Mimicry, Masculinity, and the Mystique of Indian English: Western India, 1870–1900

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This article describes the manner in which the English language took root in modern India. It does so by using gender as the unit of analysis. Building a feminist analysis on the symbolic role of culture, the author traces the history of English education in Bombay and Poona. The rise of English as the language of power in the nineteenth century was actively enabled—and further legitimated—by the patriarchal interests of Indian class and caste formation.

The author analyzes English- and Marathi-language memoirs, school reports, debates in the “native” press on the content of the English education curriculum, and other cultural productions by men and women detailing their experiences and opinions of English education. Based on those sources, the author demonstrates that upper-caste masculine authority came to be yoked to the charisma of colonial English and, with that, subtly coded the English language as masculine. Consequently, the power of Indian English emerged from its ability to evade charges of cultural mimicry for certain classes, to organize native gender difference, and to express and orient (hetero)sexual desire.

Historical studies on the English language and the English education project in colonial India have furnished us with important information on the numbers of schools and institutions, the relationship between Western education and the English language, the content of the curriculum, and colonial and nationalist administrative debates on the matter (Kumar 2005; McCully 1940; McDonald 1966; Ramanna 1985; Seth 2007; Viswanathan 1989). While in no way insignificant, these works only tangentially account for the independent “social life” of the English language, how it transcended colonial presence, and how it carved new constituencies of privilege and desire beyond a rather narrow realm of colonial–native institutional interactions. Scholarly work that does discuss the long life of English in Indian society has focused on the literary aspects of the language, skillfully analyzing the production of a bicultural/bilingual investment in the literary forms and tropes now central to a transnational bourgeois modernity (Joshi 1991; Sangari 1999; Trivedi 1995), the shaping of reading practices around the English novel in India (Joshi 2002), or the postcolonial...
curricula of English literature departments in metropolitan India (Spivak 1993; Sunder Rajan 1992). But languages produce power beyond and despite their written forms. Literature forms only one aspect of the cultural inventory of English, and as I demonstrate here, we need a far deeper understanding of how the language shaped and was actively coded with socioculturally specific meanings. With the exception of Veena Naregal’s rich study on the mutually reinforcing relation between English and Marathi from 1830 to 1881 (2001), we have yet to learn how the language moved beyond its original, colonial, and institutional settings to interact with and actively shape existing cultural practices, ideologies, and belief systems on a wider social terrain.

In this article, I trace the gendered and sexualized route traversed by the English language in nineteenth-century western India. More specifically, I argue that contests over gender, caste, and erotic desire bolstered the cultural authority of English and, with that, imbued the language with a “native” phallocentric power. In forging fresh alignments with masculine authority, the English language rapidly accrued the power to direct (hetero)sexual desire, to produce gender difference through assumptions of cultural deficiency, and to deflect otherwise wide-ranging allegations of effeminacy and cultural mimicry. Methodologically, I seek to infuse the social history of class and caste power in western India with an analysis of the contestation over the meaning of cultural forms. Indian English came to be materially and symbolically aligned with the management of cultural mimicry, masculinity, and heterosexual affect. In turn, some Indians heightened their “indigenous” class, caste, and heteronationalist power by extending the authority of Indian English into sexually differentiated spaces—in other words, by deploying English to bolster a new and self-consciously “native” identity.

Materializing a dense, interlocking history of debate, institutional change, and individual claims to subject formation in Bombay Presidency, I refer to a range of sources from 1870 to 1900. The period under study saw an especially fervent explanation of both colonial knowledge systems as well as of gender norms. It marked the coming of age of western India’s first English-educated subjects (Dobbin 1972). Simultaneously, as feminist studies on the period have emphasized, these years saw significant shifts in family structure, domestic authority (Chakravarti 1998; Kosambi 2007; Ranade 1999), and the access of gendered subjects to the

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1By “phallocentric power,” I mean the power to control gender, to order the subject’s relationship to the symbolic, and to orient desire and affect. The literature on the subject is vast, and it spans diverse disciplinary debates. Most prominently, scholars draw attention to the symbolic processes that attempt mastery of the world through transcendent, phallic signs and that implicitly center representations of “phallic” authority as the source of power. Phallocentric power determines the rules for gender differentiation (Braidotti 1994; Butler 1999). More specifically, it thrives on binary divisions (Derrida 1967) and determines a subject’s access to language and to the symbolic (Cixous 1975). The resilient power of the “masculine signifying economy” in the nineteenth century has been elicited by literary scholars of India (Gandhi 2006; Vanita 2002), but the work has yet to find resonance among historians of the period.
institutions of modernity (Anagol 2005). Along with Marathi- and English-language memoirs and novels, I analyze school reports, the vast debates in the “native” press on the content of the English education curriculum, the archives of the colonial Education Department, and other cultural productions by men and women on their agenda for, and experiences of, English education. Located upon the interconnected sites for the production of bourgeois subjectivity—print, education, and the family—this work explores the material and the symbolic negotiation over masculinity, mimicry and heterosexual power. I argue for complex alliances between sexual difference and the power of English in colonial western India. “Native” contests over gender widened the charismatic power of English, which was, in turn, deployed to mask a growing investment in normative heterosexuality as the means of staging a new “Indian” identity.

The Milk of the Tigress

Following the East India Company’s takeover of Peshwa territory in 1818, the governor of Bombay and president of the Bombay Education Society, Mountstuart Elphinstone, immediately noted the sensitivity required at the “circumstance of our having lately succeeded to a Brahmin Government” (1823, 2). Appearing to continue the Peshwa policy of funding Sanskritic learning through the Dakshina Fund, Elphinstone actually produced transformative changes.² His efforts were attuned toward elevating English in the intellectual repertoire of educated “natives” so as to encourage a new class of Brahmin men to participate in the colonial administration. As Naregal has demonstrated, this class formation came at the cost of existing educational facilities. The sharp rise of the “new colonial” Brahmin class nurtured by Elphinstone’s policies saw the cynical manipulation of lower-caste support for widening the base of English education, the marginalization of “traditional” Sanskritic Brahmins from the privileges of learning, as well as the erasure of missionary efforts to bring vernacular education to lower-class and lower-caste students (Naregal 2001, 89–94).

In addition to propelling new class formations, colonial education policies worked to invent a desire for English education. Elphinstone enshrined the language as a prize of classical stature, attainable only after other forms of “modern” knowledge had been secured. For this purpose, he advocated “schools for the purpose of teaching English to those disposed to pursue it as a classical language, and as a means of acquiring knowledge of European discoveries” (1823, 3). Divesting the execution of these policies upon the native-managed Bombay Education Society, Elphinstone decreed that English be developed as “a reward of merit in other studies … which might tend to render it an object of

²The “traditional” Sanskritic Brahmins were those male students inclined toward studying the texts of antiquity, especially the Vedas in their original form.
ambition” (20). First placed beyond universal reach and then reintroduced as a reward for other forms of acquiescence, the study of the language was thus deliberately crafted to cast its intended—as well as excluded—students as culturally lacking and inferior. Indeed, by 1860, English education significantly “rewrote not just the lives of those with access to colonial schools and an English education … [T]he majority encountered English as a condition that denied them knowledge and power” (Naregal 2001, 69). Altogether, the experience of lack was integrally enmeshed within the psychic project of English studies.

