

Colonialism, Literature and Identity

Considering Indian Literature in English

Engelbert Jorissen

I Trying to begin — Colonialism and Language

Considering colonialism and literature means at the same time to consider questions of language. The language of the colonizer and the colonized will be in conflict on various levels, as e.g. those of dominance, control and obedience, or of cultural authority and prestige, and, related to all of them, of linguistic, and connected to this, cultural identity. These problems can be traced back to the times of antiquity, however, (disregarding a mythos like that of Bacchus having already been in India) since European colonialism began in early premodern time, it may be permitted to start reflections here from the very end of the fifteenth century. That means that the question of English in India up to the beginning of a so called Anglo-Indian literature and the contemporary Indian literature in English have to be seen before the background of the beginning European colonization with the Portuguese arriving at Calicut, on the south western shore of India. In the summary of my contribution on occasion of the international symposium, November 20, 2003, what is the starting point for this paper I wrote: — The question of the use of English and the writing of literature in English in India must be seen before the broader background of European colonialism, beginning with Portuguese colonization, from the time of early modern period into the second half of the 20th century. The usage of Portuguese in Goa was part of the program to force the colonized to adapt themselves to Christian-European customs and behaviours. As it is of course not limited to India, the enforced usage of

non Indian languages must be studied in the context of the problem of identity on various levels, cultural, including of course religion, nationality etc.

The English Jesuit Thomas Stephens (1549-1619) was one of the very early European occupied with linguistic studies in India. His name has not remained for the diffusion of English in India but for his grammatical and biblical texts written in Konkani and Marathi. While his oeuvre even today must be recognized as pioneer work it must not be forgotten that his activity has to be seen too as a 'contribution' and a tool for the upbuilding of colonial hegemony, rule and control, as for e.g. Pratima Kamat writes: "The efforts of Jesuit 'Orientalists' like Thomas Stephens, Miguel de Almeida, António de Saldanha, Diogo Ribeiro and the 'Racholenses' to study the local languages and write, compile lexicographs and grammars in them constituted as Bernhard Cohn has argued, in another context, "an important part of the colonial project of control and command"¹⁾.

Letters in English which Thomas Stephens sent home stimulated his father and friends of his father to engage themselves in commercial activities with India even before the establishment of the English East India Company²⁾.

The merchants and other people involved with that Company which took up business in India at the very beginning of the 17th century used English and in their surrounding English must have begun to be spoken by Indians. Dean Mahomed (1759-1851) who stayed in Ireland and England from 1784 to 1851, he died in England, left a travelogue in form of letters, published in 1794 which constitutes one of the first documents written in English by an Indian³⁾.

With his often cited, as I did too in previous studies, cf. e.g. footnote 19, *Minute on Indian Education* from 2 February, 1835 Thomas Babington Macaulay made a lasting contribution to the discussion of the use of language in India. This text, in which Macaulay advocates not only the use of English but as well an Anglicization for those Indians who should work for the British, has become known, too, for

the contemptuous attitude of its author towards the native languages and their literatures. There Macaulay wrote: “I have read translations of the most celebrated Arabic and Sanscrit works. I have conversed both here and at home with men distinguished by their proficiency in the Eastern tongues. I am quite ready to take the Oriental learning at the valuation of the Orientalists themselves. I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature on India and Arabia. The intrinsic superiority of the Western literature is, indeed, fully admitted by those members of the Committee who support the Oriental plan of education”⁴⁾. With such and other arguments English became introduced into and used in India for practical services. In the second half of the 19th century various Indian authors began writing literary texts, prose and poetry. At the same time there was an attempt like that of Chandu Menon to write, with *Indulekha*, a novel after the English fashion in his own language Malayalam⁵⁾. Today there is a general agreement that the form of the novel, as known in Europe, was introduced into India from abroad —⁶⁾.

II The use of English in India — R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao

By the 1930ies the Indian struggle for independence and freedom from British colonialism had considerably developed, with the ‘boycott of foreign goods, *swadeshi*, wearing home-spun clothes, *khadi* and the taking of untaxed salt’⁷⁾. In the same decade works by three authors began to appear which are repeatedly brought forth as representative for Indian literature in English on an advanced level. These are Mulk Raj Anand (1905-), born in Peshawar, now in Pakistan, R.K. Narayan (1906-2001), born in Madras, what is now in Tamil Nadu, and Raja Rao (1908-), born in Mysore, now in Karnataka. They chose to write in English, and, like other intellectuals of their time, reflected upon the usage of English by Indian writers. Narayan begins his essay *English in India*, written in the 1960ies, by describing his initiation to writing

