We know that the city is the site of contention and contestation between the capitalist class and the worker as early capitalist tendencies gave way to the mature stage of industrialisation. The life of Britain’s capitalist cities has been written by many hands, and the municipal corporation has taken on the mantle of the official storywriter. The municipality is variously regarded as an institution that naturalises and moderates the capitalist process; a vehicle for the advancement of capitalist ideology and urban development in England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)

Indeed, the cities of Bradford, Manchester, Birmingham, London and Leicester are fine examples of such cities that stand today as two hundred year old mantras to industrialisation. These symbols of industrial wealth were forged by large waves of agricultural labour coming in search of the economic liberation that was delivered by the proletariat wage. Though the backdrop of industrialisation has now crumbled and all that remains is the tired chimneys that do not even have the energy to send up the wispest puff of smoke, the cities continue to stand as evidence of the power that capital casts over those who seek their fortunes within the realm of capitalist accumulation.

The lives of labouring people are etched on the buildings and streets of the industrial city and through the nineteenth century these were increasingly situated away from the factory and around football stadiums, dog track meets and men’s clubs. The excitement and exuberance generated within these social sites was in sharp contrast to the larger context of exploitation and harshness that prevailed in the processes of production and accumulation that drove the factory system.

What is noteworthy is that this social transformation was written largely in terms of the embedding of a new set of social expectations and demands, influenced almost wholly by domestic concerns. In fact, during the nineteenth century, colonialism remained restricted to the margins of the industrial economy. The encounter between colonialism and capitalism had to wait for the twentieth century in England, with the First World War bringing in a new set of industrial workers. The migrants who arrived in Asia and Africa to live and work in these large industrial cities in Britain were among those who established white working class as well as the municipality that had come to be regarded as the administrative authority of the cities.

What is less understood, and even less appreciated is that our very understanding of colonialism has been subjected to rounds of academically rereading and rewriting and the imprint of these iterations is distinctly observable on the process and pattern of construction of knowledge. The outcome of these rounds of reworking on the colonial process is that the colonial encounter was one where both the coloniser and the colonised interacted to create new forms of hybrid, even cosmopolitan cultures, in their own uniqueities and particularities. The identities generated by these encounters were creations of the colonial process itself, with the new words themselves—shampoo coming from the Indian word champi (oil-massage)—pointing to the importance of exchange, and the migrants themselves being the vehicles for the transmission of these new ideas and terms.

Migration from colonies, and the ideas that travelled between colony and mother country experienced a new wind ushered in by the emergence of newly independent nations claiming their place in the established world order in the decade after the end of the Second World War. There was a heightened sense of national identity within these countries and achieving a national identity, was cast as the single, and most important goal for colonised countries that would liberate a collective of people and Partha Chatterji provides a powerful analysis of the social forces behind creating a nation and the impacts of the constituent parts of the state, particularly the inadequate attention accorded in this process to the tendencies therein that are opposed to a single identity in his The Nation and its Fragments, (P5).

It is important to remember that the creation of a post-colonial world was often dotted with acrid periods of struggle, acts of extreme violence and considerable bloodshed. The now independent states were not stable social formations, and the migrants leaving the shores of their mother countries had often been exposed to protracted periods of opposition to both coercive and disruptive procedures, as in the case of the farmer who could no longer find decent employment in the fields of the Panjab, and migrants from post-colonial South Asia to British cities often carried with them these painful memories of the making of the nation (P9).

There is a distinct and rapidly growing literature on the impact of the Partition on the South Asian psyche.

The migrant workers who came from the Caribbean, South Asian, and within it of Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistani and Sri Lankan, are now identified by echoes of nationalist rhetoric. In contrast to that of their parental generations, the post-colonial migrant has their heads filled with a jumble of colonial and nationalist ideas. In the same direction, and the young Brit-Asian generation has traversed it in a manner that represents a sharp contrast to that of their parental generation of South-Asian migrants. If we are to make sense of the move from colonial to post-colonial in the lives of South-Asian migrants in British cities it is by ‘speaking of colonialism and postcoloniality as global, but also of recognizing the specificities of colonial and postcolonial experiences’ (Gillmarr and Berg 2007) and this double moment that would help us address mutually constitutive processes at the centre of Brit-Asian. This is particularly pertinent as we encounter a string of race-related ominous dates that fade into numerical markers: 9/11; 7/7; that have created their own image in these cities and where South-Asian voices need to be heard over the increasing clamour for racial, religious and cultural identities to be classified into official categories, even if these are cultural nameplates or youth fashions.

Yet, the policies on equality have not been able to reduce the ‘othering’ of British South Asians, forcing them to live parallel lives and a major cause of the riots in northern British towns, from Oldham to Bradford. The Cantle report published in December 2000 put forth the need for community cohesion to ensure peace in these race-riot hit towns, yet it was not able to enunciate how it conceptualised this term, nor could it set out how this objective should be achieved by city and county councils. What was still missing from the official discourse was safeguarding the rights of British South Asians is any recognition of the textured and variegated ebbs and flows between global, national and local imaginaries that constitute and reconstitute markers of community identity. The interactions of global, national and local have been evocatively drawn in on the formulation of global ethnospaces (Appadurai 1990) and investigated by Avert Brah (1996) in her concept of diasporic space (1996) where the sense of the transnational is interspersed with nodes of concentration where various imaginaries coalesce.

These imaginaries do not work in the same direction, and the young Brit-Asian generation has traversed it in a manner that represents a sharp contrast to that of their parental generation of South-Asian migrants. If we are to make sense of the move from colonial to post-colonial in the lives of South-Asian migrants in British cities it is by ‘speaking of colonialism and postcoloniality as global, but also of recognizing the specificities of colonial and postcolonial experiences’ (Gillmarr and Berg 2007) and this double moment that would help us address mutually constitutive processes at the centre of Brit-Asian. This is particularly pertinent as we encounter a string of race-related ominous dates that fade into numerical markers: 9/11; 7/7; that have created their own image in these cities and where South-Asian voices need to be heard over the increasing clamour for racial, religious and cultural identities to be classified into official categories, even if these are cultural nameplates or youth fashions.

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Dame Helen Suzman, South Africa’s “boots on” politician, passes away (P5)

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Aravind Adiga’s The White Tiger reviewed (P11)
The role of the Indian diaspora in this country has been debated and discussed from time to time. What exactly is its role and how far has it succeeded in making life better for itself the country of its adoption and for the ‘home’ country? There is hardly any dispute that a diaspora has a prime responsibility towards contributing to and influencing policy decisions in the country of its adoption. Numerous young men and women of the Indian diaspora have found places in the leading political parties of this country and have had their positive contributions acknowledged. A few of them have done well enough to represent largely white constituencies and even repeatedly been returned by them in contests with native British candidates. Which speaks volumes for the great advances made in the thinking of this country when it is remembered that it was only just fifty years ago that the Race Relations Act was introduced to staunch the spread of racial poison and prejudice—a remarkable change wrought from time to time—tremors in the form of creeping advances being made by the BNP.

Dear Sir,

Dr Stephen Gill’s article on the Indo Canadian diaspora (Confluence, January 2009) is interesting and also instructive, particularly since I don’t know the Canadian “scene”, never having visited that country. However, there are some points which are not clear to me. In the very first paragraph, Dr Gill states that the word “diaspora” is not a substitute for “immigrant”. I suppose while “immigrant” refers to an individual, “diaspora” implies many, somewhat on the lines of, say, the distinction between one person and a “crowd”. But can’t someone be both an immigrant and a member of a diaspora, an individual who, together with others, goes to form a diaspora? Dr Gill says that diaspora is “a bitter experience of dislocation” leading to “alienation”, and I wonder whether an immigrant or immigrants cannot also experience dislocation and alienation? He goes on to say, still in the first paragraph, that those of the diaspora (as distinct from the more immigrant) are unable to go back to their country of origin, but my copy of The New Oxford Dictionary, having defined the term diaspora gives, among others, this example: the Ukrainian diaspora flocked back to Kiev (italics in the original. Note “flocked back”). So too, the Jews claim they have “returned” to Israel after centuries of diasporic life. Now it is those Jews who are outside Israel who are seen as living in exile, as forming the Jewish diaspora.

