, 1990), 4.
[2] Sarnath Banerjee, *The Harappa Files* (New Delhi: Harper Collins Publishers India, 2011), 121.
[3] Rana Dasgupta, *Capital: The Eruption of Delhi* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014), 284.
[4] Ibid., 40-41.
[5] Ibid., 43.
[6] Somini Sengupta, *The End of Karma: Hope and Fury Among India's Young* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2016), 11.
[7] Anand Giridharadas, *India Calling: An Intimate Portrait of a Nation's Remaking* (New York: Henry Holt, 2011), 248.

of a difference; the call center relocates from India to the Philippines and Mexico; the nation's bursts of outsized economic growth do not translate into widespread development; the Commonwealth Games are a disaster that cannot rival the Beijing Olympics; Narendra Modi assumes the Prime Ministership; and the writer of New India is left wondering at his "miff with Fate," to quote G.V. Desani's H. Hatterr, "for things are not what I thought they were, what they seemed they were, and what might-have-been I wish they were!"[8] Thus, the dystopic allegory of Pandher and Koli; thus, an India "undone." Thus, the blasé tones of Sarnath Banerjee: "The nation is shining, poised, glowing or whatever."

The preceding chapters have pursued icons, fictions, and nonfictions of New India's rise that can also be read as narrative proxies for a New India that never actually rises. They are testaments to a New India that might have been, that almost was—but isn't. And yet, that does not mean that "New India" doesn't exist. It is legible in each one of the texts this dissertation has read. It is there in the repatriating movements enacted by critics and writers alike, and it is there in the moments of recognition that precede each narrative: from Siddhartha Deb's entrance into the call center, to Bharati Mukherjee's phone call with the Bangalore agent; from Raj Kamal Jha's encounters out the car window, to Amit Chaudhuri's dawning awareness of his belonging to Kolkata. New India is registered as an aspiration and through the encounter long before, and long after, its particular material and narrative promises are or aren't fulfilled.

But that is not—it cannot be—the end of the story. Not in an India of rapid and unchecked urbanization, coupled with disinvestment from rural communities. Not in an India where inequalities are emblematized in structures like Antilia, the 27-story personal residence of Mukesh Ambani, which sits against a backdrop of South Mumbai slums. Not in an India that has become a test case for the human costs of globalization's destabilizing forces. Not in an India that confirms once again that fragmentation is fundamental to the cultural logics of neoliberalism. In the quarter century since the liberalizing reforms of the early 1990s, market forces have ruptured connections between India's various polities of caste, class, religion, and language. If this New India is to truly develop, if there is to be a new New India, it needs a vision of the future, even if it issues from the past.

"Development" has emerged in recent years as a key rubric through which to think about literature's formal relationship to the state, among other global institutions.[9] In *Human Rights, Inc.*,

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[8] G.V. Desani, *All About H. Hatterr* (New York: New York Review of Books, 1970 [1948]), 36-37.

[9] Development is a global and comparative discourse—one that underpins the programs of minor NGOs and major, multinational foundations, like the Gates and Clinton Foundations, alike. The Nobel-winning economist Amartya Sen's conception of "development as freedom" is just one popular strand of global development discourse. As Sen write, "Development consists of the removal of various types of unfreedoms that leave people with little choice and little opportunity of exercising their reasoned agency."[9] For Sen, these unfreedoms include poverty, tyranny, lack of economic opportunity, systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities, intolerance, and the activity of repressive states. Conversely, the conditions for freedom are listed by the United Nations in what are now known as the world's "Sustainable Development Goals." These are "no poverty; zero hunger; good health and well-being; quality education; gender equality; clean water and sanitation; affordable and clean energy; decent work and economic growth; industry, innovation, and infrastructure; reduced inequalities within and among countries; sustainable cities and communities; responsible consumption and production; climate action; conserving life below water; conserving life on land; peace, justice, and strong institutions; and a strengthened global partnership for the achievement of the above goals." I am listing these unfreedoms and freedoms because we should bring a robust conception of *underdevelopment* and its material conditions to our conversation about literature and development, particularly those literatures termed "postcolonial" and "Third World." See Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999, xii; <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>.