Educated natives took to this new structure with gusto: prominently upper-class Parsis and Brahmins of the Chitpavan subcaste. New associations were formed around the pursuit of English. For instance, records from the Bombay Education Society determine that the group moved quickly to forge collaborative links with the European administration. Crucially, and in keeping with Elphinstone’s funding policies, this group insistently deployed the language of egalitarianism so as to erase earlier privileges accruing to vernacular-based, lower-class, and Sanskritic education. In 1834, the society advocated for the foundation of the Elphinstone School—the first public institution for native boys to receive an English-language education. Among the first students of the Elphinstone School was the noted nationalist leader and social reformist Mahadev Govind Ranade. Students from this school went on to enter the newly inaugurated Bombay University, which, in turn, graduated its first students—including Ranade and the Orientalist scholar R.G. Bhandarkar—in 1858.

Some colonized subjects immediately extended the chains of control intrinsic to colonial education policy. By the mid-nineteenth century, students of the Poona Sanskrit College and the Elphinstone School in Bombay were at the forefront of this rapid transformation. Exemplifying the shift from the dissemination of knowledge to its restriction, and specifically culling fresh social privileges around a new monopoly over bilingual authority, the new generation of intellectuals turned to a number of interlocking modern institutions to amplify their power. Their interest in spreading the new knowledge while simultaneously policing its dissemination was most vividly exhibited in the zeal with which they inaugurated new educational institutions and secured control over the mechanisms of print. A notable example lies in the case of Vishnushastri Chiplunkar (1850–82). Having risen through English schools in Poona and graduating with a bachelor’s degree in English, history, and Sanskrit from Deccan College, Chiplunkar embarked on a teaching career in the state-funded Poona High School. He soon broke with the strictures of colonial-funded educational policies as well as existing native publishing ventures (Tucker 1972, 182). First creating the Marathi literary magazine Nibandhmala (Garland of Essays) in 1874, he went on to establish the Chitrashala Press in 1877 and the Aryabhushan Press in 1880.\(^3\) Both presses sought to print works

\(^3\)Chiplunkar’s location within the caste politics of English studies was not incidental. Veena Naregal has pointed out that Vishnushastri’s father, Krishnashastri Chiplunkar, was “probably associated
of cultural and political import, bringing an array of works within the reach of the Marathi-reading, lower-middle-class public. *Nibandhmala* particularly embodied the bilingual prowess of the new colonial Brahmins. Aggressively foregrounding its use of Marathi, the journal claimed a privileged proximity to authentic public opinion. Its use of Marathi indicated its ability to speak for a vast lower and middle class, although, in reality, the articles actually argued for the consolidation of Anglicized Brahmin leadership over “native” society (Naregal 2001, 253). Increasingly, Chiplunkar began to collaborate with the Hindu nationalist leader Bal Gangadhar Tilak and the social reformer Gopal Ganesh Agarkar. Seamlessly rendering their own Brahmanical investments as invisible and universal, the three men would go on to determine the cultural parameters of anticolonial nationalism itself.

Founding the widely circulating Marathi- and English-language newspapers—*Kesari* and *Mahratta*, respectively—published at the Aryabhushan Press, Chiplunkar, Tilak, and Agarkar also founded the New English School for Boys in Poona in 1880. Amalgamating English education with a critique of mission and colonial schools, the school recorded its intention to be that of imparting a revitalized Hindu patriotism. Deliberately manufacturing the connection between the English language and a nationally oriented subject, the school’s first superintendent, V. S. Apte, took care to align the school with the master narrative of British supremacy, drawing attention to the “benign rule of the present rulers, who unlike the former conquerors of India that were only territorial conquerors, have won the hearts of the people by showering on them innumerable blessings of which Education is the greatest” (New English School 1883). The school opened with nineteen students on the rolls; the number rose rapidly within months, and by 1883, it recorded 732 enrolments.

In 1881, Vishnushastri Chiplunkar wrote a series of critical articles for *Kesari*, edited at the time by G. G. Agarkar. Prominent among these were pieces on the Hindu proclivity to imitate their rulers—first their Muslim rulers and later the English. Chiplunkar’s concern with the mimicry of English cultural practices was cleverly suggested by invoking subtly gendered codes. He expressed deep

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4 *Kesari*, edited by Agarkar for its first six years, was a Marathi-language paper that posed itself as a bridge between new political debates and the Marathi-speaking population. The circulation figure reported in the Report for Native Newspapers was 200 (RNN 1881, vol. 100, JD 1881). The English-language *The Mahratta*, edited by Tilak until 1891, was similarly conservative, writing against women’s education and widow remarriage. Circulation figures for the paper shifted considerably over the years; a more detailed account of the numbers is available in I. M. Reiner and N. M. Goldberg (1966, 435).
contempt for those Indians who used glasses, gloves, socks—all of these, he maintained, could be used by women but not by men—and those who drank alcohol. Certain patterns of dress and consumption indexed the desired stability of gender difference. He articulated strong regard for the British reliance on “punctuality, efficiency, spirit of adventure, patriotism, sense of unity and solidarity,” and advocated that Indians should indeed imitate the British in imbibing those qualities (Phadke 1982, 56). It was in Nibandhmal a that Chiplunkar consciously tried to forge a modern literary style for the Marathi language. While convinced of the relative autonomy of Marathi, he also conveyed his admiration of English literature and “English” state formation to his Marathi reading audience. He sought to build community both around “high” literary Marathi discourse and around a selective knowledge of English literary and historical developments. Deeply appreciative of the tradition of English literature, Chiplunkar (1882b) also dismissed the imperfect knowledge which British historians held on Asia, boldly writing against canonical literary figures and describing the political impact of the knowledge that European scholars constructed about the “east.”

In developing a cultural identity for Marathi, Chiplunkar collated cultural associations with both Marathi and English and then grafted the one upon the other. His discussions of Marathi regularly referenced English and vice versa, thereby entering into a wider, rhetorical exercise by which English and Marathi were relationally endowed with masculine and feminine qualities (Chandra 2007). Chiplunkar’s best-known essays were published shortly before his death; it was in these that he elaborated on the associations among mimicry, masculinity, and English. In eight issues of Nibandhmala, he dealt with “the condition/plight of our country” (Aamchya deshachi sthithhi), a searing collection on nationalist sentiment, knowledge, and religion. Chiplunkar categorically stated that “English knowledge [was] like a tigress. He who has thrived on her milk will never turn out to be irresolute” (1882a, 107). Native masculinity could fortify itself by imbibing the most powerful aspects of the female—the ability to regenerate those dependent on her and to reproduce herself.

Linguistic histories of precolonial South Asia have demonstrated that languages always existed in symbiotic relations with one another—evidence of deep multilingual realities (Pollock 1998). The relationship between languages, itself essential to linguistic status, was constantly buttressed by symbolic power

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5It is significant that the electoral symbol of the western India–based, right-wing Hindu nationalist party, Shiv Sena, is the tiger.