as a five year old child: “I was taught to shape the first two letters of the alphabet with corn spread out on a tray, both in Sanskrit and Tamil. Sanskrit, because it was the classical language of India, Tamil because it was the language of the province in which I was born and my mother tongue”⁸⁾. However, Narayan continues in school both of these languages were attributed only a minor role and, “as ordained by Lord Macaulay when he introduced English education in India” English held a privileged position. However the first steps in English proved to be difficult, because the children in school, to whom apple pies were unknown, could not grasp the meaning of the textbook’s first sentence: “‘A was an Apple Pie’”. The teacher’s explanation that it must be something like “...*idli*, but prepared with apple” did not really satisfy the children who, thus, had to use imagination to combine signifiant and signifié, or, as Narayan puts it: “were left free to guess, each according to his capacity, at the quality, shape, and details of the civilization portrayed in our class-books”⁹⁾. In this essay Narayan does not put into question the necessity of learning English for an Indian, but discusses the appropriateness of the method to study its language and culture. English in India, he argues, has to serve other purposes than in England or other English using parts of the world and to fulfill other expectations. Narayan considers this as possible and he asserts his confidence in the “flexibility” of English, what he explains with his own experience which showed that it was possible “conveying unambiguously” the world of his fictitious “small town named Malgudi supposed to be located in a corner of South India”. In order that this can be possible and become even more developed, the Indian writer must not try “to write Anglo-Saxon English”, and, instead, English in India has to continue its “process of Indianization”, and this as one of many languages. For this process, so Narayan, English in India has to cease to be only a “language of the intelligentsia”. If English is expected to serve the necessities of the Indian speaker it has to “reach the marketplace and the village green”, and for this have to be developed as well the appropriate teaching methods. Narayan, here, advocates that “the

language must be taught in a simpler manner, through a basic vocabulary, simplified spelling, and explained and interpreted through the many spoken languages of India”¹⁰). However, it would be wrong to assume that Narayan were advocating a kind of second-rank language. In another essay *Toasted English* he claims: “I am not suggesting here a mongrelization of the language. ... Bharat English will respect the rule of law and maintain the dignity of grammar, but still have a *swadeshi* stamp about it unmistakably, like the Madras handloom check shirt or the Tirupati doll”¹¹).

Connected to the complex of colonialism, language and cultural identity, one of the most often cited and known texts is Rajo Rao’s *Foreword* to his novel *Kanthapura*. Similar to what Naryayan says, he argues that the Indian English has to gain its own character. Although the text has been cited so often I shall reproduce it largely one time more here: “English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up—like Sanskrit or Persian was before—but not of our emotional make-up. We are all instinctively bilingual, many of us writing in our own language and in English. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us. Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect which will some day prove to be as distinctive and colourful as the Irish or the American”¹²). The fact that English is not the only language in India which came from outside, has been repeatedly brought in as an argument for the choice of language. Salman Rushdie, too, points to Urdu, when discussing the use of English as an Indian¹³).

III. 1 Language, Culture and Identity

Returning to Narayan I would like to say that on the few pages of *English in India* Narayan touches on many problems which have been brought up by other writers, of literature or of post/colonial theory. His observation that, despite English to become the language hold more

important in school, he was initiated in Sanskrit too because it was the “classical language of India” makes me think of a conversation between two teachers of Hindi in Anita Desai’s novel *In Custody*. The situation is complicated, anyway, in this dialogue one of them regrets that they have chosen to become teachers of a subject that is ‘only’ valuable to convey tradition but worthless to gain enough money, that is that could enable someone to go e.g. to America to attain a prosperous life. “Jayadev made a face. ‘What is all this past-fast stuff? I am sick of it. It is the only thing we know in this country. History teaches us the glorious past of our ancient land. Hindi and Sanskrit teachers teach us the glorious literature of the past. I am sick of that. What about the future?’ he muttered.”¹⁴⁾

III. 2 Anita Desai’s *Baumgartner’s Bombay* and *In Custody*

In studies and anthologies of studies about Indian literature in English Anita Desai’s (1937-) novels are often discussed in the context of feminist writing, a perspective which is justified. In a recent monograph about Anita Desai’s novels Ramesh Kumar Gupta writes: “The theme of man-woman relationship in Anita Desai’s novels reveals her consummate craftsmanship. Mrs. Desai sincerely broods over her fate and future of modern woman more particularly in male-chauvinistic society and her annihilation at the altar of marriage”¹⁵⁾. Already before this statement, R.K. Gupta had, with reference to A.V. Krishna Rao, put Anita Desai’s feminist writing before the background of the Indian novel in English: “In the growth and development of the Indo-Anglian novel, the feminine sensibility has achieved an imaginative self-sufficiency which merits recognition in spite of its relatively later manifestation. Anita Desai presents the welcome creative release of the feminine sensibility which emerged more powerfully in the post-independence era”¹⁶⁾.

Anita Desai was borne as a child of her mother from Germany and her father from Bengal. This background may arise the question why

she writes in English. R.K. Gupta sees it as an election: “Anita Desai, a prominent and up-coming Indo-English writer, has chosen English, a second language to her, as the medium for the “exploration of feminine sensibility”¹⁷⁾.

The problem of language becomes one of the main concerns in A. Desai’s novel *Baumgartner’s Bombay*. The main figure of the novel, Hugo Baumgartner, is a German Jew who was sent in his youth into exile in India and has remained there. Baumgartner becomes alienated from his original mother tongue German, but never finds to a new really own language. The great variety of Indian languages spoken at one and the same place, like Bombay, are for him like “seeds of a red hot chilly exploding out of its pod into his face” or so abundant like “tropical foliage”. Reluctantly he finds to a for him “new and hesitant English”, which remains but a substitute language for him¹⁸⁾. Since I have discussed, if not sufficiently, the problem of language in this novel in another place¹⁹⁾, I will here, for reasons of space, restrict myself to the following observations. Baumgartner’s linguistic dilemma is made visible by the fact that the novel is mainly written in English, however it is permeated with German and Hindi words and phrases. The importance which lullabies and children’s songs, which are given in German language, gain in the novel demonstrates the biographical and personal concern of the author, what has been shown by Malashri Lal²⁰⁾. In a study from 1990, which I read only recently, Judie Newman underlines the importance of the treatment of language in *Baumgartner’s Bombay*. Desai has repeatedly spoken about her preference for novels which treat with the inner world rather than with social problems, and has thereby, as Desai herself maintained in an interview, and here repeated by J. Newman, “avoided many of the ideological problems created by the use of English, by not writing ‘social document’ novels. In *Baumgartner’s Bombay*, however, Desai, argues J. Newman, discusses “the relation of discourse to history, the language of the interior to that of the outer world”²¹⁾. The introduction of children songs in German into the novel is seen by J. Newman, as I