Joseph Slaughter argues that the *Bildungsroman* is a novelistic correlative to the developmentalism pursued internationally under the auspices of human rights law.[10] In his recent work on geopolitics and the Anglophone novel, John Marx goes one step further, arguing that literary practice since the late-19th century has itself been as a species of governmentality, not only a quantity that comments on the managerial protocols of the developmental state but one that actually instantiates its own kind of administration. For Marx, "literature [is a] practice or manner of *producing* the world," and not simply a reflection or cognate of it.[11]

Here, let me be deliberately schematic and say that there are two primary ways in which the texts discussed in this dissertation have approached the problem of development: by variously depicting India's *underdevelopment*, and by themselves performing and enacting developmental processes.[12] In concluding this dissertation, I want to speculatively offer a third mode of approaching the problem of India's development through the graphic novels of Sarnath Banerjee. Banerjee's work is focused less on development as an aspiration of the underdeveloped, than on *redevelopment* as a mode of engagement with history, a mode of repetition that might, in the end, offer us new terms in which to wage the critique of the postcolonial and global nation-state.

In the late 1990s, the anthropologist Akhil Gupta famously argued that underdevelopment was a fundamental form of postcolonial "identity" and not "merely a structural location in the global community of nations."[13] To be underdeveloped was to be backward, belated, behind the times, hopelessly tardy, as well as out of place. It was both a temporal condition of lag and a spatial condition of marginalization—and it was one that postcolonial subjects effectively metabolized as a constitutive component of their identities. To be underdeveloped was to be in the "never-never-land of the anthropological present"[14] that was always already the past. Such allochronic assignment, as Johannes Fabian would call it, involved "denying that the . . . underdevelopment of the many might be directly related to the . . . growing wealth [of] the few."[15]

Today, we hear less about the ontological experience of underdevelopment in the postcolonial world than its successor term: *uneven* development. If, in the mid-20th century, to develop was to become *modern*—which meant to depart from the "waiting room of history" and arrive into industrial, capitalist, world futurity—now to develop generally means to become *global*—which suggests among other things to achieve interconnectedness in the international financial markets and other spheres of cultural and economic exchange. And yet, globalization highlights the uneven and unequal development of states around the world, manifest in

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[10] Joseph Slaughter, *Human Rights, Inc.: The World Novel, Narrative Form, and International Law* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007).

[11] John Marx, *Geopolitics and the Anglophone Novel, 1890-2011.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, 11.

[12] The call center and self-help novels discussed in chapter two attempt to offer formal engagements with what Aravind Adiga in *The White Tiger* terms "the modern entrepreneur's growth and development" (194) by twinning narratives of step-by-step self-improvement with the narrative of rising India. Aravind Adiga, *The White Tiger*. New York: Free Press, 2008.

[13] Akhil Gupta, *Postcolonial Developments: Agriculture in the Making of Modern India*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1998, ix.

[14] John Emigh, "Culture, killings, and criticism in the years of living dangerously," in Tracy C. Davis (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Performance Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 63.

[15] Gupta, 1998, 10.

increasing polarization between the haves and have-nots, unchecked urbanization, and environmental devastation, both within and among states.[16]

The familiar predicament, then: Although we are accustomed, on one level, to thinking of development as an aspiration—to think, for instance, of the United Nations' "Sustainable Development Goals"—in practice, development has always been a double-edged sword. For postcolonial nation-states like India to pursue development has meant to be subjected to the developmental schemes of others. Moreover, to pursue development has meant to participate in processes of capitalization and globalization that actually depend on the uneven and unequal distribution of resources necessary for the actualization and exercise of agency and "freedom" in Amartya Sen's terms.[17]