6All languages (Hindi, Marathi, and English) were and continue to be endowed with the feminine gender in Marathi. The word Chiplunkar used is nipajne, which can also be translated to mean “to be produced as” or “to be born as.” Irresolute (lenchaapecha) can also be translated as weak or silly. I have maintained the implicit masculine gender, which begs the question of whether Chiplunkar envisaged women to be in his reading audience.
and the association of each to a set of attributes and privileges. Chiplunkar’s interest in connecting social status to the relative worth of English and Marathi thus followed a well-established history of associating languages with specific practices and hence engendering new linguistic hierarchies. He was engaged in an exercise widespread in multilingual India: that of fixing the symbolic value of language. What was strikingly novel however, was how he culled this relationship. Chiplunkar’s multiply coded words suggest the increasing importance of sexual difference in signifying cultures of power for an emerging nationally oriented identity. But Chiplunkar was not staking simple binaries between the masculine and the feminine. His assertion that native men imbibe the regenerative and reproductive powers of the mother tigress signaled the fleeting possibility of an alternative to the crystallizing, logocentric polarities of modernity. Chiplunkar’s commentaries on English cultural change and his strident views on language instantly drew references to gender difference, indigenous masculinity, and cultural mimicry. Simultaneously, his writings suggest that the chain of control underwriting English education did not end with the education of “native” men. Making an angular reference to the importance of sexual difference in enabling the mimicry and ventriloquism of culture, he averred that language had to be refracted through gender to redirect its power. English had to be “reproduced” to realize its social potential.

The institutions of print and education propelled the English language through the prism of gender difference, consequently magnifying “native” masculine authority. The deliberate creation of desire—as shaped by lack—for English, the conviction that English encoded a masculine authority that could be imbibed and even mimicked, and, simultaneously, the awareness that English must filter through gender to augment “native” masculinity would all emerge once again in the record of the conjugal-pedagogic relationship to which I now turn.

LANGUAGE, PROHIBITION, AND TABOO

At the age of eleven, Ramabai Ranade (1862–1912) was married to the thirty-two-year-old Poona-based nationalist and social reformer Mahadev Govind Ranade (1842–1901). It was December 1873. The wedding ceremony

7Ranade was one of the earliest students of the Elphinstone School in Bombay and one among the first four “native” men to graduate from Bombay University in 1857. Eulogized by nationalist historians, Ranade served in a number of positions under the colonial administration, including as a judge in the High Court of Bombay Presidency. In his personal life, he educated both his wives (he remarried after his first wife’s death); his name is often evoked for his stance in favor of widow remarriage and women’s education (Tucker 1972). Differing sharply from those narratives, Uma Chakravarti has skillfully related his deliberate role in universalizing upper-caste strictures against widows into a universal Hindu law that would deny all remarried women the right to inherit their first husband’s property (1998, 128–32).
was surprisingly austere, and other than her father, Ramabai’s closest family was absent. In her memoirs, Ramabai recalled the first evening that M. G. Ranade summoned her privately (Ranade 1910, 26–27). First inquiring whether her father had left, he reiterated (verbally) that she was indeed married to him. He then asked, “Do you know who I am and what my name is?” When she said that she did, Ranade asked her to say his name out loud. Recollecting that she did not know enough to be “shy,” Ramabai did as she was commanded. Her response satisfied Ranade, even seemed to put him at ease. Learning then that Ramabai could neither read nor write, he immediately provided her with a slate and pencil and acquainted her with the first seven syllables of the religious address, “Shriganeshayanamah.” It took the young girl almost two hours to become familiar with those letters. From that point on, Ranade spent two hours every night teaching her to read and write the Marathi alphabet.

Ramabai acknowledged she had been unaware at the time that speaking her husband’s name constituted one of the gravest taboos in Hindu Brahmanical culture, for it suggested his accessibility, equality, and perhaps even mortality. She was, however, conscious of the other prohibition breached that night—the prohibition against women reading or writing. Ramabai was all too cognizant of widely entrenched beliefs that maintained an educated woman would cause the death of her husband (Ranade 1910, 27). Memories of disrupting conventions by speaking her husband’s name and writing the alphabet seemed to prevent, if not displace, any mention of other acts.8

Ramabai Ranade’s memoirs draw attention to the recurring emotional experiences that accompanied her immersion in the Western education project and subsequent acquisition of English. As Sara Ahmed has asserted, emotions map the process by which “subjects become invested in relations of power” (2003, 240). Indeed, Ramabai’s memories proffer a complex first-person account of the emotional terrain upon which the social power of the English language was contested by multiple actors. Ramabai’s husband chose to be her first teacher. Starting her off with seven Marathi letters, Ranade taught the young girl for two hours every night: grammar, arithmetic, the Modi script, and Marathi reading and writing. In her memoirs, Ramabai presents herself as surmounting the hurdles of tradition within the household, intellectually progressing from

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8There is no way to know whether the marriage was consummated that night. Sexual relations were usually deferred until both partners were past puberty. M. K. Gandhi’s autobiography—which is perhaps the least inhibited account on sex within marriage in western India in the late nineteenth century—suggests that he and his wife (both married at thirteen) were sexually active from the start (Gandhi 1927). In the specific case of the Ranades, Ramabai Ranade bore no children, and M. G. Ranade referred to himself as too old to do anything other than live a life of “restraint” (Ranade 1910, 22). The symbolic displacement of sex by education in this very case has also been indicated by Chakravarti, who has trenchantly remarked that “short of brutally consummating the marriage what would one do in such a situation except to begin teaching the illiterate wife the alphabet?” (1998, 217).
being complete illiterate to becoming conversant in several languages and even speaking English for public audiences. Despite this narrative of advancing intellectual progress, her memoirs provide repeated glimpses of the tension and ambivalence at the heart of the English education project.

Ramabai’s pedagogic experience generated conflict at many levels: with existing female domestic authority, with the public world of institutionalized education, and with new figures of power in the colonial milieu of the late nineteenth century. One of the most stressful moments occurred early in her home schooling. Ranade had employed a female teacher from the Poona Teacher Training School for Ramabai, but the young girl deliberately ignored both her studies as well as her female teacher’s authority. Ranade’s disappointment at Ramabai’s willful disregard was striking. He expressed himself silently, without physical or verbal threats, and yet his quiet displeasure effected her gravely. She instantly became aware that she had disappointed him; it produced a sense of shame that propelled a tremendous sense of dismay. Ramabai recalled that as the first time that she “really felt ashamed of myself, I didn’t want anyone to see, I wiped my tears and went downstairs. After that my childish mischievousness ended” (1910, 60).

That the female teacher was unable to discipline or teach the young girl is significant. Altogether, the experience generated deep regret in Ramabai. The sentiment of shame was multiply productive: It led her to a mature self-awareness, a new sense of herself as dependent on her husband’s approval, and hence an introduction to gendered conventions within the heterosexual bond. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has dwelt on the possibility that shame “is the place where the question of identity arises most originally and most relationally” (2003, 37). While Sedgwick’s larger concern is with the constitution of contemporary queer subjectivity, her work is helpful in understanding how the experience of shame ushers the gendered subject into the turbulent realm of the symbolic—that is, of social conventions expressed through representations. Here, Ramabai’s “failure” to adhere to Ranade’s wishes and his silent disappointment propelled in her a sense of shame that produced an awareness of his greater moral authority. As in the earlier incident on their wedding night, it was education that shaped her relative subservience.

