

THE
SEXUAL
LIFE
OF
ENGLISH



Languages of
Caste and Desire in
Colonial India

SHEFALI CHANDRA

THE SEXUAL LIFE OF ENGLISH

Next Wave: New Directions in Women's Studies



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Languages of Caste and Desire

in Colonial India



Shefali Chandra

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appear on the last printed page of this book.

For my Ai, Lilla Wagle Dhume
And as always, for Shailaja and Ramesh Chandra

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION
AND SPELLING

I have refrained from using any conventional style for transliteration of Marathi and Hindi words and phrases. Most names and words are easily recognizable in a simple, anglicized form. I have used identifiable English-language spellings for words from Marathi and other Indian languages that appear frequently, as well as for individuals, places, names, deities, and institutions.

The spelling of certain Marathi place names has increasingly become a matter for debate. For the time period covered in this book, a town will appear in Marathi-language sources as (for instance) Pune and in English-language sources from the same period as Poona. In my own writing, I have referred to the place as Poona, unless the contemporary print source refers to Pune. Similarly, I use Bombay and not Mumbai, unless stated otherwise in the source itself.

PART ONE



LEARNING GENDER, KNOWING ENGLISH

An Introduction



In 1995 the Marathi-language playwright and novelist Kiran Nagarkar penned *Ravan and Eddie*, an exhilarating satire on the class, caste, and communal politics of contemporary Bombay city. Nagarkar devoted an entire section of his novel to the mystique of the English language:

There are only two kinds of people in the world. Those who have English and those who don't . . . the haves and the have nots. . . . English is a mantra, a mahamantra. It is an "open sesame" that doesn't open mere doors, it opens up new worlds and allows you to cross over from one universe to another. English makes you tall. If you know English, you can wear a "suit boot," do an electrician's course or take a diploma in radio and refrigeration technology. . . . If you know English, you can ask a girl for a dance. You can lean Eileen Alva against the locked door of the terrace and press against her, squeeze her boobs and kiss her on the mouth, put your tongue inside it while slipping your hand under her dress.¹

The versatile allure of English, its ability to signify and thus materialize mysterious resources of social mobility, comes alive in these lines. With a few deft strokes, Nagarkar illustrates how the power of English supersedes form or textual identifications, how it exceeds grammatical, linguistic, or literary definitions. It is more complicated than either its colonial past or its ability to ensure social mobility. Most striking, perhaps, is the narrator's reference to Eileen Alva, a signifier that, in the context of Bombay city, suggests the role of sexuality in carving distinctions between religiously marked communities: the Goan Christian girl next door, in the narrator's mind, is both sexually alluring and sexually available. A deliberately vague notion of English thus produces sexual power and is amplified through it. The language is, indeed, an "open sesame." It is a sign that has disciplinary, especially phallogocentric, value. Nagarkar exposes the complicities be-

tween class and sexual power, between regional culture and religion, and he does so by stressing the centrality of “woman” in cohering otherwise disparate forms of desire. This is the selective, sexual, and symbolic axis upon which Indian English revolves. Himself a bilingual writer, Nagarkar recognizes that language can never be an unmediated mode of communication, or merely a collection of grammatical rules and lexical signs. Rather, he evokes the swirling *world* of English, a historically configured constellation of symbolic practices, expressions, possibilities, and prohibitions; an entire world manifested through social and sexual access and expressed immediately in local, communal terms. Assessments such as Nagarkar’s go to the heart of the investigations I undertake here.

The Sexual Life of English traces the indigenization of the colonial language of power, the process by which English became an Indian language. My study breaks with commonsense assumptions that the prevalence of English in India marks the lasting success of British colonial culture, the inevitability of an Anglo-American globalization, or the rise to dominance of a pan-regional and cosmopolitan middle class. Instead, I argue that the English language was disciplined and materialized through the unfolding politics of a rigorously policed and sexualized modernity. No simple story of accelerating numbers, of widening social power, or of a mere rupture from a precolonial past, I argue that it was India’s sexual politics that domesticated the authoritative power of English. This was accomplished by an array of social actors: colonial and “native,” men, women, students, teachers, and writers alike.² They first brought the language to a select group of native women, and then they laid down new demarcations between indigenous and invading cultures, vernacular and English languages, normative and prohibitive sexuality, and the parameters of sexual desire itself. In the process, they universalized upper-caste strictures on knowledge and proliferated discourses on sexuality. The disciplinary power of English, its ability to stake differences between social groups and to produce the consenting Indian subject, was generated by the discourses of sex and gender. The ambition of some men to share the language of power with their women and the vociferous outrage that this provoked within native society consolidated existing social hierarchies and built fresh consensus on caste, sexuality, and knowledge. This magnified distinctions between English and vernacular languages. English became the means by which to convey the symbolic, social, and sexual parameters of

native womanhood. In this way it was repeatedly unleashed to assert cultural difference not only from the “West,” but from other Indians as well.