do in my study, as a metaphor for the atrocities in Nazi-Germany. However, J. Newman goes further and sees in the songs expressed an “infantile blindness” of the colonizer as seen by the colonized, or: “In *Baumgartner’s Bombay* Desai takes the Imperial convention for representing the colonised (immaturity) and redefines it as a property of Europe”²²).

One may speak of two main figures in A. Desai’s novel *In Custody*. This is Denver, who teaches Hindi at a college only because it was easier to get a post for that language but would much prefer to teach in the exclusive Urdu department. And there is Nur, a poet of Urdu language who, decrepit by now, lives on what has remained of his former fame. Asked by his friend Murad who runs a journal for Urdu poetry, Denver, who years before wrote a study about Nur which has remained unpublished, sets out to interview the old poet and record him reading from his poems. Both these male figures are described most ironically in all their weaknesses; over long passages the novel almost becomes a farce. Those weaknesses appear as well in the relation to their wife, or in Nur’s case, wives.

Only in a few places of the novel the political implications of use of language before the background of growing Hindu nationalism appear directly. When Denver, e.g., asks the head of the Hindi department to be allowed to leave already before vacations begin in order to start with his interviews, he is shouted at: “I won’t have Muslim toadies in my department, you’ll ruin my boys with your Muslim ideas, your Urdu language”, and the head intimidates him that he will “warn the RSS” (p. 145)²³).

While the decadent Nur at one point in the novel confesses that he cannot find back to his former vigour as a poet and adds: “...I am going to curl up on my bed like a child in its mother’s womb ...”, Urdu language has assumed for Denver a function similar to that of a ‘mother’s womb’ (p. 169). It has become more than a hobby and means a possibility to evade, temporarily, the mediocrity of daily life which he by now has come to accept.

While Desai's major interest should, probably, be seen in the man — woman relations, the novel is worth reading as well under the aspect of the situation of quantitatively major and minor languages, as well as a sociopolitical problem and as a problem of art.

III. 3 Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* (1993)

In the context of Narayan's description how his and other generations of Indians were made to study the traditional canon of English culture and literature as if they themselves were English and its culture and literature could and should have the same value as for someone from England, Great Britain, I must think of Vikram Seth's (1952-) novel *A Suitable Boy*. This novel of epic length is hold together by the story of Mrs. Mehra Rupa's ambitions to find an adequate husband (the reason for the title) for her daughter Lata. But, indeed, while reaching back into the time of the India struggle for freedom, it is a novel of the Indian society of the beginning 1950ies²⁴⁾, that is a few years after India had gained independence from England. The numerous protagonists of four families, Hindi and Muslim, offer the opportunity to create a picture of the traditions being uphold and changes in a society that has to find as well its cultural independence and identity. Therefore language becomes one motif to bring in many aspects involved in these questions.

To begin with, there is the situation of the many languages existing side by side sometimes on equal parts, sometimes as concurrents. In a scene at the very beginning of the novel appear Lata, who is said to speak English with her mother, and Maan Kapoor, who is said to speak Hindi with his father but to know "both well" (p.7). As a friend of Firoz Khan Maan comes into contact with Urdu poetry and, "enthusiastically", announces to learn that language (p.305). Then there is Amit Chatterji from Calcutta who takes the view that only Bengali is a civilized language and not Hindi and still "writes his books in English" (p. 310). This reports Rupa Mehra — her elder son Arun is married to

Meenakshi Chatterji — , when she writes to her elder daughter Savita that Meenakshi argues, if her three year old daughter Aparna is expected to “learn correct English” it should be in this young age. Rupa Mehra herself would prefer that her granddaughter should address her not as “Grandma” but in Hindi “Daadi” (p.310). In Justice Chatterji’s case the use of English is directly connected with colonial rule, already his father had worked as a judge under the British colonial government. His study at home is full with English titles and some books on the still very young Indian constitution. It seems that the narrator wants to make him appear as a balanced character. He is said to be proud to be a Bengali as to be an Indian, and this in a context in which it is also said that he has a distaste against people who detest “all things British or tainted with ‘pseudo-British liberalism’” and who prefer the Bengali Chandra Bose to Ghandi (pp. 466-467). It is said that he becomes sad when he looks at a list of judges in Calcutta from which Muslims and English were vanishing. Among his friends are Muslims and English (p. 469), and he is said to consider religion and nationality at the same time as something of importance and unimportance when it comes to “friendships and acquaintance” (p. 471). And still, when asked in 1948, when in Calcutta still an English was Chief Justice, to become a judge, he had declined because two years before a younger man had been appointed because he was an English (p. 471). However, Justice Chatterji’s position may be compared to one which appears in Salman Rushdie’s *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, a novel written as a reaction to the communal clashes between Hindi and Muslims in 1992-1993, and in which may be read as well a longing for a Gandhian and Nehruvian pluralism²⁵).