These tensions have long animated the field of Indian Anglophone literature, as writers working after independence in 1947 have consistently explored the problem of what it means to live and work and come of age in a developing country. If it is not immediately clear that this has been the impulse behind much of the work discussed in this dissertation, it is because the idea of India as a *developing* nation has now been supplanted by ideas of the nation, New India, as *emerging*—a rhetorical sleight of hand that strives to conceal its reliance on the developmental discourse. In *Midnight's Children*, Salman Rushdie's narrator comments sardonically on the Nehru government's Five Year Plans: "The government had been forced…to announce to the world that it could accept no more development loans unless the lenders were willing to wait indefinitely for repayment."[18] In Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English, August*, development provides the alibi for the petty Collectors of the Indian Administrative Service to exploit their gardeners to produce rice in the residential compound, which the Collectors can then resell: "('In a developing country we must never waste food,' they explained)."[19] In Rushdie's 1981 novel, development is a foreign imposition that creates a problem of too much development, an excess of developmental interventions that threatens the autonomy of the nation-state, which then devolves into the Emergency. In Chatterjee's 1988 novel, underdevelopment and stunted growth have already become constitutive features of the Indians' opportunistic self-assessment.

Enter Sarnath Banerjee, author of four graphic novels published since 2004: *Corridor, The Barn Owl's Wondrous Capers, The Harappa Files,* and *All Quiet in Vikaspuri*.[20] Banerjee is not the first graphic novelist in India, but he's the most well-known and has been called India's "leading"

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[16] As Edward Said noted in *Culture and Imperialism*, following the work of geographer Neil Smith, uneven development is not only produced by capitalism but is in fact necessary to its life-processes. Indeed, uneven development is and has been the precondition of imperialism, "which dominates, classifies, and universally commodifies all space under the aegis of the metropolitan center" (225). In 21st century global India, a nation-state rife with contradictions—the increasing numbers of billionaires on the *Forbes* list, even as we can't deny what lies behind the *Beautiful Forevers*, to cite Katherine Boo—it is clearer than ever that the problem is not so much the nation's underdevelopment, but rather its underdevelopment relative to the development of other nations in an uneven sphere of global interchange. See Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993).

[17] Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999).

[18] Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981).

[19] Upamanyu Chatterjee, *English, August: An Indian Story* (Faber and Faber, 1988, 62).

[20] Sarnath Banerjee, *Corridor: A Graphic Novel* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2004); *The Barn Owl's Wondrous Capers* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2007); *The Harappa Files* (New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers India, 2011); *All Quiet in Vikaspuri* (New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers India, 2015). *The Harappa Files* is hereafter cited internally as *HF*.

graphic novelist.[21] Banerjee writes and draws in a style that is narratively provocative and visually striking. His style is collagist; strips are primarily composed of black-and-white ink sketches, interspersed with photographic images drawn from magazines, advertisements, and film posters and stills, as well as color panels and newspaper clippings.[22] For example, in *Barn Owl*, a pencil-sketched body on a pyre is drawn into an actual, color photograph from Nimtala cremation ground in Kolkata. An arresting double-page spread in *The Harappa Files* features a collage of actual advertisements for interview training, career counseling, tuition centers, and test-prep courses, along with color photos of "successfully placed candidates" (*HF* 69). In the foreground, Banerjee has drawn a large, black-and-white head, a young man contemplating the implicit and explicit promises of each ad ("Best Ranks in Bhopal"; "You Can Be Next").

All of Banerjee's works address in different ways the quotidian experience of Indian metropolitan life as well as what one critic terms the "palimpsest-like, spatial-semantic layering" of the new Indian city.[23] The form of the graphic novel allows him to access multiple spatial and temporal registers at once, and he uses a visual and textual vocabulary associated with modernism: intermediality, fragmentation, stories within stories, alternative endings and beginnings, repetitions, elisions, mixed-up chronology.[24] In an opening panel in *Corridor*, a man self-identified as an obsessive collector spins upside down, surrounded by various suspended possessions, including a film reel, sneaker, chess piece, compass, books, records, boxing glove, and kite. The text bubble features a quote attributed to Jean Baudrillard: "His passion is not for possessing objects themselves but stems from his fanaticism for an illusory wholeness…But really he is trying to re-collect himself…"[25] The attempt to re-collect oneself emerges in *Corridor* and in all of Banerjee's works as key to what I want to provisionally call the *redevelopmental* imperative:

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[21] E. Dawson Varughese gives that credit to Orijit Sen, who published *The River of Stories* in 1994. See Varughese, *Reading New India: Post-Millennial Indian Fiction in English.* London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013. "The River of Stories," which chronicled the controversial construction of dams on the Narmada River in Gujarat, was published by Kalpavriksh, an environmental action group and had a limited release. Banerjee's books, published by Penguin and Harper Collins India, have given momentum to a new generation of Indian graphic novelists.