Further on, Dr Gill states that those Indians born in Canada cannot be termed part of the Indo Canadian diaspora, but isn’t “diaspora” more a feeling than one based on a set of criteria? Can someone who “qualifies” for recognition and acceptance as belonging to a diaspora, still reject this inclusion and persist in seeing herself as an individual? If someone born to Indian parents in Canada were not to feel at home in Canada and (however misguided) were to see India as her real home—even though she has never been there—would that person not be entitled to consider herself a part of the Indian diaspora? Isn’t home more a feeling than objective facts? In this context, what Sarvan cites (page 12, same issue of Confluence) about the word “nostalgia” is apposite. Further on, Dr Gill writes that those Indians who came to Canada from the Caribbean or Africa (I suppose from countries such as Uganda and Kenya) cannot be included under the classification ‘Indo Canadian diaspora’. Is there in Canada competition and claim over the term “Indian diaspora”, an excluding attitude of, “I belong to the authentic Indo Canadian diaspora, you don’t?” That would be rather like the term “native” which word, during the imperial past, was a term of contempt but now is claimed with pride: “I am a native”, implying, “You are a foreigner or newcomer”. Are the marginalised, in turn marginalising; the excluded, excluding? Is there, in short, competition and argument over membership of the Indo Canadian diaspora? I am grateful of Dr Gill for having opened this window, and will be happy to be instructed.

A Confluence reader

Shashi Tharoor (top) addresses a packed house at 2008 Asia Lit Fest

The 2009 Festival of Asian Literature as well as BBC journalists Frank Gardner and John Simpson. Debate topics will include Terrorism and War in Central Asia, Politics and Place in Fiction, Music and Literature, and The Future of China. Three special pre-Festival events in April and early May will feature Man Booker Prize winner Aravind Adiga, Azar Nafisi, in her only solo London appearance and Tash Aw launching his new novel A Map of the Lost World. The 2009 Festival will showcase authors writing about India, China, Malaysia, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Indonesia and about Asians in Britain.

Other authors participating this year are Panikaj Mishra, Kenan Mallick, John Man, Jonathan Fenby, Hardeep Singh Kohli, Guo Yue, David Loy, Patrick Cockburn and Nirmalya Kumar.
Although Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah viewed the accession of J&K to India as a pragmatic necessity and sought to justify it by deploying the rhetoric of socialist and secularism, he harboured hopes for the creation of a sovereign Kashmir. In October 1949, the Constituent Assembly of India reinforced the stipulation that New Delhi’s jurisdiction in the state would remain limited to the categories of defence, foreign affairs, and communications only in just and equitable consultation with the government and the state governments, obligations as a unit of the [Indian] Union. Article 370 stipulates the autonomous status of J&K within the Indian constitution, which ratified the incorporation of Article 370 into the constitutional provision enabled the evolution of a neutral status for J&K. In his public speech made on 5 January, 1949, according to which Abdullah passed through a set of major reforms, the most important of which was the ‘land to the tiller’ legislation, which destroyed the power of the landlords, most of whom were Moslems. They were allowed to keep a maximum of 20 acres, provided they worked on the land themselves: 188,775 acres were transferred to 153,390 peasants, while the government organized collective farming on 90,000 acres. A law was passed prohibiting the sale of lands to non-Kashmiris, thus preserving the basic topography of the region.

The new economic plan of the state was formulated and executed by Abdullah’s government. It underlined cooperative enterprises as opposed to malignant competition, which in keeping with Abdullah’s socialist politics implied the organization and control of marketing and trade by the state. This revolutionary economic agenda in a hitherto feudal economy enabled the abolition of landlordism, allocation of land to the tiller, cooperatives, while preserving the people’s control of forests, organized and planned cultivation of land, development of sericulture, pisciculture, and fruit orchards, and the utilization of forest and mineral wealth for the betterment of the populace. Tillers were assured of the right to work on the land without incurring the wrath of obnoxious creditors and were guaranteed material, social, and health benefits. These measures signaled the end of the chapter of peasant exploitation and subservience and opened a new chapter of peasant emancipation. The purportedly autonomous status of Indian administration of Kashmir government provoked the ire of Hindu nationalist parties, which sought the unequivocal integration of the state into India.

The unitary concept of nationalism that such organizations subscribed to challenged the basic principle of the foundational government of democracy. In this national project, one of the forms that the non-mutilation of statehood and the respect for the shrines and places of worship, for the institutions of religious minorities to a central and authoritarian state buttressed by nostalgia of a "glorious past." As Bose is quick to point out, the unequivocal aim of the supporters of the integration of Indian administered J&K into the Indian Union was to ensure the political autonomy endowed on the State by India’s constitutional provisions. According to the unitary discourse of sovereignty disemnated by Hindu nationalists, Indian administration J&K wasn’t entitled to the magnificence of statehood and the former Maharaja’s flag, the state and constitution. The concept of nationalism constructed by Abdullah and his government for J&K to India as a strategic and pragmatic necessity and sought to justify it by deploying the rhetoric of socialist and secularism, which in keeping with Abdullah’s socialist politics implied the organization and control of marketing and trade by the state. This revolutionary economic agenda in a hitherto feudal economy enabled the abolition of landlordism, allocation of land to the tiller, cooperatives, while preserving the people’s control of forests, organized and planned cultivation of land, development of sericulture, pisciculture, and fruit orchards, and the utilization of forest and mineral wealth for the betterment of the populace. Tillers were assured of the right to work on the land without incurring the wrath of obnoxious creditors and were guaranteed material, social, and health benefits. These measures signaled the end of the chapter of peasant exploitation and subservience and opened a new chapter of peasant emancipation. The purportedly autonomous status of Indian administration of Kashmir government provoked the ire of Hindu nationalist parties, which sought the unequivocal integration of the state into India.

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So who doesn’t want to be a millionaire? A slumdog millionaire? No cheers. No. The Indians are protesting the film: “The ones who love the film are all foreign! Even the ‘Indian’ hero is British! They’ve exposed and exploited and appropriated our poverty! They think they are superior! We are more than this! ‘Dog’ is an insult to us! The Big B expected this and turned down the offer to play the Game Show Host!”

But the top-dogs of the latest Brit-on-India film are barking with delight. Their low-budget poor-boy-from-slum-strikes-rich story has been honoured with a gazillion awards and accolades, and it has captured the ire and imagination of people, for good or ill – even of those who haven’t seen the film! Alas, it won’t change India’s marketing hype and hypocrisies.

Bizarrely lucky for Mumbai, India’s much flaunted capital of commerce: one of its biggest sores – “Asia’s largest slum” – gets bared to the world, and it pays off handsomely. (For whom, though?) An estimated million people live in Dharavi’s squalor-filled and violence-ridden mini-world. I grew up in Sion and hadn’t realised until now that it actually bordered my locality; I just knew our domestic help lived in Dharavi and took buses. It is vast at 75 hectares. Dharavi was a fearsome never-neverland.

Now we will press coverage of Dharavi, of human interest stories of true grit and commercial enterprise: there are at least 15,000 one-room home-cum-factories there. Perhaps even organised tourist bus tours. To look for yourself. Perhaps.

But Dharavi seems not particularly perturbed. Their world won’t change, no, not really. The mother of one of children in the film protested to the press: Hum ne socha zindagi badal jayegi!” (We thought it already had changed. Because they know how it is to live daily with unpromising futures, with its terror, even if it’s not of the media-grabbing gun-wielding imported variety? What lines were fed them?

Yes, there was this massive outpouring of sentiment from the ordinary man and woman on the street. And with what equanimity and entitlement they took it. The wealthy. The chattering. Dutt’s plea was not much different from Bush’s doctrine of loyalty: “If you are not with us, you are not a Mumbaikar!”

Mumbaikars or ‘Mumbai folks’ never needed such heady slogans to move them to altruistic action. That has been their signature.

Please don’t get me wrong. I have eaten at the home of one who got shot dead that day too. And I grieved for the destruction of lives, in places that were ironically as familiar as home in my youth. But I grieved less than I did in 1992 when Mumbai lost its innocence and killed for faith.