Arun, Rupa Mehra’s elder son, represents the position of those who have internalized colonial rule with its culture and language. He knows so much about London, including the actual programs of theatres and recently published books which are in vogue, that surprises even his English chief Basil Cox (p. 381) and that makes one believe he must have spent years in London and continues to be a regular visitor,

but, as it turns out, he has never been there²⁶). Of course he wears European suits, and this not only of conviction, but because he seems to suffer from a complex of inferiority. When Basil Cox is awaited to visit his home — he lives in Calcutta at his wife's, that is the Chatterjis' house — he wants to force his younger brother Varun to change his Indian style clothes for European, and argues, that he does not want Basil Cox think that he is running a “third-class dharamshala” (p. 378)²⁷). When, during the war Arun had heard Churchill's speeches over the radio he had murmured ““Good old Winnie!””, doing this in the same manner as he had heard it from English doing so (p. 378)²⁸). And he continues to maintain his strict opinion about language and its implication with a civilization he considers superior. When Lata, finally, is about to decide her husband he tries to dissuade her from marrying Haresh, because, so Arun who himself never has been to England, even if Haresh may have studied at an acknowledged English college in India and have lived two years in England, his English was not acceptable. And this, so Arun, not only because of his accent which betrayed that Haresh's “first language” was not English, but because of his “idiom and diction, of his very sense” of what he said in English (p. 1293).

In the novel, Arun's younger brother Varun's, is to be taken as a diametrically opposed position. This could, as it appears in the novel, be caused by Arun's brotherly tyranny — their father had died early. Still of interest is how the difference is expressed. While Arun had been hearing speeches by Churchill, Varun had acted at school, if animated by chance and fury, in acts of anti-imperialism and hate of foreigners and had written “‘Pig’ on two Bibles” (p. 378). And when Arun, as said above, on the occasion of Basil Cock's visit, wants to enforce on him western clothes he reacts furiously and asks if he is expected to imitate the white man even at his own home (p. 379).

The questions of language and identity appear in Vikram Seth's novel as well as a problem of literary expression and reception of literature. There is Amit Chatterji, Arun's brother in law, who is a poet

and writes in English. He becomes invited to hold a lecture before the Literary Society of Brahmipur. After he has read his poems he is confronted with the question why he does not write in Bengali, his mother-tongue. Upon this Amit confesses that his Bengali would not be enough, and he defends himself with the explanation that he, in fact, has no choice at all. A sitar-player, he says, cannot become all of a sudden a sirangi-player because ideology or consciousness demand so, and ascribes his writing in English due to a coincidence of history. Further he as well explains that Sanskrit, too, “...came to India from outside” (p. 1253).

Amit’s explanation is of interest within the events of the novel itself, but I want to mention that Vikram Seth himself, as Krishna Dutta points out, is not Bengali, however, he was born in Calcutta. And perhaps it may be allowed to see in Amit’s explanations as well a shadow of the author’s (who of course must be strictly separated from Amit as from all other figures) reflections upon language²⁹). Especially Amit’s last argument reminds of Salman Rushdie’s declaration, when he wrote about Indian writers’ English, that as well Urdu has come from outside. Amit’s problem is briefly discussed in Krishna Kripalani’s essay about “Modern Literature”. He makes reference to Rabindranath Tagore, who, while himself “a lover of the English language to which he owed much”, still argued that “no great literature could be produced except in one’s mother tongue” and who “likened an exclusive reliance on English to the use of crutches which make a lot of clatter while the natural limbs become atrophied by disuse”. Kripalani has his doubts about such argumentation, he thinks that Tagore has “overstressed the *mother* tongue aspect, for it is doubtful if Sanskrit was the tongue in which either Kalidasa or Jayadeve lisped to their mothers”. He continues that a writer may adopt another language than his “mother tongue proper”, and in India, so Kripalani, this does not necessarily mean English. Kripalani’s opinion is that “the language of one’s cultural upbringing and environment is the best medium for one’s creative expression”³⁰).

The question of language and identity comes up with an ironical subtone when an elderly lady asks Amit whether he has “...ever been in love with an English girl?” (p. 1253). To be taken more serious is the question of professor Mishra, head of the English department in Brahmpur college and Pram Kapoor’s senior, whether Amit has not been influenced by Eliot. The relation between Pram Kapoor, who is still a lecturer of English literature and waits to be appointed professor, and Professor Mishra, who can take influence for or against this, continues to be brought up regularly from the very beginning of the novel to the end. Here I want to mention only that Pram Kapoor for some time has come to argue that the James Joyce’s œuvre should become a compulsory subject in the examinations of modern English literature. Professor Mishra is strictly against such a decision (pp. 49ss). He brings forth esthetical arguments and doubts about the grammatical correctness of Joyce’s English (p. 52). However, when one thinks of the parallel situation of India and Ireland as former colonies the question of an alteration of the traditional literary canon of English literature may, here, have deeper implications. The problem, however, is still more complicated. When Pram Kapoor argues that Joyce’ œuvre is read more and more at American universities, Mishra argues against this that the Indian people should be proud of their independence gained after a struggle propelled by several generations, and that he would be wrong to have literary priorities been dictated by American scientific institutions (p. 51). It is not possible to consider the problems here involved further, but I want to mention at least that it might be worth to discuss the question of literature in English to be read in India, too, before the background of Narayan’s quest to Indianize English in India.