[22] Because the graphic novel is a relatively new form in India, Banerjee has said that he draws inspiration largely from visual artists and filmmakers: the documentary photographer and screenwriter Taraporevala, the filmmakers Sai Paranjpye and Basu Chatterjee, as well as Goya, Albrecht Dürer, and Alain Resnais. In addition to writing graphic novels, Banerjee makes drawings and films that have been exhibited around the world. In 2012, he was commissioned by the Frieze Foundation to create a "Gallery of Losers" for the London Summer Olympics.

[23] This widely shared reading of Banerjee holds that his significance lies in having shown us how being modern in New Delhi or Kolkata is not unlike being modern in a city like London, Paris, or Berlin; in other words, that India is not uniquely underdeveloped, but rather that it is already, and perhaps has always been, a site in which the *modern* subject must confront the gap between the self and the world, space and time, the intimacy of built environment and the experience of isolation within it. This is a perspective that Banerjee himself has voiced in interviews given in Berlin, where he has lived and worked for some years: "I actually was of the opinion that where I come from and German society—they can't be more different. They're two opposite sides of the coin . . . But with time, I realized that it does not have to [be]." See Cecile Sandten, "Intermedial Fictions of the New Metropolis," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 47.5 (2011), 521. Cf. Rosalyn D'Mello, "Artist Sarnath Banerjee Takes on Berlin in his Latest Comic *Series,*" available online from <http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/902012/artist-sarnath-banerjee-takes-on-berlin-in-his-latest-comic>

[24] Focusing on the wanderings of Banerjee's characters additionally lends itself to such a reading of his work: that Indian modernity exists even amidst underdevelopment; perhaps even that belatedness, backwardness, and out-of-jointness are fundamental to the apprehension of the modern.

[25] Banerjee, 2004, 7. I have not been able to locate the original Baudrillard citation. However, I found the line in a work called *Introducing Baudrillard*, a "graphic guide" to the work of Baudrillard written and illustrated by Christopher Horrocks and Zoran Jevtic.

the point is not to advance, but to return to the self, here though the material artifacts of modern life, especially the book.

Each of Banerjee' first three books presents literature as key to the individual's negotiation of modern Indian life. *Corridor* tells the stories of five men linked by their frequenting a second-hand bookstall run by the eccentric Jehangir Rangoonwalla in Delhi's iconic Connaught Place commercial district. All of them are looking for books that their lives depend on—whether their love lives, professional lives, or sex lives—like Brighu Sen, a young urbanite in search of an obscure book, James Watson's "Double Helix," and Digital Dutta, a Marxist computer engineer in pursuit of an H-1B visa to work in the United States. *Barn Owl* is about a search for an 18th century book of scandals, written by an Indianized version of the legendary Cartaphilus, the "Wandering Jew" of medieval Christian mythology. It uses the pursuit of the book to examine how everyday Indians negotiate their and the world's colonial history, while skipping around in time from Lubeck, 1601, to the Abbey of St. Alban's, 1228, to 21st century Kolkata, with detours to the library of Walter Benjamin, the grave of Bengali poet Michael Madhusudhan Dutt, and Favourite Cabin tea stall (a real-life place in Calcutta, specializing in toast).

Banerjee's books take readers from Connaught Place to Frankfurt Airport—and back again. His characters range from urban flâneurs and government bureaucrats to "psychic" plumbers whose powers are well suited to the many buildings that have sprung up in India without blueprints. There are "Marxists of high birth"; foreign-returned air-condition repairmen with training in "integrated cryogenic technology"; luxury car-salesman with zero interest in cars. His books observe phenomena like the transformation of Delhi's historic Hauz Khas village, studded with ancient tombs and mosques, into a wealthy residential area, and the "global Brooklynification" felt from Bombay to Berlin, while digressively recounting historical episodes, like that of the first dissection of a human cadaver in India (a brief episode in *Barn Owl*). Each book is also casually multilingual, including phrases of Hindi, Urdu, and Bengali without translations into English.