But where’s the faith in this: on NDTV’s We The People programme aired right after the siege ended, once again, now chairman TV host Simi Garewal said something to this effect to the Indian Javed and Janaki Q. Public audience: “Go to the rooftop restaurants or penthouses of the Four Seasons or any of the five-star hotels around here and look down at the slums below. What will you see? Green flags, with the crescent and star! Pakistani flags!” Blaming Pakistan aside, how many Mumbaikars can afford to go up to those restaurants and penthouses? How Marie Antoinette?

The gap between bread and cake in Dharavi is not to be measured in years now but in generations, or eternities. Water may yet become a human right in India. Meanwhile what trickles by as River Mithi in Dharavi is a trashcan of human waste. It dully reflects an image of Incredible India Shining! These slumdogs will not get any bones until they begin to growl, or even better bite. Ask Balram Halwai.

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*Balram Halwai is the boss-murdering driver-turned-entrepreneur protagonist of The White Tiger, the Booker Prize winning novel on the current Indian class struggle.
South Africa newsletter
Dame Helen Suzman, South Africa’s “boots on” politician, passes away

South Africa lost one of its most treasured citizens when Dame Helen Suzman, the iconic advocate of liberalism and human rights, died peacefully on the 1st of January 2009. For those of us who knew her well it was not a happy start to the New Year. Knowing her as we did though, she probably didn’t want to drag herself into yet another year of disintegrating health. Her mind was alive and kicking but her body was crumbling. We spent her 91st birthday as fellow Scorpios eating a delicately shaped samosa together. Nelson Mandela had just visited her the day before, adorning her internationally trampled drawing room with magnificent flowers. The walls told the story of great accolades received from various esteemed quarters throughout her many years as SA’s most outstanding human rights fighter and Member of Parliament.

Helen Suzman’s contribution to the struggle for democracy and the consequent demise of apartheid was perhaps more significant than many people today realise. Sole attribution to the ANC’s armed struggle in the liberation movement often undermines the role of protest pressures from within.

As a lone voice in a formidably patriarchal parliament, Helen Suzman used her extensive political rigour and ready wit to expose the iniquities of apartheid to the world. For this she became world renowned, twice nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, receiving numerous honorary doctorates, and the DBE from the Queen of England in 1989.

Our friendship started through my husband who became a colleague of hers when he joined the PFP in 1985. He took her under his wing and mentored him as a young newcomer in the House of Delegates of the much-criticised Tripartite parliament. It seemed that she had handpicked him over others, as she appeared not to have extended this generosity to all and sundry. Our friendship soon developed through the years and I recall that fairly early in the relationship my husband, Mamoo Rajab arrived with a gold bangle belonging to Helen, which a certain Indian jeweller had made for her. My husband wished to copy the pattern for me and she was generous in sharing her jewellery with no reservation. For many years we sported the same bangles and her only comment was that he was too miserly, as he had only made me 8 bangles while she had a bulky dozen. Our relationship grew over the years and as we became firm family friends we would spend time staying over at each other’s homes, experiencing the joys of ‘hearth and mirth’. I would often marvel at the fact that in her repertoire of famous people who clogged her life with accolades and admiration, how did she make space for the ordinary people. But this was precisely the nature of her character, if she liked you she would not be deterred by fame and fortune. Her only abiding uncontrollable nature lay in her belief in fairness. She did not ever waver on this score.

In the dark days of apartheid Albert Lutuli, the noble peace prize-winner described her as the “only bright star in a dark chamber”.

Her integrity in fighting for her principles for liberal democracy was legendary. Helen’s legacy of tackling issues in an informed manner became the hallmark of liberal opposition politics in South Africa. Already in 1969, she spoke of apartheid as structural violence that disrupted black lives in a most personal way.

She was an ardent fighter against the laws, which directly affected our lives – the Group Areas Act, the Mixed Marriages and Immorality Acts. She abhorred the Race Classification Act of 1950 that determined the status of everyone born in SA, where they went to school, where they worked, whom they could marry and sleep with, which public amenities they could use, and where they could or could not live.

She did not bend to authority that was illegitimate. Accordingly on issues of justice, no Prime Minister, no Minister, no government official escaped her barbs. Those who took her on did so at their peril. She deflected their abuse and insults with a sardonic wit that made headlines the world over. Having served under five formidable presidents – DF Malan, JG Straydom, HF Verwoerd, BJ Vorster and PW Botha - from 1953 to 1989, Helen showed tremendous courage in single-handedly taking on the plight of the oppressed. Her battles for a just society were never done sanctimoniously. She gave as good as she got. Often as the only woman in Parliament she took on men who probably had the most daunting visages of any politicians in the world. “It is not my questions that are an embarrassment, it is your answers”, was one of her world famous retortary comments when a Minister blamed her for the world’s negative perception of SA.

Helen Suzman was a politician of a special type. She was elected as a member of the United Party in 1953, which she left soon afterwards with colleagues to form the Progressive Party, later known as the Progressive Federal Party. Rhoda Kadali, a close friend and human rights activist notes that Helen was always “armed with devastatingly accurate information gleaned from her insistence on seeing things for herself, she became a “boots-on politician”, going where the action was.” From prisons to squatter camps she traversed the country in search of the truth as its archangel and protector of justice. This role was a self imposed one driven by passion and a mission to defend what was always right. She became the mouth-piece of the voiceless masses. When she made submissions to the Fagan Commission in 1947, hoping to influence the Smuts government to reverse a battery of laws that reduced black men, women and their families to mere chattels, she was clearly driven to speak up for the oppressed. She fought those pernicious laws to the end of her career in 1989 with the ferocity of a tiger, holding up a mirror to a world that might have remained ignorant because of prevailing media censorship.

For her, principles mattered more than personalities. I was in the audience a few years ago when she addressed a group of invited guests in Cape Town’s Jewish Museum on the occasion of the official opening of the Helen Suzman-fighter for human rights exhibition. She took us down memory lane with accolades and admiration, a free press, free association, a free vote, free elections, a free press, free association, guaranteed civil rights and an independent judiciary.” These words were boldly featured at the entrance to the exhibition with a grand picture of a young Helen who had not seen the penalties of one of 26 other political parties. She said: “I am proud to acknowledge that I am a liberal who adheres to old fashioned liberal values such as the rule of law, universal franchise, free elections, a free press, free association, guaranteed civil rights and an independent judiciary.”

None of this spun left her character in her final years of her life. She openly chastised our current government for some of its present excesses. While she acknowledged that SA was undoubtedly a better country than it was during Nat rule she felt that we still needed a strong opposition to prevent a return to a one party state. Her chief gripes were against the ANC government for its failure to deliver a comprehensive anti aids programme, its attack on the judiciary for a racial mindset and its uncritical support for Mugabe in Zimbabwe.

In an excerpt of her speech delivered at the University of Cape Town on receiving the penultimate of one of 26 other honorary doctorates she said: “I am proud to acknowledge that I am a liberal who adheres to old fashioned liberal values such as the rule of law, universal franchise, free elections, a free press, free association, guaranteed civil rights and an independent judiciary.” These words were boldly featured at the entrance to the exhibition with a grand picture of a young Helen who had not seen the penalties of one of 26 other political parties. She said: “I am proud to acknowledge that I am a liberal who adheres to old fashioned liberal values such as the rule of law, universal franchise, free elections, a free press, free association, guaranteed civil rights and an independent judiciary.”

Dr. Devi Rajab is a leading South African journalist and can be reached at: rajab@cybertek.co.za
Multiculturalism or pluralism By Dr. Jagdish Sharma

While Britain progresses on the road to a culturally pluralistic society, a sense of ‘Britishness’ needs to be strengthened.