Ramabai’s learning evoked shame in the context of the larger family unit as well. From the very first days of her life in the marital home, Ranade had her recite her lessons to him at night. Despite trying to lower her voice or soften her performance (Ranade would often order her to recite poetry and hymns in rhythm), Ramabai’s in-laws overheard her each time. The next day, they would ridicule and mimic her performance, “teasing me and shaming me before all the older women, and then they would laugh hilariously” (Ranade 1910, 38). While the majority of the women in the family are not named, Ranade’s widowed sister Durga was the primary instigator of the ridicule against Ramabai. Ramabai’s emotional ferment exemplified the contest over female
power within the household—specifically, the contest between the labor of the Brahmin widow and the apparent enjoyment of leisured conjugality by the “new” wife trained into a selective modernity. At its heart, the confrontation exemplified the twin faces of a newly ascendant Brahmin patriarchy in the mid-nineteenth century: the dehumanized position of the widow on the one hand, and the elevation—albeit through Victorian strictures—of the conjugal companion on the other.

Uma Chakravarti has underscored that “the ‘schooling’ of women was a major platform of middle-class reform” specifically played out through the rising “phenomenon of husband as teacher” (1998, 201, 207). Education was central to the vast shift in family structure, directing new domestic patriarchies and smoothly stimulating affective routes to gender awareness. As a primary representation of the “modern” colonial public, Western education was actively deployed to control female subjects and domestic structures. This was enforced by reformed patriarchal actors, not through actual physical coercion, but through producing an investment in sexual difference. The role of the English language would be—symbolically, emotionally, and materially—to accelerate such an orientation toward masculine authority.

Soon after starting on her Marathi language education, Ramabai became aware that two of Ranade’s stepbrothers, who were about her age, had begun learning English. At that time, she was at the level of the Marathi fifth grade. The knowledge that the boys were learning English filled her with a bhari haus, or (in translation) deeply stirred her desire and ambition (Ranade 1910, 37). When she told Ranade “shyly” that she would like to learn it, too, he was “surprised and pleased.” He decreed, however, that she must complete her Marathi learning first before he could start teaching her English, hence effectively ventriloquizing colonial education policy that the knowledge of English be made a “reward for merit in other studies” (Elphinstone 1823, 20). Ramabai’s account of her own, entirely self-motivated turn toward English is reminiscent of Sigmund Freud’s reading on the role of “lack” in producing bourgeois female desire and hence subjectivity. Reading Freud less literally and more as providing sharp insights into contests over symbolic authority, I argue that this vignette from Ramabai’s memories sheds important light on the interface among English,

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9Here I diverge very firmly from Partha Chatterjee’s oft-repeated formulation, “the material/spiritual dichotomy, to which the terms world and home corresponded, had acquired … a very special significance in the nationalist mind. No encroachments by the colonizer must be allowed in that inner sanctum. In the world, imitation of and adaptation to Western norms was a necessity; at home, they were tantamount to annihilation of one’s very identity” (1993, 121). As is apparent in my analysis, the “world” or the culture of the colonizer was deliberately brought to the home to produce the new “native” and compliant femininity.

10Very controversially, Sigmund Freud argued that when confronted with the sight of the male organ, the little girl “behaves differently. She makes her judgment and her decision in a flash. She has seen it and knows that she is without it and wants to have it” (1925, 672).
desire, and social power. Ramabai’s individuated desire to possess the cultural power of English was interwoven with her awareness that it was her male relatives who were learning the language. Instantly, she turned to her husband to mediate the gendered disparity in symbolic power, magnifying his ability to settle disputes between gender and power and, with that, materializing the phallogocentric power of English.

After a few months, Ranade began to personally teach Ramabai English. Not surprisingly, this swiftly exacerbated the existing spatial, temporal, and psychic rift growing within the household. It was no longer possible for Ramabai to study only in the late night and early morning, for she often had to work for an additional hour every day, memorizing the vocabulary. For that purpose, she would retreat into the bedroom to pursue her lessons.\(^\text{11}\) This angered the other women even more, for they imagined her “shirking household tasks and slighting their authority” (Ranade 1910, 39). The spatial location of Ramabai’s education, which was physically mapped in proximity to her husband and at a distance from the world “downstairs” (constituted by the taunting in-laws), further tightened the ties of companionship and privacy that bound her to the newly fashioned nuclear and heterosexual dyad.\(^\text{12}\) She recalled how, with time, she was able to bear the humiliation of continuous taunts, knowing that at night when she ascended the stairs to the room she shared with Ranade, all memories of the day would leave her (41). It was in this way that English education, already inflected by the taboo against women’s education, would be additionally marked as spatially and emotionally distinct. Her knowledge of the English language came to rest upon a disturbingly private and nocturnal experience, but it was also a source of comfort in the woman-dominated household from which she—through her companionate conjugal relationship—was increasingly alienated.

Ramabai related a time when she was “caught” trying to read an English newspaper downstairs. Immediately, her sister-in-law fulminated,

Your office is upstairs! There you can dance or study as you like, but do not dare insult us! Our older brother [Ranade] tried to teach his first wife too, and she could read and write. She was our age and despite that she never dared to read or write a single alphabet in our presence. A war was

\(^{11}\)Ramabai mentioned that she soon finished the second English reader and could read Aesop’s Fables, tell simple stories, and write sentences in English. Ranade then had her read the New Testament; over time, she would read Marathi newspapers aloud to him and once mentioned that she was reading *Tara* by Meadows Taylor. Ranade later employed an educated Englishwoman—Miss Hurford—to continue the education of his wife, although Ramabai often recalled how little interest she had in learning from any other teacher.

\(^{12}\)While not focusing on the role of English, Meera Kosambi has traced the shift from the female-dominated household economy by focusing on the lives of six Chitpavan Brahmin women, including Ramabai Ranade. For a skillful account of how this shift in domestic relations was mapped onto changes in the very organization of space within the household, see especially her essay “Home as Universe” (2007, 99–126).
waged continuously for her to learn English, but she paid no heed [to Ranade’s wishes]. Yet she remained his loyal wife … and not frivolous like you! (Ranade 1910, 40)

It is significant that Ramabai’s relative identified the difference between education and English, and that she did so by pointing to levels of domestic authority. Ramabai’s English was a greater threat to female authority than education in general. Ramabai’s in-laws recognized that English bolstered Ranade’s domestic dominance, elevating his power within the household through Ramabai’s new knowledge. Ramabai recalled that “abuse” such as this went on daily, so much so that she was often at the point of weeping aloud, continuously wondering why she had “ever begun to learn English” (40).

“English” assisted Ramabai’s emergence as an individuated and desiring subject but the process was necessarily fraught with turbulence. The desiring subject, desirous of both English as well as conjugal exclusivity with her husband, was produced through a prohibition. The female-dominated domestic hierarchy, and the requirements of caste and kinship, exemplified continually through the presence of the Brahmin widow, continued to articulate their pressure. Together these cast a shadow on her acquisition of English and the exclusive bond she sought to forge with her husband.