This promiscuity of reference and linguistic mélange are products of Banerjee's upbringing and education. Born in Calcutta in 1972, Banerjee had, in his own self-description, a "very ordinary" middle-class upbringing with "some exposure to the crumbling corporate culture and a dying cosmopolitanism."[26] An "okay" but "bookish" student, Banerjee was also a "hard dabbler" interested in obscure subjects like boxing and mountaineering (by contrast, his peers were occupied with "Debate or Quiz"), which now routinely figure in his work. He did his undergraduate work in Delhi before leaving India to pursue a Masters from Goldsmiths College in London. "Throughout my childhood, I had that perpetual feeling that the party was elsewhere," Banerjee says. "The circus had just left town. I feel my whole generation felt like that." Like almost all of the writers discussed in this dissertation, Banerjee has consequently been an emigrant, an expatriate, an immigrant, and a repatriate. In 2011, however, traveling against the traffic of reverse migration to India, he moved to Berlin, where he is still based.

Writing from both within and outside India, Banerjee has emerged as an incisive critic of the New India. In *The Harappa Files*, Banerjee describes the country as one "on the brink of great hormonal changes … a fast capitalizing society that suffers from bipolar disorder" (*HF* 15). His most recent book, *All Quiet in Vikaspuri,* depicts the privatization of Bharat Copper Limited (a fictionalized version of the government-owned Hindustan Copper Limited) and the

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[26] Interview with author conducted over email, July 31-August 6, 2016.

corresponding decimation of public infrastructure in its industrial township. One worker displaced in the process is a plumber, Girish, who goes to water-scarce Delhi to look for work. There, hired by a seemingly benevolent entrepreneur, Girish is charged with drilling far enough below ground to locate the Saraswati river, which is mentioned often in the ancient Sanskrit *Vedas*, but no longer exists. Along his quest, Girish encounters numerous people who have been banished below earth for the crime of wasting water, such as Philippa Carrey Jones, the "wife of the ambassador of a…country which considers India as a punishment posting," who repeatedly drained and refilled her pool, Jagat Ram, a scapegoated employee of the Delhi Water Board, and B.K. Gambhir, an army colonel who was caught stealing water from his neighbor's tank. Girish eventually finds the Saraswati, but on returning from his quest discovers that Delhi has descended into an epic "water war" led by the entrepreneur Rastogi, who it turns out is actually a disaffected businessman trying to inflate real-estate prices.

When *Vikaspuri* was published, many critics referred to it as "dystopian." In fact, despite the labyrinth of underworld denizens, *Vikaspuri* hews provocatively close to the contours of real-world events. Its fantastical plot echoes and extends costly, distracting, and almost certainly futile efforts by the BJP-led government to locate the river Saraswati, which I referenced in the Introduction.[27] The novel also includes an essayistic series of panels on "short-termism" that comments on recognizable issues, institutions, and government policies. Short-termism, as Banerjee depicts it, is "the constant talk of building new institutions without restoring the old." It's prescribing "strong antibiotics for mild illnesses," and building golf courses in Gurgaon, when there's a water shortage in neighboring Delhi. It's India getting ready for the 2010 Commonwealth Games by "[c]overing all that is crappy with marble."[28] Here, as in all of his work, Banerjee is concerned with what India risks losing in its rushed transformation into New India: the old institutions and remedies that are being thrown out with the proverbial bathwater.

Vikaspuri is astute on the subject of the myopic development of India, but *The Harappa Files* is the text of Banerjee's that most fully gets out from underdevelopment as an identitarian rubric. *The Harappa Files* offers a metacritical account of its own formation as a specific initiative of the Greater Harappa Rehabilitation, Reclamation, and Redevelopment Commission (GHRRR). The onomatopoeic acronym, GHRRR, is meant to be viewed in relation to the other stultifying bureaucratic entities referenced in the book, like the hopeless "Ministry of Hope" and the "Department of Surplus Emotion," which is administered by a stony-faced gargoyle.[29] What's most interesting about GHRRR is that it is credited with the production of the book itself. There can be no *The Harappa Files* without GHRRR, which gives us cause to take seriously GHRRR's three charges: rehabilitation, reclamation, and redevelopment. The prefix "re-" indicates repetition, backward motion, a return. *Redevelopment* is the rebuilding, repurposing, refurbishing of that which has been stagnating or in decline. Whereas the rhetoric of development tends to