Multiculturalism means different things to different people. In recent times it has come under attack as a failed idea and policy from different people in different contexts. At a recent seminar hosted by the Royal Society of Arts and chaired by Trevor Phillips, Chairman of Equality and Human Rights Commission, Multiculturalism was described by David Cameron, Leader of Conservative Party as a failure, both as concept and as state policy. He blamed the policies adopted under multiculturalism for all sorts of manifestations of cultural diversity which are creating divisions in society. Over zealous political correctness was also, according to David Cameron, a gift of our sensitivity to the recognition of cultural differences. He cited an example of a school head unable to put up posters on the school notice board warning of the evil practice of forced marriages lest it generates hostility from the Muslim community. He even blamed multiculturalism for the Archbishop of Canterbury Dr. Rowan Williams’s recent reference to Sharia Law becoming ‘unavoidable’ in modern Britain. The discussion that followed did not deal with the conceptual analysis of multiculturalism nor its historical context.

Multiculturalism was a simple descriptive word recognising the fact that Britain back in the nineteen seventies was becoming a society of many cultures, different cultures coming in with immigrant communities who repudiated not only recognising the situation as a matter of fact but dealt with the newly created situation in an appropriate manner that would pay due deference to different cultures in the new Britain as it was shaping. It was a sort of progression from the first attempts of new immigrants to integrate and, perhaps assimilate into the host society. In the context of Britain it demanded ‘behaving like the British, speaking English like an Englishman did, and in those days, the Queen’s English or BBC English. If you lived in London, you also needed to pick up a smattering of Cockney. Many were quite successful in Anglicising or Westernising themselves. Even names were Anglicised which meant adopting the nearest English sounding name. My own experience illustrates the point: as I introduced myself as Jagdish to another teacher on my first day as a teacher in a London school, I had to spell Jagdish out for him. I had only mentioned the first three letters, when I was interrupted, “Can I call you Jag?” And, before I knew it, he had already introduced me to the next teacher as ‘Jack’; and so it took less than a minute to transform Jagdish to Jag and to Jack. This name stayed with me as long as I taught in that school.

Such attempts to integrate were more successful for immigrants from Europe such as the Jewish people than for the black or brown skinned people from the new Commonwealth countries. Back in the sixties I recall objecting to an educated Englishman calling me a ‘wog’, he justified it by saying that he meant it as a ‘Westernised Oriental Gentleman’. Many such situations, examples and experiences highlight the difficulties faced in attempts at integration and assimilation with the host community, not only by Hindus and Muslims but even by Anglo-Indians and other Christians from the Indian subcontinent, despite the fact that they shared a common religion. Experiences of black immigrants from the Caribbean trying to attend church services in the early days were equally, if not more, harrowing.

Social thinkers came up with the concept of multiculturalism as an ideal situation in which many different cultures could co-exist side by side. It assumed a recognition, acceptance and respect for each other’s ways of life and traits of culture such as religion, language, dress and food habits. This concept became very popular in the seventies. All schools in Britain especially in London made an attempt to propagate multiculturalism. I myself conducted many in-service seminars at Avery Hill Teacher Training College promoting multiculturalism.

At the World Jewish Conference which I attended at the City University London in 1972 many intellectuals presented papers on the subject of multiculturalism as an ideal solution for modern societies. During discussions I asked a question: Are we trying to be (1) the same, therefore, equal? (2) different, therefore, unequal? (3) different but equal? Obviously the conference leaned towards the idea of ‘different but equal’. Multiculturalism allowed for that. Britain showed political commitment by passing the Race Relation Act of 1976 and later setting up the Commission for Race Equality.

Many places of worship and community or cultural centres were set up by Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. This, however, in no way reduced discrimination in jobs, housing and schools etc. Nevertheless people were better able to assert their identity. The English were now able to recognise and accept the differences and were making an effort to say your name in its original pronunciation. My name too reverted from Jack to Jagdish and so my identity was restored.

The question of identity again became a cause for concern when the second generation of immigrants, born and brought up in Britain became aware of various levels of cultural conflicts. The ‘Britishness’ in their thinking and behaviour had to co-exist with cultural values, morals, manners and mores of their parental cultures. It is easy to find a successful business executive or a professional fully British in dress, manners, etiquette, behaviour and dealings during the working day but turning to Indian dress, music, food and Bollywood movies on television in the evenings. His children attending a prestigious fee-paying public school during the week and going to religious and ethnic language classes over the weekend. Cultural dualism is not an easy phenomenon for the young to cope with, who also face many other pressures in academic and social life. Cultural dualism is sometimes referred to as ‘hybrid culture’, a phrase I personally don’t like.

Lately, however, the concept of ‘cultural pluralism’ has become more popular, which for me actually represents a natural progression of multiculturalism. It envisages a society in which many different cultures exist side by side. They are recognised in their own right and are regarded as of equal importance and are mutually respected - not just tolerated but respected. Cultural differences are explained as cultural diversity. Diversity is recognised as a positive source of cultural enrichment. Followers of different religions are able to attend their different places of worship, wear their distinctive cultural dress and speak their language without any intimidation or fear of reprisals. Bilingualism and multilingualism are regarded as assets and are encouraged by the education system. “We don’t talk in Hindi or Punjabi as long as we are inside a pub” I was reminded by a friend back in the nineteen sixties, now a thing of the past. These days you can hear many different languages spoken in a London bus or in the tube.

While Britain progresses on the road to a culturally pluralistic society, political and social requirements of ‘Britishness’ need to be recognised and inculcated through our education system and other socio-cultural institutions. The ‘sameness’ generated by our common values will negate the influence exerted by the sense of ‘otherness’. Generally speaking these values are Fairness and sense of fair-play in our dealings, Respect for the rule of law, Freedom of speech, Equality of opportunity, Respect for others, and Responsibility towards others. Acceptance of these values, their appreciation and inculcation and practice will lead to creating a truly pluralistic society where good relations and community cohesion will automatically prevail. The thin line of demarcation between being ‘different’, which is a desirable requirement for maintaining one’s identity, and being ‘separate’, which is a negative social condition, will and must disappear.
Every Hindu living in the UK, is entitled to considerable tax savings through HUF (Hindu Undivided Family), irrespective of whether he holds an Indian, British, US or any other passport even if India is not his country of birth.

Distinct and Separate Legal Entity

Status granted to HUF under Indian Tax Law

Hindus constitute a majority of the Indopopulation. Hindus, being an ancient religion and a way of life, has customs, traditions and rituals centuries old followed by its members to this day. The joint family system, as which members of one family lived together under a common roof, including married brothers, their children and grandchildren, is in practice even today amongst most Hindu families. Under this system, the members of a family share houses, properties, businesses, income, wealth, food and their value systems and principles. Therefore, in India, a joint Hindu family is given a separate legal entity status called ‘Hindu Undivided Family’ (HUF) and this status is shared and enjoyed by all members of the family.

Tax savings through HUF

HUF is an excellent tax saving device as being a separate legal entity under the tax law it is assessed to tax separately as a distinct legal person. Therefore, a person can file two income tax returns, one in his personal individual capacity and the other in the name of his HUF. This gives him the benefits of dividing his taxable income between two entities and also double deductions and expenses in two capacities. This brings down his total taxable income and tax liability substantially. For example, at present, the tax free income for males in India is Rs. 50,000 and for females, this limit is Rs. 180,000. An individual can thus claim a minimum of Rs. 1,00,000 as total tax free income, (Rs. 1,00,000 in his personal and an equal amount in his HUF return). In addition to the basic exemption, he can also claim other specific exemptions in both capacities provided under sections 80C, 80CCB, 80D, 80DD, 80DB, 80G, 80GGA and the rebate under section 80 of the Income Tax Act 1961, the Indian tax legislation. A HUF also enjoys exemptions under sections 54 and 54F in respect of capital gains.