III. 4 Amitav Ghosh, *The Glass Palace* (2001)

The two brothers’ differences, as depicted in Vikram Seth’s novel remember of the different positions taken towards the British rule in

India of Dinu and Arjun, who become brothers in law, in Amitav Ghosh's (1956-) novel *The Glass Palace*. Here I shall look at that novel only briefly because the problem of language itself, if inside, appears not so explicitly in it. A major problem in the novel is that of identification with the British colonial culture.

The Glass Palace is a historical novel which, mainly, tells the (hi)story of the fall of Mandalay in 1885, the subjugation of Burma under British colonization, and the political developments up to the situation in Myambar in 1996. The problem of Indian identity appears with the second world war and especially with the Japanese invasion in "Burma, which the British Sarkar had declared to be a part of India"³¹), when Indian and Burmese soldiers had to ask themselves whether they should fight in the British army. Dinu is the son of Rajkumar, originally from Chittagong who under most adventurous conditions has succeeded in the teak business and married a Burmese princess being exiled to Radnagiri on the Indian west coast, Dinu's mother. Arjun comes from what seems to be a middle class family in Calcutta. He becomes Dinu's brother in law when his sister Manju marries Dinu's elder brother Neel. Dinu is an introverted type and a photographer, Arjun develops from a "boy of whom teachers complain that their performance is incorrigibly below their potential" (p.223) to an energetic soldier in the British army. Differently from his friend Hardy, whose family, as other Bengal families, has supplied the British army with soldiers since generations, Arjun is the first of his family to enter the army. On occasion of Manju's marriage Arjun and Dinu meet in Calcutta and on that occasion run into a demonstration of the freedom movement. A pamphlet is thrown into their car: "There were quotations from Mahatma Gandhi and a passage that said: "Why should India, in the name of freedom, come to the defense of this Satanic Empire which is itself the greatest menace to liberty that the world has ever known?" (p.254). Arjun, who has identified himself completely with the British army, even on condition that "...the British Indian army has always functioned on the understanding that

there was to be a separation between Indians and Britishers...” (p.246), calls the demonstrators ““Idiots”” (p.254). At this time Dinu accepts Arjun’s opinion, but for other reasons than his. He argues that at that moment the most important is to fight fascism. He calls Hitler and Mussolini ““...the most tyrannical and destructive leaders in all of human history...””, he mentions the massacre of the Jews, and adds ““...The Germans’ plan is simply to take over the Empire and rule in their [i.e. the British] place...””. What will become more important, he further makes comments about the situation in Asia, that is about the Japanese. He mentions the Nanking massacre: ““...Last year, in Nanking, they murdered hundreds of thousands of innocent people...””, and adds: ““...Do you think that if the Japanese army reached India they wouldn’t do the same thing here?...”” (p.255).

At this time for people like Arjun the identification with the culture and spirit of the British army means, too, to be modern. Eating all kind of foods, including beef etc., drinking alcohol means for him to be free: ““...we’re the first modern Indians; the first Indians to be truly free. We eat what we like, we drink what we like, we’re the first Indians who’re not weighed down by the past”” (pp.242-243). Dinu is offended by such an argumentation and he declares ““It’s not what you eat and drink that makes you modern: it’s a way of looking at things ...”” (p.243). Saying so, Dinu makes Arjun to look at some professional photographs.

Into his age, Dinu, who by now is “seventy-four at the time” (p.463) “had ever been directly involved in politics” (p.461). Only at the end of the novel, that is in 1996, “the sixth [year] of Aung San Suu Kyi’s house arrest” (p.465) he is made to confess: ““It’s strange ... I knew her father ... I knew many others who were in politics ... many men who are regarded as heroes now ... But she is the only leader I’ve ever been able to believe in”” (p.467).

While Dinu’s life becomes shaped by the dramatic events in his surrounding world, Arjun’s life itself takes a dramatical development. For quite a time he continues to hold his view that he must be loyal to the

British rule. When his friend Hardy reports to him about Captain Mohun Singh's decision "...to break with the Britishers" and that he was "...going to form an independent unit — the Indian National Army..." (p.377) that would fight on the Japanese side, it is now Arjun who, like Dinu before, argues: "...What do the Japanese want with us? Do they care about us and our independence? All they want is to push the Britishers out so they can step in and take their place. They just want to use us: don't you see that?" (p.378). However this does not mean that he has changed his opinion. He still feels himself more British than Indian: "Just look at us, Hardy — just look at us. What are we? We've learnt to dance the tango and we know how to eat roast beef with knife and fork. The truth is that except for the color of our skin, most people in India wouldn't even recognize us as Indians..." (p.379). This is a 'confession' which shows Arjun as a 'perfect' product of the education aimed at by Macaulay in his *Minute on Indian Education*³². By adding: "...When we joined up, we didn't have India on our minds: we wanted to be the sahibs and that's what we've become..." (p.379), he points at the problem that the colonizer is dividing the colonized society for its own purposes.