For Ramabai herself, English symbolized and facilitated greater proximity to her husband. Ranade’s high-level post in the colonial administration, as well as interest in current social reform issues, required him to travel widely. Ramabai could not always accompany him; often Ranade decided that the best option was to leave her behind. It is telling that these decisions instantly reverberated with her desire for learning, especially her desire for her English lessons. The first time that they were to be thus separated, Ramabai recalled the gush of thoughts that overwhelmed her. She cried bitterly at the news, remembering,

I did not like any aspect of this decision. It made me feel tremendously miserable. It became difficult to feel joy about his promotion. How would I spend my days all alone, my English lessons would cease, even the time that I spent on my lessons would not pass any more, and there would be no comfort to my days. (Ranade 1910, 74)

It is obvious that Ramabai Ranade studied as diligently as she did because it pleased her husband and that, conversely, pleasing Ranade cemented a certain

13In her work on speech acts and the constitution of gender, Judith Butler has argued that “prohibition becomes the displaced site of satisfaction for the ‘instinct’ or desire that is prohibited, an occasion for the reliving of the instinct under the rubric of the condemning law … desire is never renounced, but becomes preserved and reasserted in the very structure of renunciation” (1997, 113, 117). I find Butler’s theorization especially useful in understanding how networks of social prohibitions produce the individuated subject through notions of instinct, desire, and renunciation.
inviolable bond that itself nurtured a degree of autonomy and self-actualization in an otherwise ritualized space. The English language became an enabler, lubricating the exclusive desire that structured bourgeois heterosexuality. And as her in-laws intuited, it was through English that Ranade was able to elevate his domestic authority in the female-dominated household.

Outside the home, Ranade was closely connected with the bureaucratic structure of the Poona Native High School for Girls. While Ramabai did not herself study at the school, Ranade frequently involved her in its ceremonies. Like the other men who directed the education of their women, Ranade, too, encouraged her to perform her recently acquired knowledge, especially in front of strangers of the same or higher social classes. With that, he would repeatedly unleash the chain of cultural command embedded in colonial education policies. For instance, recalling the various meetings and gatherings in the aftermath of the inauguration of the Poona Native Girls’ High School (discussed in more detail in the following section), Ramabai mentions the occasion when Ranade asked her to present the petition for the school to the governor of the presidency, Sir James Fergusson. It was her first effort at reading an English address in front of a large audience, and Ranade had prepared the entire speech for her. Despite that, and his careful coaching, when the time came she had an unsettling, physical reaction: “As I stood up to read, my hands and legs trembled, I lost my breath and my head and body seemed on fire. It was as though a stream of hot blood was submerging me!” (Ranade 1910, 85). The tension dissipated only gradually, and she remembered reading the address aloud despite a continuing sense of anxiety.

But it was when her female relatives learned that she had read an English address to a group of strangers that she came under actual attack. The women turned upon her and Ranade for performing her knowledge of English, that, too, in front of male strangers. The harangue then led to a discourse on romantic love, with one of Ramabai’s relatives declaiming to them both,

> In the days past women dared not even lift their heads in front of strangers. Did they not know love, were they not their husbands’ darlings? Nowadays, love means that a woman must sit close to her husband as if their clothes are knotted together, bring their chairs close to sit as if inseparable, for a woman to write and speak like a man ... Were you not ashamed to see your wife reading an address in English in front of two thousand people? If you must teach them ... why must it be English? Give up all this English at least for the present. (Ranade 1910, 87)

English education threatened to disrupt existing domestic hierarchies, and—by way of the “new” companionate love—to diminish the authority of a female centered household. According to Ramabai’s in-law, women educated in this
way would mimic masculine ways, enable the rise of masculine power and disturb existing sexual division within the home. They would be the conduits for new, Anglo-native alliances. This was how English would disrupt gender order. Ramabai remembered that the woman was so outraged that she had “convinced herself that in learning English I had defied him and was beyond his control” (87).

OF MIMICRY AND WO/MEN

Chiplunkar’s philosophies unfolded within the crucible of education and print, all of which were to influence Bal Gangadhar Tilak’s militant Hindu nationalism. M. G. Ranade would have been on the other end of the political spectrum of those “new colonial” bilingual Brahmins. Ranade espoused a more moderate social reform agenda, favoring widow remarriage and women’s education, both of which he attempted to enshrine by inaugurating the National Social Conference (the social reform wing of the Indian National Congress). Yet, while characterizing divergent political terms and strategies, it is evident that both Chiplunkar and Ranade recognized the symbolic and material role of sexual difference in heightening the elite male monopoly over English. English had to filter through gender to magnify a new, “native” power.

If print culture and the home provided arenas by which the power of English could be “reproduced,” the woman’s school provided another kind of opportunity for selectively engineering—even ventriloquizing—the English language so as to augment “native” power. On July 19, 1884, a large and influential gathering of Poona’s native and colonial elite gathered in Hirabaug Town Hall to cement plans on the Poona Native Girls’ High School (PNHS). This would be the first native-managed school to teach girls and women to the level of the matriculation examination. Newspaper accounts from the period reported that the women’s forum started by Pandita Ramabai—the Arya Mahila Samaj (AMS)—had met the day before to discuss these plans (Bombay Gazette, August 12, 1884). Pandita Ramabai was herself in England, where she had gone to pursue an education, but the women of the group—nearly one hundred in number—had met and reached a resolution, which they entrusted to M. G. Ranade. Presiding over the public meeting, Ranade emphasized that their resolution (composed in Marathi) established that the desire for a high level of education was felt and expressed most urgently by native women themselves (Mote 1972, 271). Categorically stating that the benefits of male education would be “multiplied a hundredfold” if a similar education were given to women, Ranade reiterated that the AMS supported the effort “about to be made to start a high class school

14The matriculation examination was conducted entirely in English, and in the case of contemporary boys’ schools, it was considered synonymous with an English-language education and perusal of the Western education curriculum. Successful students could enter the same presidency universities that had graduated candidates such as M. G. Ranade and R. G. Bhandarkar.
for teaching the higher standards in vernacular languages along with English and Sanskrit studies” (*Bombay Gazette*, July 26, 1884). While Ranade believed that native women had expressed their independent sentiments, in actuality, the AMS was guided by educated Indian men. In fact, in her memoirs, Ramabai Ranade wrote of how the AMS’s sessions were regularly supervised by gentlemen from the community who would present lectures and then encourage the women to write and communicate their thoughts on a variety of issues. Hence, the statement from the AMS actually sanctioned the authority of a certain class of Hindu, Brahmin, and English educated men, cementing their role as mediators between the desires of some women and the colonial state.

Less than a month after the meeting at the town hall, the suggestion for the girls’ high school was formalized. A deputation of the “People of Poona” visited the governor of the presidency on August 9, 1884, to reiterate their desire for such a school. Speaking at the occasion, the Rao Bahadur Chhotalal of Ahmedabad emphasized that

> an acquaintance with English is essentially necessary to enlighten women on the practical questions of the day, and to enable them to take an intelligent interest in the pursuits and aspirations of their husbands and to encourage the growth of vernacular female education in general. (N. A. 1884)

In stressing that women represented a vital constituency of vernacular speakers to be introduced to the languages and literature of England, the Rao Bahadur evoked the central tenet of the linguistic “trickle-down” policies first suggested in Thomas Babington Macaulay’s 1835 “Minute on Indian Education.” Furthermore, and as he implied to his fellow English-educated men, this act of linguistic and cultural ventriloquism relied on the forging of new, companionate relationships between English and the vernacular and, simultaneously, between men and women. English-educated women would both nurture the vernacular and bring progressive ideals of domesticity and companionate love to fruition.