Non-resident HUF

What applies to non-resident individuals will also, in some cases, be applicable to non-resident HUF, whose management and control is exercised wholly outside India during the financial year is a non-resident under the Indian tax provisions. From a tax point of view, it can be shown that all decisions concerning the family members and the affairs of the HUF were taken outside India during the relevant year, that HUF will enjoy all benefits available to a non-resident individual and the same tax exemptions of personal income of a member will be regarded as the member’s individual income and not the income of HUF. A HUF can also contribute funds or capital in a partnership firm and the share in profits will be regarded as an individual income and not tax free accordingly in the hands of the Karta or the representative of the HUF. A Karta is thus taxed in two capacities, as a personal income from his personal capacity and the other in his capacity as representative of HUF. If the HUF gives a certain sum of money to the Karta for any services rendered by him, such income is taxed in the hands of the Karta in his personal capacity. A HUF, being a separate legal entity, can earn income from many sources such as house property, business income, and capital gains or inheritance tax and clubbing of income provisions will also not apply. Similarly, a Karta of a HUF can give by way of gifts or inheritance tax and clubbing of income out of HUF properties to its members over a period of time to gradually build up the individual names. A HUF can also build its capital by way of borrowings from non-members and the income so earned from investments of the capital will only be HUF income. Individual members may also transfer their personal funds in a HUF for the benefit of the HUF. A HUF can also create trusts in tax free instruments. Income thus earned from these instruments will be tax free and cannot be clubbed with the individual’s personal income. Such income, if reinvested in instruments, income of which is subject to tax, will also not be clubbed as only income earned from transferred amounts is clubbed.

Crucial tips in HUF tax planning

The bank account of a HUF should be either in the name of the HUF or in the name of the Karta of the HUF with a specific declaration to the effect that the account is of the HUF. The members should also be careful not to deposit any personal funds in the HUF bank account as only funds belonging to the HUF can be held in the account. Usually the Karta is authorized to sign all cheques and operate bank accounts of the HUF. However, he may also authorize any other member of the HUF to operate on behalf of all or any one member. A person, who desires to bequeath some property to his son or sons, may also provide a specific instruction in his will to operate on behalf of all or any one member. A HUF, which is subject to tax, has to rely and act on the information and advice given by the Karta.

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The views expressed in the above article are for general guidance of the reader explaining the current position of the law. While the law remains uniform in general cases, every individual or taxpayer’s case is unique and appropriate legal advice is recommended before taking any action. The author does not accept any liability or responsibility for any loss suffered by any person/entity relying and acting on the information provided.
Rama, Laksmana and Sita distribute their jewels and material wealth

Laksmana and Sita have decided to accompany Rama in exile. There is a hint of pathos as Sahib Din paints Sita, seated in the pavilion on the left, distributing her jewels before leaving the palace. Likewise Rama (with a blue body) and Laksmana, in the pavilion on the right, give away their jewels, horses, elephants and camels. Having gracefully given up their material comforts and royal attire, they are now clad in ascetic garments. Only the princes’ diadems and weapons are not given away.

The final farewell

A densely textured painting, depicting the moment of the final farewell, as Rama, Sita and Laksmana ride off in a chariot for their fourteen years exile. Dasaratha (the king) and Kausalya, (Rama’s birth mother) according to Valmiki’s text, hurry after the chariot until Rama, unable to bear the sight, has to tell the charioteer to fasten his pace so that they would be left behind.

Whereas many of Sahib Din’s paintings employ simultaneous narration, in which several episodes appear in one painting, this climatic image focuses powerfully on one incident in the story.

News of the death of king Dasaratha

This beautiful painting is a classic depiction of simultaneous narration where the action proceeds in an anti-clockwise manner from the top left. Rama greets his younger brothers Bharata and Satrugna by embracing them. Bharata gives Rama the sad news of their father’s death and pleads Rama to return to Ayodhya to govern his kingdom. Rama, unable to bear the shock, faints (bottom left)

Then Rama, his three brothers and wife go down to the river to perform a ritual offering of water, (as is customary) and return to the hill top grieving outside their hut. The five participants each appear at least six times, yet there is no effect of crowding.

Rama and Sugriva have a conference

The demon king Ravana had abducted Sita and taken her to his kingdom of Lanka. In this illustration Rama and Laksmana come to the monkey kingdom of Kiskindha to seek help from Sugriva, the king of the monkeys. They swear friendship.

Here the style of the painting has changed. The dresses of the two brothers are now depicted in Deccani fashion. It is an anonymous style heavily influenced by the painting schools of the southern sultanates of the Deccan, identified with the monkey kingdom of Kiskindha.

In this period artists and paintings passed back and forth between the Deccan and Rajasthan. In the Deccan style, the colour palette is more sombre, figures are larger and often the artists concentrate on a single episode of the story unlike that of Sahib Din’s paintings which employ simultaneous narration. In this picture an artist from the Deccan is attempting to work in a Mewar style.

Hanuman gives Rama’s ring to Sita

In Lanka, perched on a tree, Hanuman sees Sita, sunk in melancholy, surrounded by Ravana’s wives, female demons and others. Ravana, who has ten heads and twenty arms, begs her to marry him, but she repulses him. He threatens to kill her if she refuses and leaves.

Hanuman comforts Sita, revealing himself to her as Rama’s messenger with his ring, but she cannot allow herself to be rescued by him: that right and the glory of so doing belongs to her husband alone. She gives Hanuman a jewel as a token for Rama.
The exhibition which ran through four months - from summer to autumn drew an average of 938 visitors daily, and a total of 114,488 visitors, from all walks of life.

I could see ardent art-lovers and academicians immersed in each painting, while there were the less serious casual viewers too. Then there were those with some initiation into the story of the Ramayana and those who had no idea at all. Not least of all were the school children, who swarmed around the televised excerpts of the Ramayana. I continued from p8

This is one of the most dramatic paintings by Sahib Din where he combines a bird’s eye viewpoint with a conceptual rendering of Lanka.

Rama and his allies launch a general attack on Lanka from all gates and all sides, in which many marvellous feats of skill and daring are performed.

The monkeys surround the city in preparation for the attack.

Rama's coronation—the beginning of a golden age

Sahib Din paints Rama, Lakshmana and Sita returning triumphantly to the palace in Ayodhya. They drive through the bazaars with their festive hangings. Ayodhya rejoices once again. After being reunited with Bharata and Satrughna, they are received by their mothers.

Rama’s coronation begins his auspicious reign, a truly golden age for mankind - Ram-raj
The story of Ramayana is woven around Rama the prince of Ayodya. He (the rightful heir) gives up his throne at the behest of his step mother Kaikkeyi, who wants his own son to ascend the throne with Rama to go into exile for fourteen years. Obeying her commands, he leaves his kingdom accompanied by his wife and his younger brother Laksmans. Initially they make Chitrakuta their home, later moving deeper into the Dandak forest. Here they lived for a number of years leading a meagre but happy life, until the demon king Ravana, the king of Lanka with 10 heads and 20 arms (symbolic, to project his great intelligence and immense strength) kidnaps Sita and takes her across the sea to his own kingdom.

With the help of an army of monkeys headed by their chief Hanuman, and following a fierce battle with Ravana, Sita is rescued. Sita when challenged proves her chastity by stepping into a huge fire and remains unscathed.

On their way to Ayodhya after fourteen years Rama is crowned and so began the golden age of Rama’s rule, the Ramayana. His kingdom adorned with candle lights. This day is celebrated by Hindus as Diwali to this day with every Hindu household adorned with candle lights.

Rama, is considered an avatar or incarnation of God Vishnu, the Preserver, (attaining an anatomy of Buddha) born on earth to humankind, in order to fight all evil. He is considered the embodiment of virtue, selflessness and righteousness and worshipped by Hindus as a god.

Sheila Malhotra is an accomplished artist and an art critic for art magazine Interiors. Her latest series ‘Playing with the Millennium’ view the world at the dawn of the new millennium and the immediate beginning of the new century. Her paintings are overlaid on a turn of the century editions of original UK newspapers, which in due course have been brought out for this extraordinary exhibition.

an Arabic or Islamic illustration, each picture usually depicts a single episode of the story, but in the Indian or Hindu method, the artist would paint the same characters in several times in a single frame work in order to show continuity of events. Jagat Singh’s artists usually followed the representation of simultaneous narration of which Sabih Din’s paintings are a good example. Though a Muslim, he illustrated a specifically Hindu epic, on which over time began to hold a religious sanctity for the Hindus. The artists of the time had painted an ancient epic, but their paintings bore mid-seventeenth century influence.

The story of Ramayana was written around the prince of Ayodya, he (the rightful heir) gives up his throne at the behest of his step mother Kaikkeyi, who wants his own son to ascend the throne with Rama to go into exile for fourteen years. Obeying her commands, he leaves his kingdom accompanied by his wife and his younger brother Laksman. Initially they make Chitrakuta their home, later moving deeper into the Dandak forest. Here they lived for a number of years leading a meagre but happy life, until the demon king Ravana, the king of Lanka with 10 heads and 20 arms (symbolic, to project his great intelligence and immense strength) kidnaps Sita and takes her across the sea to his own kingdom.