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[27] Manu Balachandran and Itika Sharma Punit, "India is spending millions to find an ancient river that probably never existed," *Quartz India* (August 19, 2015), available online from <http://qz.com/480801/india-is-spending-millions-to-find-an-ancient-and-probably-mythical-river/>; Seema Chishti, "Can you make a river come alive? The long, dry quest to find the Saraswati," *The Indian Express* (July 12, 2015), available online from <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/can-you-make-a-river-come-alive-the-long-dry-quest-to-find-the-saraswati/>.

[28] Banerjee, 2015, 51-59.

[29] Institutions imbricated in development schemes have long featured in Indian Anglophone literature, from the gift-shop-managing Kerala Tourism Development Corporation in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* to the welfare-oriented Badabon Development Trust in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*.

presume a kind of tabula rasa on which developmental activity is to take place, to redevelop is to foreground that which has been, that which *was*, which preexists the status quo.

E. Dawson Varughese calls *The Harappa Files* "a generational and cultural museum for an India that is changing at pace"[30]; she crucially draws our attention to how Banerjee juxtaposes scenes and artifacts of Indian life in the 1970s and 1980s with life in the New India. But I would argue that *The Harappa Files* offers more than a "museum," as the comparisons between Indian life then and now, postcolonial and global, pre- and post- liberalization, serve a more prescriptive, redevelopmental imperative. GHRRR is charged not with a critique of the past, nor with developing a blueprint for the future, but rather with identifying aspects of the past and present that merit preservation and could potentially animate future visions of India.[31] In addition to explicit commentaries[32] on the gated communities and woeful congestion of the New India, there are commentaries on India-produced iconic national products like Vicco Vajradanti toothpaste, Boroline antiseptic, and Lifebuoy soap, which is described as "the smell of the working class" (*HF* 82)—products that were "made in India" long before Narendra Modi's "make in India" campaign.[33]

In File #8871, "Plain Old Tap-Water," (Figure 1) Banerjee draws a contrast between the Indian Kamleshwar's experience of drinking tap water in the West—"it seemed as though civilization itself flowed from those taps" (*HF* 124)—with the reality that "the West too has taken to drinking bottled water" (*HF* 126). The irony is clear, and it demonstrates the ways in which the belated Third World that has not arrived at the civilizational apex of "cool, crystal-clear, potable water" (*HF* 124) is attuned to the value of a public asset and public facilities that the West long undervalued and has now undermined.

Another panel, #2134, "Prop-Maker," (Figure 2) describes a visit to a "[prop-maker's] workshop in North Calcutta….just in time to stop his sons from selling off their father's trunk" (*HF* 140). "Every Christmas, our school used to put up a drama," the narrator writes; the prop-maker would bring a trunk "filled with false beards, plastic swords, helmets and other props [that] transformed [the] enthusiastic amateurs, into fearful monsters" (*HF* 140). The point is not only that the sons are not invested in preserving history—they are ready to dispense with the trunk and the traces of their father's labor—but also that the fantastical transformation enabled by the provincial prop-maker is now threatened by the encroachment of new media forms and communication technologies that have endangered the venerable old Calcutta theaters, in which one could as soon encounter *Hamlet* as *Rasputin*. The result is not just a loss of history, but certain social deprivation.
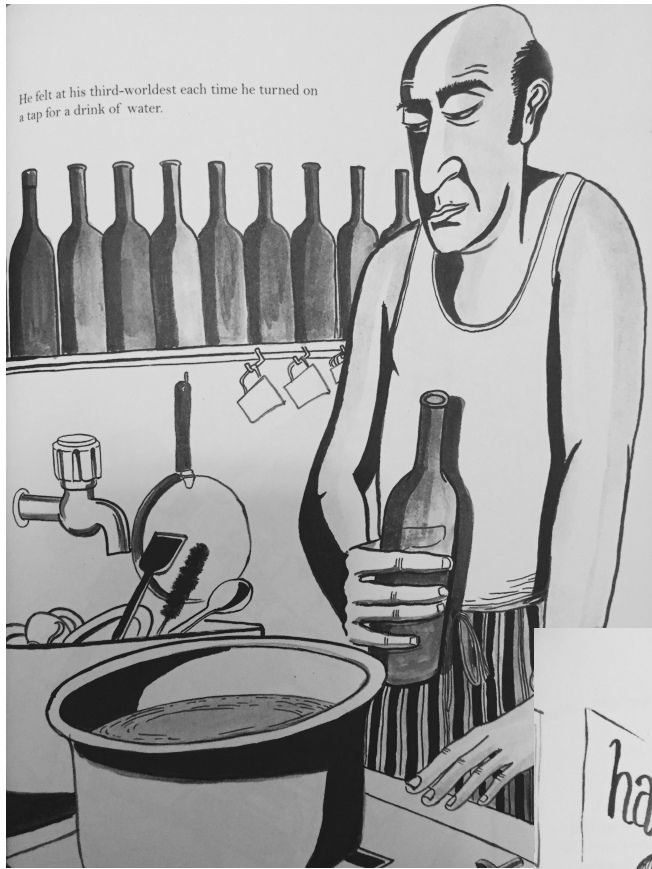
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[30] Varughese, 2013, 140.