Women Make English an Indian Language

The Sexual Life of English emerges from a simple observation: far from widening the reach of English to those castes and classes historically excluded from learning, British India’s English-educated subjects taught English to their own women. In doing so, they transformed the language. Bringing English to their wives and daughters, British India’s English-educated men successfully secured the language of power within their class and caste location; they turned English toward consolidating, even fixing, the standards of caste, sexuality, and prohibition. The investment in gender enabled some Indians to stake early control over the symbolic power of the language. English and normative sexuality converged, in the process augmenting distinctions between indigenous and foreign, feminine and masculine, labor and knowledge. It was the normative Hindu and upper-class Parsi woman who anchored this selective modernity, and she did so by naturalizing the “regulatory fiction of heterosexuality.”³ This idealized female figure was key to the Indian elite’s quest for cultural equivalence with Europe, its distinction from “other” Indians, and its ability to speak in the name of a national commonality. Despite its sexual potency and its bonds with the colonial project, English could and would be subsumed within the gender logic of upper-caste India to augment indigenous power. The history I track here thus demonstrates that far from characterizing the triumph of colonial culture, Indian English is a critical effect of native gender regimes.

Put simply, this book demonstrates how English became an Indian language. That English is fundamentally embedded in the history of modern Indian social stratification is no surprise; how it has become so requires greater scrutiny.⁴ I deliberately break with those sociolinguistic theories that maintain the primacy of language in shaping and expressing human culture; rather, my contention is that social context determines the value, reach, and meaning of language. My analysis aligns with post-structuralist, anti-caste, and queer critiques of social power. Following Nagarkar, I maintain that languages are historically shaped signifying practices and not predetermined, transparent, or value-free forms of commu-

nication.⁵ “English” is a powerfully ambiguous sign that spans knowledge, literature, desire, fashion, virtue, labor, and sex. Rather than accepting that Indian English is entirely determined by its linguistic structure, or by its origin in colonial policies and literary texts, I pursue “English” to learn what people say it is and what it does.⁶ As becomes evident in the pages of this book, people were not primarily focused on the linguistic, literary, or grammatical nature of English. Instead, they deliberated in great measure on its power to change the parameters of Indian culture.⁷ Hence, I do not take its contemporary disciplinary location as evident, nor do I set out to rehearse its history through an examination of literary texts.⁸ I draw attention instead to the vexed process by which Indian English sprang from the fierce debates over Indian authenticity. How did native codes of gender and sexuality shape the history and symbolic power of English, and how, in turn, did English infuse conjugality, desire, and caste?⁹ The meaning of English was, I argue, produced through the proliferation of discourses over sexuality. English accrued traction through the nineteenth century and through an interest in fixing the parameters of normative sex.¹⁰ I am thus concerned less with how English operated as the colonial language of power; rather, I explicate its ability to take on a native phallogocentric power vis-à-vis so-called vernacular languages and native standards of gender.¹¹ The book exposes how some Indians symbolically and materially reinterpreted English through the vocabulary of gender in order to produce sexual difference, sexual desire, and thus new regimes of caste exclusivity.

The story takes place in the western Indian cities of Bombay and Poona between 1850 and 1940, urban locations characterized by the colonial economies of opium and cotton and by unprecedented higher-education facilities. From the work of a diverse range of historians we know how the colonial state and missionary agencies attempted to extend the reach of English studies, Christianity, and the Western education project.¹² Scholars of colonial discourse, on the other hand, have delved into the intricacies of English studies themselves, eliciting the symbolic power of English literary texts in strengthening the fiction of colonial power.¹³ More recently, literary scholars have examined the way that Indians used the language to shape transnational, spiritual conversations or how they reevaluated, even resignified, English literary texts.¹⁴ English operated in different registers for an array of constituencies; it could be a means for securing employment, a vehicle for Christianity, a route to humanist equivalence with

European power, or a break with upper-caste hegemony. Stepping back from a literary or form-bound definition of English, I investigate the contours of the English-education project when Indians gained the power to direct English studies for themselves. This approach has taken me to the terrain of education itself, the formation of schools, debates over the composition of the student body, and the determination of the curriculum. By tracking the relationship between a rather amorphous idea of English and the production of subjectivities, I reconstruct how English cohered over the course of ninety years through native attempts to discipline the normative sexual subject.

This book thus looks at the dynamic, changing history of Indian English in relation to pedagogic efforts on the one hand and the shaping of new subjectivities on the other. It details the formal, institutional efforts of some of these first English-educated native subjects to control English studies between 1850 and 1930. Through analyses of school reports and colonial education department files on native-managed English schools in Bombay and Poona, along with a close examination of debates in English and Marathi, popular cultural sources, newspapers, and plays, I track the convergence in debates over respectability, chastity, mimicry, liberalism, Hindu nationalism, and sexuality. These debates coalesced to keep English studies from moving beyond the caste and class location of the first native proponents of English education. What becomes most clear is that even in contestations on curricular content, English is referenced neither as a collection of literary texts nor as a mere language form, but as a sign that supervises behavior, sexual power, and caste. The early history of native pedagogic efforts reveals how English is managed by the modernity of Indian tradition, how historically contingent ideas on the relationship between sexuality and social power materialized the function and purpose of English.