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The screens displaying the paintings ran across the Pacacc Gallery and carried on the eighteenth and nineteenth century art that merged into the twentieth century. The art styles, phenomenally different as they were, yet depicted the merger of the past and the present and were indeed mind-boggling.

The stylised paintings of Sabih Din with attention to every detail of costume and jewellery, and flora and fauna, with Ravana’s highly decorative attire thrown in, contrasted with the more literal Indian artists like M.F.Hussain and Jemini Roy (the impressionists) employing but minimum strokes on canvass or paper, were an imitation of the realistic school of Ravi Verma paintings.

Vying for the visitor’s attention closest at hand, were also the rather garish posters advertising the Hindi film Bajrangali (Hanuman) The storyline was the same - the styles were different. The British Library had not missed out on any of them.

The story of how the manuscripts and illustrations got to the British Library makes interesting reading. The Rajput rulers of Mewar and Rajasthan had a number of years leading a meagre existence. So, in order to show continuity of events. Jagat Singh’s artists usually followed the simultaneous narration of which Sabih Din’s paintings are a good example. Though a Muslim, he illustrated a specifically Hindu epic, on which over time began to hold a religious sanctity for the Hindus. The artists of the time had painted an ancient epic, but their paintings bore mid-seventeenth century influence.

Kate Bingham received an Eric Gregory Award from the Poetry Society of Authors in 1997. Her first collection, Cohabitation, was published the following year. She has published two more volumes of poetry, and her second collection, shortlisted for the Forward Prize 2006. As well as books of poetry, she has published novels and written for the screen. She lives in London.

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A great many journalists secretly nurse the ambition of writing a bestseller. Few ever do. Hammering out a 600 word piece for next day’s rag is one thing, patiently crafting a 100,000 word novel that holds the reader’s attention page after page is quite another cup of tea. Therein lies the difference between a hack and a writer. However, some choice spirits such as Dickens and Hemingway did bridge the gap. Aravind Adiga is such another. He worked for Time magazine in India and also reported for other papers. His background is rather international: born in Chennai, he lived in Australia before proceeding to Columbia and Oxford. He now lives in Mumbai. This is his first novel and it scooped the 2008 Booker prize. First time lucky? You can say that again.

For one who has led a privileged life Adiga has captured, quite unbelievably, the psyche and thought processes of the Indian underdog.

Our hero, if that is what one must call him, was born in a malodorous village called Laxmanghar not far from Both Gaya where the Buddha found Enlightenment. The Buddha preached universal love, understanding and compassion. However, not much of these excellent virtues were evident in Laxmanghar. Life was hard for our hero’s father, an illiterate rickshaw puller. He found it difficult to feed his wife and children and, to make matters worse, his fellow villagers were exploitative, grasping and mean minded. The extended family that owned the surrounding land and the havelis, mansions, exercised power with all the ferocity that the feudals of India had done for centuries.

After the death of his parents Balram was expelled out of school by his relatives and put to work scrubbing the floor, tending the fire and clearing the tables in a teashop near the village bus stop. Being an ambitious lad he decided to get away and, as soon as he got the opportunity, that is what he did. In Dhanbad, the city of coal, he managed to procure a driving licence. He then worked a job as the second chauffeur cum odd job man in the establishment headed by a grandee from Laxmanghar who with his elder son operated dodgy coal mines in the Dhanbad area. The grandee, known as Thok because he owned the river that coursed past Laxmanghar and often dipped his beak into the fishermen’s nubile daughters, had sent his younger son Ashok (Mr Ashok to the servants) to the States. There, to the Thork’s great disappointment, the Americanised Ashok had contracted what in India is called a love marriage. Moreover, Pinky Madam was not a Hindu and this the family found intolerable. They had expected Ashok to return to India like a good boy and accept an arranged marriage to a well brought up girl from the right caste, the right family and with, of course, the right dowry.

Mr Ashok and Pinky Madam had just arrived in India when Balram is taken on and our hero is destined to drive them about on their shopping and sightseeing trips. Pinky Madam has taken an instant dislike to India and its inhabitants but Balram has taken a shine to Pinky Madam. Her generous bosoms which she heaves frequently stir base desires in him and he soon memorizes her favourite swear words which had better not be repeated here.

Soon the westernised Mr Ashok and his wife are despatched to Delhi where, with their suave ways and command of English, they are to cultivate and bribe ministers and senior civil servants. All in the cause of, you will understand, lubricating the Stork’s wheeling and dealing. They live not far from the international airport in a plush apartment in Gurgaon fitted with all the latest mod-cons. The driver of their Honda City is our hero who is consigned to a cockroach infested servant’s room at the bottom of the high rise condo.

It is in the great capital of the resurgent nation that Balram’s education takes off. As he confesses in one of his weaker moments, he is a good listener. He eavesdrops on all the conversations in Hindi and Hindlish. The latter, a handy though inelegant mode of expression, being the bastard ‘lingua franca’ of the upwardly mobile Indian in a hurry to haul himself up to the topmost rung of the socio-economic ladder. Hindlish, in fact, is a first cousin of Pakistan’s Urdu. The post-1947 enmity of the two countries are amazingly similar.

Delhi is described with accuracy and relish. The traffic jams, the pollution, the arrant snobbery of the new rich, the chasm between the poor and rich, the wide ranging report in the realm of, one must call him, was born in a malodorous village called Laxmanghar not far from Both Gaya where the Buddha found Enlightenment. The Buddha preached universal love, understanding and compassion. However, not much of these excellent virtues were evident in Laxmanghar. Life was hard for our hero’s father, an illiterate rickshaw puller. He found it difficult to feed his wife and children and, to make matters worse, his fellow villagers were exploitative, grasping and mean minded. The extended family that owned the surrounding land and the havelis, mansions, exercised power with all the ferocity that the feudals of India had done for centuries.

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POETRY RENDEZVOUS

A NEW DAWN

"Yes, I am an untouchable, and every Negro in the United States of America is an untouchable."

Martin Luther King: From sermon at Ebenezer Baptist Church, July 4, 1965

That hate could be about pigmentation
I learnt first as a schoolgirl
Reading Uncle Tom’s Cabin

Hate transformed into empathy
The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn
Revealed hope

That hate could be so relentless
I learnt from Roots, a tale of miserable uprooting
Mercifully, soon I learnt about warriors too-

I learnt from Roots, a tale of miserable uprooting
That hate could be so relentless
Redeemed hope

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn
I learnt first as a schoolgirl
That hate could be about pigmentation
America is an untouchable.

A NEW DAWN

For not being noisey.

The principal introduced me and then as he came to the conclusion of his introduction, he says, “Young people, I would like to present to you a fellow untouchable from the United States of America.” And for a moment I was a bit shocked and proved that I would be referred to as an untouchable—"

From The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr, Chapter 13 – Pilgrimage to Non-Violence.

Sanjukta Dasgupta
Professor, Dept of English
Calcutta University

My Home

The whimsical moon shot past me like an arrow, in a flux
I saw it as a mirror
revealing myself to me.

My home,
I love sitting here
in the windy balcony
and flying in the night sky.

This is my home in Delhi,
Delhi away from Delhi,
my dream home
the home of my long-cherished desires
at the foot of the hilllock
flowers all over.

Here I am given more
than I could ask for.
Peacocks dance
to the tune of the wild rain
camels graze,
birds of hue
sing lullabies to my tired soul.

My little son plays around
runs like the wind on the sloppy road,
the country road,
a feast to my eyes;
lying on my bed I watch
him with flower-like kids
flying audible kisses from there
at me
I hum a tune to myself
in my velvety voice
keeping a book close to the chest.

The pretty dappled trouts
with joyful haste
move in the aquarium
like the brook.

This was a present to my son
on his award of a medal –
he wants trouts
for he loves to see them
moving patient,
for not being noisy.