[31] File #2068 introduces the figure of the psychic plumber with this statement: "What is left behind when an old building is torn down, wondered American cartoonist Will Eisner" (*HF* 92).

[32] Other commentaries on the New India include "Nano" about Vipin Mathur and Naman Doshi, childhood friends, who haven't spoken to each other in years because neither dares to cross a busy Delhi road that separates them. The Nano car is going to fill the roads, the artist speculates: "Roads will look like vast parking lots. You can step out of your Pajero, have a masala dosa an get back in to the continue the journey at 2 inches per hour" (*HF* 29). There is also a file called "City of Gates," which skewers the residents of gated communities by pretending that they are afraid of "those furry things" that live outside their gates. Banerjee has a "Prof. Mattoo of the Institute for the Study of Contemporary Mythology" say that TFTs "are an embodiment of the collective meanness of the city that finds expression in the empty streets at night" (*HF* 110).

[33] The "Make in India" website is available from <http://www.makeinindia.com/home>

Figure 1. From File # 8871, "Plain Old Tap-Water," in *The Harappa Files.*

He felt at his third-worldest each time he turned on a tap for a drink of water.

Figure 2. From File #2134, "Prop-Maker," in *The Harappa Files.*

What I want to raise in closing is the question of this redevelopment's relation to and difference from the project of excavating the heterotemporality of History 2 identified famously by Dipesh Chakrabarty in *Provincializing Europe* and most recently critiqued by Vivek Chibber and Pheng Cheah. In his well-known argument, Chakrabarty seeks to relocate the particular in the general, against historicist frames of intelligibility that locate "the general in the particular."[1] One of the ways he does this is by drawing a distinction between History 1, "the universal logic of capitalist development"[2] and History 2, the particular, local, interruptive pasts that are also capital's antecedents and yet not part of its "life-process."[3] The past is not dead, Chakrabarty writes; we can choose to inhabit the plurality of the now and treat the past, which is as plural and fragmentary as the present, "as though it were a pool of resources."[4] In positing an outside to the time of capital, Chakrabarty offers an optimistic conception of human lives lived in excess of abstract labour and of a history worth uncovering in pursuit of better, more equitable, and livable presents and futures for all. By that same token, however, his argument risks advocating an instrumentalist understanding of the past and of the subaltern subjects located within it.