The Poona Native Girls’ High School was inaugurated soon after by the governor of the presidency, Sir James Fergusson, on September 29, 1884 (Panse 1934). It was the first native-managed school across British India to administer education to girls at the level of the matriculation examination, imparting English language, literature, history, geography, and other elements of the

15 Possibly building on earlier, regional formulations on English education—such as Elphinstone’s “Minute”—Thomas Babington Macaulay deemed that the agenda of colonial education should be 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” (1835, 249). Macaulay’s “Minute” was instrumental in the inauguration of the three presidency universities, which in the case of Bombay saw both M. G. Ranade and R. G. Bhandarkar as its first (among four) graduates.
“Western education” curriculum to its students. The school was entirely supervised by Indian men, with Miss Hurford as its superintendent. At the end of the first year, the school’s official report mentioned that the girls’ knowledge of “their vernaculars” was barely up to the mark, and so the need was felt to revise the curriculum to strengthen this facility (N. A. 1885). In response, the state education department concurred that students aspiring to enter the school as well as its higher English classes must first be tested in Marathi or Gujarati, as the “girls were not well grounded in their vernaculars” (EDF, vol. 47, 1885). It is of tremendous significance that Marathi- or Gujarati-speaking girls were not considered sufficiently conversant in their own languages. The colonial state authorized the male-managed school to judge native women as inadequately knowledgeable in the languages that they spoke. Signaling the growing centrality of a written and formal structure in determining the standards of language (even “vernacular” language), the statement further pointed to the institutionalization of differences between the language that students knew and the one being taught in school.17

The school magnified the social capital of the native and colonial male elite over the years, and it was this group that forged favorable connections between the English language and companionate domesticity. The school’s annual function in 1891 had the governor of Bombay Presidency, Lord Harris, note that women’s education should train a woman to communicate with the men of the household on all matters and subjects. Further eliciting the connection between language and domesticity, the noted Orientalist scholar R.G. Bhandarkar emphasized that through contact with “England and Englishmen and English-women that … higher social and moral ideals have dawned in our minds.” He stated,

16 The school had eighteen students on its rolls the first day. A few years later, a female teacher training school was amalgamated with this school. Of the seventy-four girls on the rolls at the end of the first year, twenty-four were married, six were widows, and sixteen were from outside Poona; the students ranged in age from seven to twenty-nine years old.
17 Other standards taught at this school can only be gleaned by reading the Indian Education Commission (also known as the Hunter Commission). The commission, which conducted its study in 1882, mentioned only the curriculum of boys’ English schools in the presidency, but as the PNHS was expressly geared toward the state matriculation examination, its standards would have been at par. According to the Hunter Commission report, boys’ high schools in Bombay usually had their English classes read “an easy play of Shakespeare, a book of Paradise Lost or one of the shorter poems of Milton; a poem of Cowper or Wordsworth such as ‘The Task’ or the ‘Excursion’ or a prose work such as an ‘Essay of Macaulay’” (Indian Education Commission 1882). Students were required to learn one other language, and the other subjects included “Arithmetic, Algebra, Euclid, General Knowledge, History of England and India, Geography.” The PNHS, for its part, had Sanskrit as an optional language, and the majority of students studied Marathi. Miss Hurford taught English songs. Although not included in the syllabus for the matriculation examination, the students at the PNHS were also taught sewing, singing, and drawing (Panse 1934).
We do not propose in this institution to make our women learned and teach them to neglect their household duties and take to books. What we intend to do is to make them more fit to discharge those duties, and to open a window in the prison house of our social system through which they may look into the modern world. That window is the knowledge of the English language—the language of modern civilisational and of healthy human progress. (EDF, vol. 60, 1891, compilation no. 87)

A close colleague of M. G. Ranade, Bhandrakar had also graduated in 1858 as one of the first four graduates of Bombay University. In his speech, he made it evident that the dissemination of English required the performance of certain tasks marked as “feminine,” tasks that were orientated toward the private, domestic, and conjugal. Further echoing the role of English in buttressing the “new” pedagogical-conjugal bond described by Ramabai Ranade, Bhandarkar’s words clearly reflected the male desire for a gender order marked by the primacy of the heterosexual dyad and companionate understandings between husband and wife. Crucially, it would be the transfer of the English language from designated Indian men to “their” women that would consolidate these progressive cultural standards. English had already been established in colonial discourse as the language of a superior civilization. Now it was refashioned by colonial subjects as the conduit through which to introduce native women to the “advanced” gender order of the modern world.

Despite the careful grafting (by some) of connections between orderly gender relations and the English language, the new Poona Native Girls’ High School was regularly lampooned for ushering in new regimes of gender disorder by others. The ability of the language to determine male and female cultural roles, to orient the desire of gendered subjects, and to augment the social authority of a certain class of native men was subtly referenced in a number of printed sources. Significantly, these accounts drew attention to the dangers of cultural mimicry. And yet, while appearing to critique the English-language curriculum of the PNHS and the agenda sponsored by Ranade, Bhandarkar, and their allies, the wider conversation in the native press actually reflected a wider consent over the phallogocentric power of English.

A few weeks before the Poona Native Girls’ High School had been inaugurated, the bilingual Bombay-based newspaper The Native Opinion noted,

[A]ll our anxieties are chiefly directed to acquire the outward surroundings of the Englishman … We are securing the appearances only without the moral condition of English civilisation [which is] the Englishman’s energy, determination and dogged perseverance, love of manly exercises and sports, of constitutional liberty and fair play … Again, while we deplore the fact that the education of our boys is given in a foreign language, what can be said of an attempt to repeat the same evil in educating our girls? (“Higher Education for Our Girls,” September 14, 1884)
The newspaper argued that the perusal of the English language by Indians would produce shallow, emasculated mimics. The language compromised “true” masculinity and as a result was even more detrimental to native femininity. The writer demanded instead “an elementary education, [one] that will not make fluent readers and writers of a foreign language, but which will make them good housewives.” The debate was immediately picked up in another “native” newspaper.18 Contrasting the learning of English with the necessary feminine accomplishments required in a native woman, the bilingual Mumbai Indu Prakash agreed that the education in the new school would force native women to choose between being either “fluent readers and writers of a foreign language” or “useful in their houses.” The English language would separate women from the activities that established their femininity; moreover, it would encourage them to imbibe superficial aspects of English masculinity. The article thus went on to caution

our Puna friends [to] steer clear of the Scylla and Charybdis of superficial and showy education on the one hand and of masculine education on the other … [We deny that] imitation is at all a bad trait in our character, or that we are not fit to imitate Englishmen. Well directed imitation is one of the best means of improvement … we need not be ashamed to imitate them in their energy, determination and dogged perseverance, their love of manly exercises and sports, their love of constitutional liberty and fair play … We must continually strive to improve ourselves, and as part of such improvement we must educate our women. (September 22, 1884)