I arrange my home
with a careless care –
nightlong in winter, I hear the silence
silently here. In full moon nights
the nightingales sing frantically in summer.
The passionate rain
with its vibrations
tinkle my inner self, here.
I discover a newer world
close to nature, close to
a power, unknown, and
rediscover myself.

I cry no more
my world is wet enough
here my heart is grilled
with green moss
I have transfigured myself,
the base of my harmony
is my loneliness.

I have just started
to count life beneath
my fingertips.

Loving Stranger

After you left
only after you left
I could guess
that your shadow spreads
beneath my lonely heart,
and you are a stranger
the most loving stranger;
time came to a halt
pain sprinkled over my earth.

This contention crushed me to dust
dipped my wings
addicted to fly
pushed me off the branch
where I was resting, relaxed
in an endless sphere;
my heart broke.
The vibrations
spread across the sky.

Can I ever write a love poem
for you? Exclusively for you?

Who Says Death is the Only Truth?

Death stands at a distance
day all night, smiling, unblinking,
like that picture under the staircase.

Are you waiting for the last bus?
Do you know, the sands are slowly
rolling through the gaps of your fingers?
Tighten your fist. You are enlightened
to pick one – the coffin or a life of action.
From one birth to another, augment the civilization.

Does your laugh tear your shrunken lips?
Open your wardrobe, cover the breast of the poor,
apply on your lips the balm of a millennium’s rebellion.

My Home

Who says death is the only truth?
See, your body of fog is still seated on the throne.
You still shine in the firmament of stars.

That Foot (for my Baba)

That foot that has walked
on thorns
all through the day for you.
That foot which has shown
you foot-steps to follow.
That foot.

That foot behind the orange sun
has walked through arches
bare foot
on fire, on water
near parapets
has cracked doors and windows
for you to enter safe.

That foot.

That foot walked, crossed the
never-ending roads
when you aspired for the colossal.
That foot. Your passport
to utopia, to dream of
new truths, passport to planets uncharted.

That foot, is walking away, weak,
parting with fantasia forever.
Will you join?

Who Says Death is the Only Truth?

Death stands at a distance
day all night, smiling, unblinking,
like that picture under the staircase.

Are you waiting for the last bus?
Do you know, the sands are slowly
rolling through the gaps of your fingers?
Tighten your fist. You are enlightened
to pick one – the coffin or a life of action.
From one birth to another, augment the civilization.

Does your laugh tear your shrunken lips?
Open your wardrobe, cover the breast of the poor,
apply on your lips the balm of a millennium’s rebellion.

A NEW DAWN

No new Martin Luther King
Will ever have to declare—
“Yes, I am an untouchable, and every Negro
In the United States of America is an untouchable”

A spectacular new Rainbow House
A confluence of colours and cultures
Melting binaries forever

Audaciously dreaming of a world
Where all colours will blend and dance
In the radiant swirl

Peace, happiness and prosperity
Will return to the pristine earth
And poets will write again

Not about bombs, guns and blasts
Not about limbs, fractures and body bags
Not about shattered minds and horrible trauma
Poets will hail the new dawn of hope
Tinkle of a rare mellifluous music
Of the linked human chain

A trailblazing journey
Of discovery, recovery
And a healing beyond

Human words
Persaud’s intellectual engagement with India defines his imaginative landscape says Shanta Acharya

In a Boston Night is Sasenarine Persaud’s seventh collection of poems. Also a novelist and short story writer, his awards include the K. M. Hunter Foundation’s Emerging Artist Award (1996), and the Arthur Schomburg Award (1999) for his literary aesthetics which he refers to as Yogic Realism. Persaud’s fiction was shortlisted for the 1997 Journey Prize (Toronto) while his poetry was nominated for the 1998 Canadian National Magazine Award, and twice (1989 and 1998) shortlisted for The Guyana Prize for Literature.

A recipient of several fellowships and scholarships, his most recent was the Leslie Epstein Fellowship at Boston University, 2005-06. Persaud’s work has been included in major anthologies such as the Anthology of Colonial and Post Colonial Short Fiction (Houghton Mifflin, Boston & New York, 2006 & 2007), The Journey Prize Anthology: short fiction from the best of Canada’s new writers (McClelland & Stewart, Toronto, 1997), The Oxford Book of Caribbean Verse (Oxford University Press, 2005) and The Oxford Book of Caribbean Short Stories (Oxford University Press, 2000) among others.

Persaud left Guyana joining a growing community of migrant Guyanese writers in Canada, mainly Toronto, before moving to the USA, where he now lives in Tampa, Florida. It is Boston however that is the focal point of this collection, and as the blurb on the back cover of the book reminds us, it “deftly threads his reflections and/or Indianness. Even a casual reader of Persaud’s poetry cannot miss this element in his poetry. The third line of “In a Boston Night” refers to “a Krishna-blue bulb.” There are several deeper references to various aspects of Hindu philosophy and aesthetics. Challenged at a conference of mainly Caribbean scholars at the University of Miami to define his “Indianness” manifest at the center of his work, Persaud replied that if you took Indianness/Hinduism away from his work it could not exist, that he could not exist. This is not unusual among poets and writers; one would not understand a lot of Eliot without Christianity. But for someone who has never been to India, Persaud’s intellectual, philosophical engagement with India defines his inner self and imaginative landscape.

In an essay entitled “Kevat: Waiting on Yogic Realism” Persaud defined yogic realism as a continuation of a literary tradition going back centuries and which has at its core the concepts of yoga. Yogic Realism, in a nutshell, in the words of Persaud is “the application of the spirit of yogic principles and forms, the application of Indian philosophy and concepts, to writing…where the writing is serving as a conduit or yoga for union with the divine spirit/consciousness -- not yoga serving “art.” This concept of art and the imagination at the service of a higher consciousness is not confined to Indian thought though its philosophy is more congenial to such endeavors.

Reflecting on Persaud’s concern with life, art, language, it is worth pointing out that when they come together in words that achieve an unity with ease as in “Christmas” where “… the Florida sun rubbing our heads/ like Grammy’s hand as she poured fresh coconut oil, in our hair…” or when he urges Bostonians: “Do not grow older by a second/ do not let saps grow into leaves/ and goodbyes and the rustling/ of dresses; a friction of summer trees.” (Spring: Toronto-Boston”). Here the images are free, unselfconscious, not weighed down by the message.

In a Boston Night has many poems dealing with what Persaud refers to as his “odyssey” including his past life in Guyana and his travels through North America. The poem, “Odysseys, My Love” depicts his own journey away from home, his keeping faith: “I have kept faith, I tell you – Ulysses’/ Nothing and Rama’s knowing Hanuman’s Chest, when opened to Sita, is a flower/ Still scented and waiting your touch.” Interweaving his own persona with that of the protagonists of Greek and Hindu mythologies, placing himself alongside the Greek hero Ulysses (Odysseus) and the divine Ram (Rama), Persaud is placing his personal exile in context.

Unpacking his richly layered text would indeed be a challenging assignment for students of literary criticism. For readers who simply enjoy words, settle for not wishing to ‘understand’ the meaning of everything, I direct them to “Her Dancing On Leaves: Re-reading Palace Of The Peacocks”: “An exile is always lonely, I would call after your back, we tend to look behind once/ in a while. I head instead, the Boston snow/ like white sands on the edges of a tropical forest – I went there once, enchanted. I loved – was born there/ a shout rang out. We died and yet we lived and lived again.” The nature of exile, the role of language and poetry in defining a new personal identity are common among creative writers and thinkers, but more so among exiled poets. Poetry is not only the way home; it is also a way of coping with the loneliness of exile.