However, Arjun's way of thinking has changed. He too begins to doubt about the correctness of his standpoint. In front of a superior he remembers the words, cited by this same superior, of the English general Munro "...*The spirit of independence will spring up in this army long before it is even thought of among the people ...*" (p. 387, italics as in the novel; here it is necessary to make critical differentiations between what is called here "the people" and the Gandhian movement). But finally he himself joins the National Indian Army which in Burma was led by Aung San Suu Kyi's father Aung San. Shortly before his death he is confronted one more time with Dinu. He is fighting now desperately against the British army, still there remain doubts about his convictions when he says: "Did we ever have a hope? ... We rebelled against an Empire that has shaped everything in our lives; colored everything in the world as we know it. It is a huge, indelible

stain which has tainted all of us. We cannot destroy it without destroying ourselves. And that, I suppose, is where I am ...” (p.446). When Dinu tells him that Rajkumar and his granddaughter have been killed by Japanese soldiers, and when he asks him why he continues to fight even after the defeat of the Japanese army he argues: “...You think I joined *them*. I didn’t. I joined an Indian army that was fighting for an Indian cause. The war may be over for the Japanese — it isn’t for us” (p.446)³³). At this time even Dinu has his doubts about “his own absolute condemnation of them” (p. 447) [that is of men like Aung San who decided to fight against the British army]. Finally Arjun almost provokes his death which comes close to a kind of suicide. By an eyewitness it is reported: “It was clear ... that he did not want to live” (p.454).

IV Trying to conclude

In V. Seth’s novel as in A. Ghosh’s novel a divide is shown going through society on various levels. I would like to put this into a context with another divide, that is India’s political situation and development after the partition in 1947. More than half a century after India was divided this trauma continues to become the theme of novels and films. Here I mention only Amitav Ghosh’s novel *The Shadow Lines*. In one scene of the novel partition is shown directly reflected as problem of language of a different kind than shown up to here. The narrator’s family has moved from Dhaka to Calcutta, and in one scene the grandmother, who is a schoolteacher, regrets the difficulty to visit her old home. This she expresses: “I could come home to Dhaka whenever I wanted”³⁴). The narrator, at that time a child, mocks that his grandmother wouldn’t even know the difference between ‘to go’ and ‘to come’. Years after the little incident he understands that grandmother had not really been wrong. He considers: “Every language assumes a centrality, a fixed and settled point to go away from and come back to, and what grandmother was looking for was a word for a journey which was

not a coming or a going at all; a journey that was a search for precisely that fixed point which permits the proper use of the verbs” (p.153)³⁵). In S. Rushdie’s *The Moor’s Last Sigh* a ‘divide’ appears in the form of the politically different attitude of the brothers Camoens da Gama and Aires da Gama during the fight for independence and freedom and is expressed metaphorically when the house, where both brothers live, is literally divided, both expressed as well in the title of the first part of the novel *A House Divided*³⁶). In Rushdie’s novel the motif of being divided appears in one more shape. Francisco da Gama, father of Camoes and Aires invites a young architect from France, M. Charles Jeanneret, better known as Le Corbusier, to build two houses in his garden. One is built in European, Western, style and the other one in Japanese, Asian, style what should be read as an expression of cultural identity³⁷). Rushdie’s novel as those discussed above show that ‘divides’ from which India has been made to suffer can be traced in many aspects of Indian’s colonial and post-colonial conditions.

This is, of course, only one of the many aspects which could not be brought up here. Another important question, that could not be discussed here, is the question who, in India, reads Indian literature in English.

Notes

- 1) Pratima Kamat, *Farar Far. Local Resistance to Colonial Hegemony in Goa 1510-1912*, Panaji, Goa, Institute Menezes Bragança, 1999, p.44; P. Kamat is citing here from: Bernhard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its forms of Knowledge — The British in India*, Delhi, Oxford UP, 1997, p.x. What Pratima Kamat cites in her excellent book indeed makes part of Bernhard S. Cohn’s argumentation. However, this is, as presented by Nicholas B. Dirks in his *Foreword* to B.S. Cohn’s book, where he points out “several substantive shifts in Cohn’s newest writing”, whom P. Kamat is obviously citing. I myself have used the edition: B.S. Cohn, *Colonialism ...*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton UP, 1996, N.B. Dirks, *Foreword*, pp.ix-xvii, here, as well, p.x.
- 2) Raja Ram Mehrota, *Indian English. Texts and Interpretation*,