Indian men could benefit from imitating the best aspects of English culture—but only by directing the education of women. Echoing the cultural agenda expressed by Chipulkar and corroborated both through Ranade’s domestic experiments and proponents of the PNHS, here the conviction was that the antidote to the threat of cultural contamination and native effeminacy lay in the supervision of women’s education. As the paper reiterated the following week, “[I]f we are to become like the Englishman, energetic, persevering, and manly … if the Englishman’s virtues are to be reproduced in India, his education must begin at home” (September 29, 1884). Strengthening male authority in the home would fortify a

18 The Native Opinion remained in print from 1864 to 1908 and maintained a somewhat conservative stance; its circulation figures fluctuated between 400 and 600 annually. Mumbai Indu Prakash was more markedly pro-reform, lasted from 1862 to 1924, and published regular contributions from M. G. Ranade and R. G. Bhandarkar, among others; it listed its circulation figures as 1,000 per issue (Naregal 2001, 199, 250). According to Naregal, both ventures exemplified the manner by which bilingual newspapers claimed to be the sole spokesmen for native opinions, demonstrating “an intimate knowledge of ‘native opinion’ and a close familiarity with the forms of modern governance” (222).
native masculinity otherwise enfeebled by its mimicry of European ways. The writer of these lines thus established that British colonial modernity was supported by a chain of cultural control: Desirable masculine traits of British culture would be strengthened among native men if those very men could define and control the education of the “home.” Native masculinity needed to imbibe the “masculine” aspects of “English” schoolboy and political culture, but that acquisition could only be ensured by teaching native women their correct domestic roles.

The conflict over mimicry in these debates partially evokes Homi K. Bhabha’s work on the “ambivalence of colonial discourse.” Reading Macaulay’s “Minute on English Education” alongside other colonial texts, Bhabha has famously argued that the desire of white supremacy was enacted “through the repetition of partial presence, which is the basis of mimicry.” The legacy of colonialism’s civilizing mission lay in the production of the mimic men, “the appropriate objects of a colonialist chain of command, authorised versions of otherness … but also … the figures of a doubling, the part-objects of a metonymy of colonial desire which alienates the modality and normality of those dominant discourses in which they emerge as ‘inappropriate’ colonial subjects” (1993, 87; emphasis added). But the evidence I have presented in this article demonstrates that we must look far deeper—structurally as well as literally—than either Macaulay’s desire to produce English-educated mimic men or the performative “failure” of those mimic men to uphold the civilizational standards of colonialism. Indeed, Bhabha’s fixation with the colonizer/colonized divide comes at the cost of theorizing the simultaneous production of “native” authority over class, gender, and caste. The native mimic man was not the end point of colonial cultural engineering. Instead, English-educated subjects immediately sought to cement their authority by reaching out to their own women to ventriloquize Macaulay’s desire. As the history of colonial education discussed by Naregal evidences, this twist was performed in the face of actively marginalizing other caste and class subjects from English education. In the process, the English-educated augmented their native masculinity. The success of colonial mimicry lay in the manner by which English-educated Indians deployed sexual difference to contain English within their caste and class locations, turning colonial desire for the native mimic man into a revitalized Indian heteronationalism.

**ENGLISH AS THE LANGUAGE OF DESIRE**

Despite disagreeing over whether native women should learn English, the debates discussed here established a wider, more hegemonic consensus: that English could secure the relation between masculinity and female gender roles. The debate accelerated with extraordinary velocity during the case of
The fear was that English would disrupt gender, for it was her English education that had allegedly armed Rukhmabai to reject her husband’s sexual authority (Agashe 1890). While appearing to critique the role of English in women’s education, ultimately the debate corroborated the existence of a wider consensus on the phallogocentric power of English and its ability to control gender and direct sexual desire.

Two years after the first outbreak of controversy around the Rukhmabai case, the Marathi-language play *TaruniShikshanNatika* circulated a particularly sexualized critique of the English language. For its part, *Kesari* lauded the play for finally exposing the nefarious intentions of the Poona Native Girls’ High School. First published in 1886, the print version of *TaruniShikshanNatika* went into a second edition, and the play itself was staged every week in Marathi theaters around the city of Poona. The playwright, Narayan Bapuji Kanitkar, sensationalized the lives of the female students in the new institution. Central and recurring themes were their flirtatious and sexually motivated behavior, their enactment of European dances and mannerisms, and their mercenary inclinations. The women were overwhelmingly driven by their desire for the language, and the play described how their single-minded pursuit of an English education drove them to prostitution and extramarital affairs. In the preface, Kanitkar called for the rejection of the “chimerical, practical and ornamental effects of teaching of the English language and English ways to young women through the new educational system [which is] enervating, immasculating” (Kanitkar 1886, 13–14). Especially drawing attention to the dangers of mimicry, Kantikar claimed that

> [I]f women … imitate men, then they will be short-sighted … their religious convictions will be shaken, they will desire the alien religion, they will mix the simple and pure Marathi language with English words to create a weak combination … obscene books will spoil their minds, they will drink alcohol with men, will want to dance in the English way, they will want to have love marriages, ask for divorces, prefer the path of elopement. (14–15)

English would disrupt the fundamental markers of gender difference, encouraging women to appropriate Westernized behavior and to repudiate tradition. Their desire would drive them to extramarital affairs and alcoholism. Most significantly, women educated in this way would become like men, mimic masculine

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19Arguing that she had been married to her husband as a child and drawing attention to intellectual, moral and physical incompatibilities, Rukhmabai (1862–1953) fought a four-year-long legal case of regional, national, and international ramifications (Burton 1998) in which she actively resisted living with her husband. Rakhmabai’s English education was repeatedly cited (especially in the press) as the reason for the “incompatibility.” For more details, see Padma Anagol (2005, 184–91).

ways, and, with that, insult native masculinity. If English produced a corrupted masculinity in women, it could also turn men into enfeebled, undesirably emasculated subjects. In 1891, one Martand Narayan Davne wrote a musical play entitled *Sangeet Aadhunik Shikshan Vipaak Natika*. The play alleged that native boys were increasingly draining their energy by learning English and other subjects in the Western education curriculum. This compromised them physically—the male protagonists in this play were vividly portrayed as consumptive, diseased, and debilitated. Significantly, it was the body of the native subject that would suffer: It would be deformed and defiled for imbibing English.

The lasting and prohibitive power of English was that it would blur the polarities of gender difference, producing emasculated men and women driven by sexual desire. Allegations such as Davne’s did not pass without counterassessments. Significantly, charges against the language and its aberrant phallogocentric power were immediately answered in English, in writing, and by the new class mobile gendered subject. For instance, the 499-page memoir penned by Dosebai Jessawalla, *The Story of My Life*, details firsthand how English inserted itself into the masculine signifying economy of bourgeois India. That an English-educated Parsi woman would reach to the printed memoir to amplify the connection between an English education and normative sexual desire is of tremendous significance, establishing my point on the ventriloquism of English through gender in nineteenth-century India. Published posthumously in 1911, the work provides immense details on the very years discussed in Ramabai Ranade’s memoirs, that is, between 1870 and 1900.