Why, how, and by whom is the past to be made to serve the present as a resource? Whose past? And whose present? Chakrabarty's evocative but ultimately opaque definition of subalterneity as "that which constantly, from within the narrative of capital, reminds us of other ways of being human than as bearers of the capacity to labor" establishes the subaltern as the name for a figure who eludes location and specification.[5] The categorical indeterminacy of the subaltern is one issue that Chibber takes on in his recent sociological critique of postcolonial theory and Subaltern Studies specifically. Chibber cannot conceive of a subaltern agent whose personal and collective history poses a genuine threat to capital's life processes: "capital simply does not care about workers' local culture as long as it does not interfere with the accumulation process."[6]

Cheah's critique is offered from a different disciplinary vantage. In his recent monograph on world literature, *What is a World?*, he reads fictional texts that derive their worldly force from "precolonial oral traditions…folk practices, subaltern rituals…religious ethics, and even the geological time of the landscape"; however, he argues, these "alternative temporalities" do not reject the teleological time of what Chakrabarty calls History 1. Rather, they "are nonuniversal or local teleologies…governed by a dynamic of self-return in which a given postcolonial people or social group achieve self-determination through their own practices."[7] Cheah critiques Chakrabarty's theory of heterotemporality for its reliance on an understanding of plural temporalities "within the order of presence."[8] Moreover, warning of the dangers of "nostalgia for

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[1] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 23

[2] Rochona Majumdar, *Writing Postcolonial History* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2010), 48

[3] Chakrabarty, 2000, 64.

[4] Ibid., 246.

[5] Chakrabarty, 2000, 94–95.

[6] Vivek Chibber, *Postcolonial Theory and the Spectre of Capital* (London and New York: Verso, 2013), 236.

[7] Cheah, 2016, 13.

[8] Pheng Cheah, *What is a World? On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 208.

a pure past,"[9] he advocates that "[w]e must patiently search for *extant* resources for reworlding the world."[10]

From its initial invocation of the ancient city of Harappa in the Indus Valley, *The Harappa Files* is advocating a kind of self-return, but it is not (and notwithstanding the book title) a return to folk practices or subaltern rituals. There is no nostalgia for a pure past. Rather, in returning to Vicco Vajradanti toothpaste, airplane-enabled encounters with Western tap water, and the recent past and present of small-time prop-makers and psychic plumbers, Banerjee offers a critique of the New India that advocates self-return to the postcolonial, as opposed to neoliberal, nation-state—to the past-contemporary, not the precolonial past. By explicitly revaluing undervalued aspects, products, and vocations, and by re-presenting India as a visually sophisticated tableau for redevelopment, Banerjee's work is an example of Indian Anglophone literature's capacity to, from a defiantly diasporic vantage, halt New India's developmentalist impulse in its tracks.

This was supposed to be the era of a cosmopolitan "literature for the planet,"[11] one unfettered by territorial borders and capable of transcending modernism's conventions of national assignment. Yet what we are seeing in the New India moment is a profound reclamation of the nation by both Indian writers and critics, an assertion of national bonafides staked on the reterritorialization of the putative motherland, and the celebration of a national literature that can once and for all disentangle itself from expatriate writers in and oriented toward the West. Against all expectations that the writer of "world literature" in the 21st century would *not* be limited to the production of nation-oriented narratives, the Indian Anglophone novelists and nonfictionists read in this dissertation have been involved in exactly that: the twinning of their lives with that of the nation, the twinning of the life trajectories of ordinary Indians and that of New India's global rise.

It seems so obvious now: nativism as a response to globalization; the return against the rise. But also: the urgency of renewing the promise and potential of the postcolonial nation-state. And finally, what *After New India* has in the preceding pages labored to show: that the return to the nation requires, ironically, that we again marshal the resources of Anglophonism, the ambivalent proximities and intimacies of diaspora, and the critical tropes of a past-contemporary postcolonial discourse in order to resist the dubious artlessness of the lowbrow and the seductions of realist vernacularity, on the one hand, and to intervene in the present-contemporary moment of New Indian nativism and neoliberal fragmentation, on the other.

In the concluding pages of Banerjee's *The Harappa Files,* the mountaineer Edmund Hillary reaches the top of Everest and realizes with a "deep melancholy" that "he had seen this sight before, from an even higher altitude. From an aeroplane." Sherpa Tenzing then offers him this counsel, which perhaps we might read as a final commentary on the "rise of India" discourse as well: "[L]ook behind to see what we have achieved, not what lies before us" (*HF* 213).

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[9] Ibid., 204.

[10] Ibid., 12, my emphasis.

[11] Wai Chee Dimock, "Literature for the Planet," *PMLA*, Vol. 116, No. 1, Special Topic: Globalizing Literary Studies (Jan. 2001), 173-188.

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