- Amsterdam, Philadelphia, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1998, p.3.
- 3) Cf. Michael H. Fisher, *The First Indian Author in English. Dean Mahomed (1759-1851) in India, Ireland, and England*, Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Oxford UP, 1996.
 - 4) Thomas Babington Macaulay, *Minute on Indian Education*, in: Th.B. M., *Selected Writings*, Edited and with an Introduction by John Clive & Thomas Pinney, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1972, pp.235-251, here, p.241.
 - 5) O. Chanthu Menon, *Indulekha* [in my transcription: o. chantumeenoon, *induleekha*] (1889), Kottayam, D.C. Books, 1989; for a discussion of the novels innovation and modernity cf. K. N. Panikkar, "Creating a New Cultural Taste: Reading a Nineteenth-century Malayalam Novel", in: R. Champakalakshmi, S. Gopal, eds., *Tradition, Dissent & Ideology. Essays in Honour of Romila Thapar*, Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Oxford UP, 1996, pp.89-108.
 - 6) For the almost identical text between the hyphens cf. E.J., "Colonialism and Literature considering Indian literature in English", in: 京都大学大学院文学研究科 21 世紀 COE プログラム 「グローバル化時代の多元的人文学の拠点形成」 「文学と言語を通してみたグローバル化の歴史」 News Letter No.4. 2004. 1. 22, pp.1-3.
 - 7) Cf. e.g. Muriel E. Chamberlain, *The Longman Companion to European Decolonization in the Twentieth Century*, Harlow, Essex, UK, 1998, p.49, whom I cite slightly changed.
 - 8) R.K. Narayan, *English in India*, in: R.K. N., *A Story-teller's World. Stories, Essays, Sketches*, New Delhi, Penguin Books India (1972), 1990, pp.20-23, here, p.20.
 - 9) R.K. Narayan, *English in India*, op.cit., pp.20-21.
 - 10) R.K. Narayan, *English in India*, op.cit., all citations here, p.23.
 - 11) R.K. Narayan, *Toasted English*, in : *A Story-teller's World*, op.cit., pp.24-26, here, p.26.
 - 12) Raja Rao, *Kanthapura* (1930), New Delhi, Bombay, Hyderabad, Orient Paperbacks, 14.1996, *Foreword* (p.5).
 - 13) Salman Rushdie, *Introduction*, in: Salman Rushdie and Elizabeth West, eds., *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing 1947-1997*, London, Vintage, 1997, pp.ix-xxii, here, pp.xii-xiii; for some of Rushdie's opinions about Indians writing in English cf. e.g.: "‘Commonwealth Literature’ Does not Exist" (1983), in: S.R., *Imaginary Homelands. Essays and*

- Criticism 1981-1991* (1991), London, Granta Books in association with Penguin Books, 1992, pp.61-70.
- 14) Anita Desai, *In Custody* (1984), London, Penguin Books, 1985, p.186. All citations are taken from this edition.
 - 15) R.K. Gupta, *The Novels of Anita Desai. A Feminist Perspective*, New Delhi, Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2002, p.153.
 - 16) R.K. Gupta, *The Novels of Anita Desai*, op.cit., p.82; concerning the concept of “feminine sensibility” Gupta cites A.V. Krishna, *The Indo-Anglian Novel and the Changing Tradition*, Mysore, 1972, p.50, Gupta, p.143.1.
 - 17) R.K. Gupta, *The Novels of Anita Desai*, op.cit., p.13.
 - 18) Anita Desai, *Baumgartner’s Bombay* (1988), London, Penguin Books, 1989, pp.85, 92, 86.
 - 19) See my modest: E.J., “Lemon trees bloom only in dream Anita Desai’s *Baumgartner’s Bombay* (1988)”, in: *The Integrated Human Studies*, Faculty of Integrated Human Studies, Kyoto University, 1999, vol. 6, pp.67-86.
 - 20) Malashri Lal, “Anita Desai’s *Baumgartner’s Bombay*: The Feminization of a Hero”, in: Naresh L. Jain, ed., *Women in Indo-Anglian Fiction. Tradition and Modernity*, New Delhi, Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 1998, pp.193-207. Lal cites an interview with A. Desai, ‘On the English Language in India’, *The Commonwealth of Letters*, Vol.2, No. 1 (June 1990), in which Desai explains that, while she was writing in English and speaking in Hindi, this novel had become an possibility to “use that part of my tongue that I had to silence for all my writing years because I could not find the key to unlock it”, here cited from M. Lal, p.195, in the original text, p.9.
 - 21) Judie Newman, “History and Letters: Anita Desai’s *Baumgartner’s Bombay*”, in: Michael Parker, Roger Starkey, eds., *Postcolonial Literatures. Achebe, Ngugi, Desai, Walcott*, Hampshire and London, Palgrave, Macmillan, pp.195-208, p.195, For A. Desai’s preference for novelists who deal with the “inner’ world” cf. as well R.K. Gupta, *The Novels of Anita Desai*, op.cit., p.13.
 - 22) Julie Newman, “History and Letters”, op.cit., p.198.
 - 23) “**RSS/ R.S.S.** Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh, National Voluntary Service Organization. A largely **Hindu** semi-militant organization with right wing connections. ...”, here cited, as with bold print from: Nigel Hankin, *Hanklyn Janklin. A Stranger’s Rumble-Tumble Guide*