The primary purpose for Dosebai Jessawalla’s monumental work was to establish her unique status as the “first Indian woman” to “taste the sweets of an English education” (Jessawalla 1911, 37). Her enthusiastic embrace of an “Indian” identity established that women’s English education enabled a disavowal of the disparities (of caste, class, region, and, in this case, religion) internal to that very “Indian” identity. Jessawalla’s autobiography continually yoked her English education with details on her “break” with the dictates of traditional patriarchy and her individuated embrace of companionate heteroconjugality. Recounting the events leading to her marriage in 1852, she noted that, “by my association

21Contemporary sources corroborated the existence of this mounting anxiety. Closely resembling Ramabai Ranade’s experiences, whereby she was chastised for wanting to “write and speak like a man,” the *Bombay Gazette* recorded that the author of *TaruniShikshanNatika* believed that the English education of native women would bring “immense harm to the males of his Community” (*Bombay Gazette*, October 21, 1887).

22This was certainly not the only text that suggested the connection between English and hetero-sexual desire; a number of printed sources in English and Marathi argued for this. See the English-language novel *Ratanbai* by Shevanti Nikambe (1895) and the Marathi novel *Bahekleli Taruni* (The Wayward/Corrupted Young Girl) by V. V. Haddap Bahekleli Taruni (1924).

23The Parsi community had been at the forefront of print and education—including women’s English education—working in tandem with the Chitpavan Brahmins of western India (Farooqui 2006; Luhrmann 1996).
with English ladies, I had come to the conviction that I had a right to either assent to or decline any proposed union, that I too had something to say in a matter of such grave importance to myself” (59). That she felt prepared to recreate a world of companionate understanding is evident. The ambition was accompanied by a solidifying individuality, and together these aligned themselves with a discerning consumerism and, later, an appreciation for the Anglicized tastes of her husband. The role played by English in articulating her desire for companionate conjugal-ity was even more lucidly developed in Jessawalla’s depiction of her wedding night. Recalling first the “stockings, kid gloves, pieces of lace and tulle” that her husband gifted her on the “first day of my new life,” Jessawalla’s memoirs established the structural alliances between English, heterosexual desire, and an upwardly mobile liberal individuality. The couple immediately set out to discuss his needs and her abilities. His needs were to maintain traditional ties in a large joint family (more than sixty members, as she recalled), and Jessawalla’s abilities entailed her English education and simultaneous knowledge of custom. He informed her that despite his family being large and rather traditional, she, being “blessed with an English education as well as trained up in Parsee usages,” would discern the route to “family concord” without having to deprive herself of those pleasures or habits which she might have “from infancy been accustomed.” Immediately followed her grateful memory of those “kind words of confidence in me [that] soothed my anxieties … It would be out of my power to describe the thrill of ecstasy which the love of my husband excited in my hitherto virgin breast” (70).

Jessawalla’s husband gave his approval to her simultaneous mastery of English and tradition, instantly igniting the rush of elation in her “hitherto virgin breast.” English materialized Jessawalla’s relationship to her husband, to consumption, and to tradition. The language inserted itself into the interstices of “native” bourgeois heterosexual desire and, with that, guided their mutual satisfaction. Rather than suggesting the intuitive critique of bourgeois political formations (as might be suggested by Bhabha’s work on mimicry), Jessawalla’s memoirs exposed instead the centrality of English to the coalition between heterosexual desire and “native” patriarchy. The economy of consumption was fundamental to this discriminating choice. Her emphasis on choice, pleasure, and taste congealed to form the illusion of the discerning individual, who, by way of the consumption of “English” culture and cultural practices, would freely entered into sexual relations with her husband.

Jessawalla smoothly naturalized the connection between English and heterosexual desire and, in the process, established her cosmopolitan individuality and adherence to culture/tradition. The virginal “thrill of ecstasy” reinforced the connection between English, a companionate understanding between herself and her husband, and the power of traditional patriarchy. Voiced through the supposed inevitability of heterosexual consummation, Jessawalla revealed that her desire was to ventriloquize male authority through the universal power of
bourgeois consumption, heterosexuality, and the specificity of indigenous custom. She embodied the benign and entirely nonradical benefits of an English education and did so by depicting the expansion of those sites that compulsorily reproduced the “Indian” heterosexual contract: the private space of the bedroom, the monogamous dyadic unit, and the “tradition” at the heart of modern colonial national culture.

CONCLUSION

The grave knowledge of prohibition and taboo, the suggestion of sexual consummation, and the triumph of an otherwise emasculated patriarchal authority by the extension of education into sexually differentiated spaces all point to the power and charisma attained by the English language in late nineteenth-century India. From Vishnushastri Chiplunkar’s plea that Indian men imbibe the regenerative milk of the tigress, to Martand Davne’s allegations that an uncontrolled pursuit of the English language would unhinge native men, anxieties over the English language were regularly voiced in a gendered idiom. Invoking images of the degenerate, sexually driven, native body, these rhetorical strategies compounded beliefs in the prohibitive power of the English language. Despite that, some “natives” strove to adapt “English” to this increasingly sexed and gendered cultural imperative. The process worked to amplify patriarchal power, bringing ideas of sexual difference and national culture into convergence.

The memoirs of Ramabai Ranade and Dosebai Jessawalla both establish that the normative heterosexual unit was symbolically consummated through an English education. In Ramabai’s case, English separated her from a preexisting female-dominated space. Ironically, her performance of the language of power drew her closer to her husband in a novel, companionate, and exclusionary bond even as it marked the public as a space of unease and discomfort. Ramabai’s acquisition of English enabled Ranade’s display of patriarchal control. While bolstering Ranade’s heteronationalist role, it generated sentiments of shame, rage, and gendered subservience in her, thus suggesting her awareness that sexual difference was constructed to sanction class and caste inequities. But for her part, Jessawalla maintained instead that some others who learned to desire (through) the English language actively enabled new alliances between upper-caste power, “native” patriarchy, and essentialized gendered polarities.

English-educated men faced critiques of their masculinity from two quarters: colonial as well as “vernacular” native. Their response was to extend the chains of control essential to the project of colonial modernity in the direction of cementing sexual difference. Strengthening the power of a reformed, “indigenous” patriarchy, they simultaneously shored up their own caste authority. Indian English bound the nineteenth-century educated gendered subject to a new and self-consciously “indigenous” heteropatriarchy. It fuelled the process by which nineteenth-century “native” subjects were taught to guide their desire toward a
possessive investment in sexual difference. As numerous sources testified, new rules for gender difference were derived from the phallogocentric power of English—it's ability to initiate desire, submission, and difference. Its ability to incorporate native womanhood—as the location for stable gender difference—was essential to its symbolic power. And indeed, it was once English became desirable for “Indian” women themselves that it could be disengaged from its point of origin as a colonial imposition and, finally, take its place as an Indian language.

Acknowledgments

It is my pleasure to thank Jean Allman, Antoinette Burton, Kenneth George, Jennifer Munger, David Roediger, Saadia Toor, Shivali Tukdeo, and two anonymous readers for the Journal of Asian Studies for their sustained engagement with this work. For the ever-inspiring example of her intellectual and political activism and her commitment to my project, I remain especially grateful to Professor Uma Chakravarti.

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