Shanta Acharya was born in India, educated at Oxford and Harvard, and has lived in London since 1985. Her four collections of poetry are Shringara (Sheospring Press, UK; 2006), Looking In, Looking Out (Headland Publications, UK; 2005), Numbering Our Days’ Illusions (Rockingham Press, UK; 1995) and Not This, Not That (Rupa & Co, India; 1994). Her doctoral study, The Influence of Indian Thought on Ralph Waldo Emerson, was published by The Edwin Mellen Press (USA: 2001).

www.shantaacharya.com
Stifling the Voice from Within: A Discourse on the Problem of Literary Communication in Indian Writing in English- Dr. Nilanshu Kumar Agarwal

All great imaginative literature is carved out of the highest emotional upheaval in the heart of the poet. A particular emotion catches the soul of the poet and the result is the outpouring of the excessively creative poetry. Poetry is nothing but the drainage/excess of emotion emotions in the poet’s heart. Through this cathartic or therapeutic process, though poetry, a poet receives aesthetic relief from the burden of the overwhelming emotions in the poet’s heart. The ecstasy of Holi and the revelry of Deepawali can best be explained in my mother-tongue.

The ecstasy of Holi and the revelry of Deepawali can best be explained in my mother-tongue. In Indian traditional songs, the festival of Holi is celebrated with great joy and enthusiasm. The festival is characterized by the vibrant colors and music. The festival signifies the triumph of good over evil. The tradition of lighting oil lamps and bursting firecrackers is symbolic of the victory of light over darkness. The festival of Deepawali, on the other hand, is a festival of light, and it is celebrated with the lighting of oil lamps and fireworks.

When the sage Valmiki saw one of the Krauncha pair shot down by a hunter, he was overcome by the deluge of emotions in his heart. The killing of the Krauncha bird? What should be the medium of this expression of pain and sorrow? The answer is spontaneous expression of these sentiments. The answer is spontaneous expression of these sentiments.

The ecstasy of Holi and the revelry of Deepawali can best be explained in my mother-tongue. In Indian traditional songs, the festival of Holi is celebrated with great joy and enthusiasm. The festival is characterized by the vibrant colors and music. The festival signifies the triumph of good over evil. The tradition of lighting oil lamps and bursting firecrackers is symbolic of the victory of light over darkness. The festival of Deepawali, on the other hand, is a festival of light, and it is celebrated with the lighting of oil lamps and fireworks.

Professor of English at IIT Madras, has outlined the difference between the first and second languages thus: people ‘acquire’ the first language... and learn the second language...After all, the circumstances and results of learning these languages are often quite different for many people....While everybody has abundant exposure to the language to be learnt in the context of first language acquisition (FLA), it is not always so with the second language. Neither does everyone get to learn the second language in ‘natural’ circumstances like one’s first language. People often learn it through instruction (95-96).

This distinction between the first and second languages clearly indicates that the later one is not the spontaneous medium for poetic communication. Here, some issues are doing their rounds in mind. Why have they not adopted the languages of their own region for the free flow of their ideas? Are they not completely unlike Valmiki, who was overcome by the deluge of emotion when he saw the killing of the Krauncha bird? Are not emotions dried up in them due to their employment of a second language?

Native experiences can rarely be communicated in an alien language. The ecstasy of Holi and the revelry of Deepawali can best be explained in my mother-tongue; if expressed in the second language, it will smack of artificiality and be devoid of the fragrance of the indigenous soil. My point of view is that Indian Literature written in English (a language, used by Macaulay to rule over India) fails in certain situations because of its non-indigenous nature. Here, it is pertinent to quote certain words from Macaulay’s celebrated Minute.

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 (qtd. in Krishnaswamy and Krishnaswamy 31-32).

To make a class of Indians British in taste, the English language was employed as a tool - a powerful weapon in the hands of the colonizer to colonize our minds. It was used by the empire for their mission of ‘civilizing’ the backward minds of their natives. Gramsci, a revolutionary thinker, has propounded the view that the ruling class alters the ideologies of the ruled through the mutual consent of the latter. In a way, “the element of coercion is ruled out but the major emphasis is on consent which is obtained by the ruling class through exploiting institutions like the church, the school, the family, the media (Rajnath 78).” Due to this indirect control of the empire, “Indians were so brain-washed by educational, cultural and religious activities of the West that they began to reckon themselves as inferior and developed a propensity for everything Western including administration and governance (Rajnath 78).” The civilization mission of the colonizer left us to believe in the superiority of their institutions and the inferiority of our own. We may call it the colonization of the mind, which is worse than the colonization of the land. In this process of civilizing the backward minds of the subjects, the tools of English language and literature were employed to strengthen the colonial domination in India.

Taisha Abraham has suggested the same idea, “Educating the colonized through the use of the English language and literature was central to colonial rule (68).” When the empire was successful in stuffing our minds with the ideas of their superior rationalism and our inferior backwardness, there began the presence of some authors reproducing their literary works in their language and thus started a literature, the very medium which is the imperialistic bias of the Whites.

But the question is—how can this weapon of exploitative oppression become the language of creative expression in literature for the colonized people? How can a writer reveal his inner ideas, feelings, sentiments and the surrounding ethos in this language, while the subconscious/in unconscious layers of our mind delude it as a heuristic colonial tool, employed by the colonizer to control us? Why is this mad rush after Indian Literature in English? Another objection to this literature of the anglicized Indians is—what is the readership of this type of literature? Naturally, millions of Indians are not acquainted with its readers, because of the ignorance of the natives about the intricacies of the English language. Of course, Kerala is a highly literate state. I salute the people of this region for their high rate of literacy. But, that is not the case with the other parts of the country. Even the people cannot even comprehend the English newspapers and magazines, not to speak of the works of the authors of the Indo Anglians. The supporters of Indian Writing in English argue that they target an audience outside India. Even here, there is a problem. Writing in English is imbued with classical mythology references and is mostly written about an Indian ethos. How will an outsider understand all this? Pritish Nandy in his book The Inheritance of Loss: In Stone They are sandalwoods and chapatis, in teeth, pilau rice... Saeed and Saeed could sing like Amitabh Bachchan and Hema Malini. He sang, “Mera joota hai japani...” and “Bombay se aaya ishq” (53).

The whole of Indian English literature is stuffed with English words and names. How will a foreigner follow the references to dhal, daal, kheer, jalebis, Amitabh Bachchan and Hema Malini and the songs from Bohemia?

So, for whom are these works of the Indo- Anglians produced? Of course, they are not for the masses.

Indian English Literature is not without defects. Still, every year numberless works are produced by Indians in the English language. What is the target audience of this literature? Is it in the main written for the public school educated and English speaking pseudo-intellectuals of India. This literature of the elite club drawing-room idlers caters to the tastes and moods of these persons. But these works of literature is not an aesthetic realization, rather a tool of social control. The works of the great masters are not works of high imagination for these persons. For the mention of a particular work of literature in conversation you are required to produce the whole class. A literary text is no better than a detective piece, as they are not Sahiddayas.
STIFLING THE VOICE FROM WITHIN

eye of a tive. Only the microscopic meanings—literal and figurative—literature has two types of not be out of place to say that and literature. Here, it will come and go Talking of J. Alfred Prufrock:

I am reminded of T.S. Eliot’s feeling of burning — burning in the fire of sorrows, hatred, disre spect, injustice, inequality and un touchability. Non-Dalits do not have this experience. To be very honest, the feelings of these anglicized Indo-A nglians from the upper strata of society for the bottom dogs of the society are just synthetic. They are not from the core of their being.

In place of Indian Writing in English, we should promote literatures in regional languag es as a ‘spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings’. I am not completely against the Literature of England authored by the native speak ers of the English language. I mean to say that literature written in one’s native lan guage is better than literature in alien languages. Here, I must clarify that I have just presented certain issues about Indian Writing in English. I am not against the use of the English language in day to day life. English is a global language and any cultural or social group, with out effective communication skills in this language, will lag far behind in technologi cal and scientific fields, as also much innovative research is being done in this lingua franca of the world. It is the language for dry scientific and mechanical studies and also for research in various branches of social sciences. English does not lend itself for emotional literary purpos es in India, in my view. In the opinion of J. A. Richards, there are two uses of the lan guage—scientific and emo tive. In India the English lan guage should be promoted for its scientific use and commu nication skills. It has no place in the production of literary output.

Notes and References
1. In this paper, I am equating all imaginative literature with poetry.
2. All information about the authors in this paragraph is borrowed from the following sources:


Works Cited
- This paper was presented at the ‘Language And Identity’ Seminar, organized during The International Literary Festival, 2008, hosted by Kerala Language Institute at Calicut (Kerala, India).

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