- to some Words Customs and Quiddities Indian and Indo-British, New Delhi, Banyan Books (1992), 3.1997, p.262.
- 24) At a very early stage of the novel the reader is informed: "It was the early winter of 1950, and India had been free for over three years", Vikram Seth, *A Suitable Boy* (1993), New Delhi, Penguin Books, India, 2.1996, p.6; all citations in the text are from this edition.
- 25) Salman Rushdie, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1995; cf. here as well my: "Eeny Meeny Myney Moo(r) ... Searching the proper second line Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995)", in: *The Integrated Human Studies*, Kyoto University, Faculty of Integrated Human Studies, Vol. 7, 2000, pp.83-110, here, p.86.
- 26) The case of the protagonist in Carmo D'Souza's novel *Angela's Goan Identity*, Panaji, New Age Printers, 1994, is somewhat different. Still I have to think of her experiences in this context. Like Arun's imagination about London Angela's about Lisbon is made by the colonizer. I would like to mention this novel too for the linguistic experiences made by Angela and her surrounding world. After Goa's independence from Portugal, 1961, Angela has to change her education in Portuguese to an education in English. The question with which language to identify must be seen there as well in the context of the language-religion relation. Cf. here my: "Aspects of identity and hybridity in Carmo D'Souza's *Angela's Goan Identity* (1994)", in: *Doitsu bungaku kenkyu*, Kyoto Daigaku, Sogoningengakubu Doitsugobukai, Vol.48, 2003, pp.41-69.
- 27) "DHARAMSHALA/ DHARAMSALA Inexpensive or free pilgrim's or traveller's rest", S. Muthiah, *Words in Indian English. A reader's guide*, New Delhi, Indus, 1991, p.62.
- 28) What could become, or even already has become, a classic literary parody of Indians imitating the 'British style of the Raj' is the description of the immediate-post-colonial micro-society in Salman Rushdie's chapter "Methwold" in his *Midnight's Children* (1981), London, Vintage, 1995, pp.92-106.
- 29) By the way, the narrator makes Amit to be asked as well why he is using the language confining rhymes in his poems. Upon which Amit answers that rhymes could help to control the language and that he himself does not feel limited at all. While it may be dangerous to continue to stress parallels between Amit and V. Seth, I still want to mention, too, that Vikram Seth uses rhyme in his own poems, as in his *Mappings* (1981), New Delhi, Viking, 1994; *All You Who Sleep Tonight*,

New Delhi, Viking, 1990, *Beastley Tales. From Here and There* (1991), London, Phoenix, 1994, and in his in rhymes written novel *The Golden Gate* (1986), New Delhi, Penguin Books India in association with Faber and Faber, 1993. Many of his rhymes, in their playfully language and ludicrous style, resemble those by Amit and other persons in *A Suitable Boy*, as that Mr. Nowrojee, a member of the Literary Society in Brahmipur, about the untimely death of the poetess Toru Dutt (p.II, 849). Toru Dutt, again, a historical figure and born into a family of writers and poets, is hold as one of the pioneers of Indian poets writing in England for her innovative language in her poems and translations from French. Rosinka Chaudhuri underlines her “awareness of her own ‘Indianness’” without being “restricted to Indian historical themes and the reworking of Indian legends”. Instead, so R. Chaudhuri, she wrote about “individual life and a sensibility that belongs to modern India”, R. Chaudhuri, “The Dutt Family Album. And Toru Dutt”, in: Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, ed., *A History of Indian Literature in English*, London, Hurst and Company, 2003, pp.53-69, here, p.69. Rhyming, one may add, is intentionally used playfully and even ironically in this novel. Almost all members of the Chatterji family indulge with it (cf. e.g. pp.484ss). And even the titles of the 19 “Parts” of the novel in the list of *Contents* (without paging) are in rhyme.

As for Vikram Seth’s interest in language in Calcutta I must add that only after finishing the manuscript and when correcting proofs I read Krishna Dutta’s *Calcutta. A cultural and literary history, Cities of the Imagination*, Oxford, Signal Books, 2003, There I learned that V. Seth is not Bengali, and I found the interesting explanation: “Even Vikram Seth, not a Bengali but who was born in Calcutta, felt compelled to recreate the linguistic complexity of the city in his portrait of the Chatterji family in the novel *A Suitable Boy*. The Chatterji elders are portrayed as almost congenitally reverential to Tagore so much so that their children predictably turn rebellious”, op.cit., p.209.

- 30) Krishna Kripalani, “Modern Literature”, in: A.L. Basham, ed., *A Cultural History of India* (1975), Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Oxford UP, 10.1996, Chapter XXIX, pp.406-422, all citations here, p.420.
- 31) Amitav Ghosh, *The Glass Palace*, New York, Random House, 2001, p.108. All citations in the text are from this edition. In several of my citations from the novel, unfortunately, I could not differentiate dots as taken from the novel itself and dots marking my own abbreviations.

- 32) Even if well known I want to cite one time more the following ‘famous’ words left by Th.B. Macaulay: “We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect”, Th.B. Macaulay, *A Minute on Indian Education*, op.cit., p.249.
- 33) The Japanese defeat was caused by a British counterinvasion, to which was added a change by the Burma Independence Army: “They [the Japanese] were dealt a final blow by General Aung San, who dramatically reversed his allegiances: although the Burma Independence Army had entered the country with the aid of the Japanese, they had never been more than reluctant allies for the occupiers. In 1945 General Aung San issued a secret order to his followers to join the drive to push the Japanese out of Burma. After this it was clear that the Japanese occupation was almost at an end”, A. Ghosh, *The Glass Palace*, p.443.
- 34) Amitav Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines*, New Delhi, Ravi Dayal Publisher (1988), 9.1997, p.153.
- 35) Cf. here as well my modest study: “Unseen Boundaries between Not So Different Worlds – Amitav Ghosh’s *In an Antique Land* (1992)”, in: *The Integrated Human Studies*, Kyoto University, Faculty of Integrated Human Studies, Vol. 8, 2001, pp.19-34, here, pp.25-26, and as well my essay 「見えない境界線」、『現代のことば』、京都新聞（夕刊）1999年（平成11年）6月9日、p.2.
- 36) S. Rushdie, *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, op.cit., p.35.
- 37) S. Rushdie, *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, op.cit., pp.15-16; cf. here as well my: “Eeny Meeny Myney Moo(r)”, op.cit., p.86.

（京都大学大学院人間・環境学研究科助教授）