The schools that I discuss in part I sought to disseminate English. But as chapter 2 discusses, through their curricula and ceremonies, the schools demonstrated that English would not disrupt caste power; in fact, it would educate its students to comply with caste strictures of monogamy, chastity, and the male monopoly over knowledge. I read this history critically, noting the performative power of English: its ability to operate as a sign that reinforces the very sexual norms that contain the language within upper-caste groups.¹⁵ Chapter 3 turns to wider cultural debates that focused on the dangers of English, particularly on its ability to destabilize the

relationship between women and sex, and between caste power and chastity. In the process of debating who should learn English, popular and literary sources reveal how anxieties over sexual difference were put in the service of protecting upper-caste power and how ideas of sexual difference served to inflate the distinctions between languages. The final chapter in part I shows how transnational debates over female sexuality were used as ammunition to redirect the caste project of Indian English toward managing sexual difference. Overall, part I exposes how upper-caste Indians invoked standards of gender to control the power of English, hence imbuing it with a native phallogocentric authority. They used sexual associations to establish hierarchies between languages, a process that I call sexual-citational grafting.¹⁶ Together these revelations show the long history by which upper-caste power served to present itself as secular and undisputed.

By policing the “fact” of gender difference, a variety of subjects reinforced the exclusivity of Indian English. Part II tracks changes over the same locations and time period, 1850–1940, but looks to different sources and a different methodology. Here I turn away from a sociocultural study of school curricula and popular cultural debates to analyzing book-length studies—biographies, autobiographies, and novels—produced by a range of English-educated subjects. These works corroborate assertions in part I on the sexual power of language, the deployment of sexual associations to rank hierarchies between languages, and the way the investment in sexual normativity restricted English within upper-caste groups. By shifting my method in the second part of the book, I seek to destabilize any easy narrative of English and to reveal the complex way that English emerged amid a host of related sexual, sartorial, and affective formations. Part II thus elicits the “subject effect” or the networks between knowledge and subject formation, between English, liberal individuation, and caste, and between culture, consumption, and sexual desire.¹⁷

The chapters in part II reveal how caste strictures dovetailed with the seemingly willing turn to conjugality, how the engineering of sexual desire by the English-education project rendered caste power into something transparent, even secular. “Secularization” is widely characterized by the delinking of the religious from the political, although I use the term to indicate that upper-caste status was being delinked from religious ritual. Hence, in its alliance with English, caste was itself secularized, a process that served to normalize—even universalize—majoritarian power.¹⁸

Chapter 5 specifically illuminates how the virtuous woman appears to willingly tether English to the requirements of Hindu upper-caste culture. In chapter 6, I elucidate the careful, albeit ambivalent, engineering of desire within the marital bond so as to limit English to the new secular, upper-caste couple. Chapter 7 focuses on the tightening relationship between English and liberal cosmopolitanism at the turn of the century and the ways in which the secular subject operated in transnational registers. The final chapter tracks one woman's nationwide and multinational search for English. Although the quest ends with her self-declared failure to learn the language, the story corroborates the triumph of caste-specific gender requirements over English, and with that explicates how gender limits the disciplinary power of English.

Colonial Policy, Postcolonial Critique: “Mental Miscegenation” of the “Bastard Child”

Perhaps the most widely cited lines in the historiography of British India are those of Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay in his 1835 “Minute on Education,” in which he made an impassioned plea to William Bentinck, governor general of India, for the anglicization of colonial education policy in India.¹⁹ That British policy produced new, uneven, and restricted social hierarchies is no surprise. The study of English was enshrined as the central component in this policy, geared to generate desire for colonial culture and new intermediary class formations. Macaulay famously argued:

I feel with them that it is impossible for us, with our limited means, to attempt to educate the body of the people. 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 tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population.²⁰

Macaulay has been interpreted for his invocation of racial difference, for using English to enshrine cultural distinctions between East and West, and thus for producing new social hierarchies.²¹ Undeniably powerful, his words signaled a whole new way of administering India through the no-

tion of cultural difference.²² He was not operating in a vacuum. Possibly building on earlier, regionally oriented formulations, such as governor of the Bombay Presidency Lord Elphinstone's own "Minute on Education," Macaulay's words were reflected among contemporaries such as T. E. Trevelyan and, later, Arthur Mayhew,²³ all of whom propagated a particular brand of Whiggish liberalism and supported the need to craft new social hierarchies through the English education of select natives.²⁴ Macaulay's words had immediate effect; they served to usher in the three Presidency Universities in Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras, modeled on the constitution and curriculum of the University of London. Despite their origin in colonial policies, these universities were largely funded by native agencies.²⁵ The agreement between upwardly mobile natives and colonial education policymakers was cemented early on: Bombay University was significantly financed by natives participating in the new transnational economies of cotton and opium, specifically through the largesse of Premchund Roychund and Sir Cowasjee Jehangir.²⁶

Historians have thoroughly documented the prominence of native elites—both vernacularists as well as Anglicists—in the overlapping histories of Western knowledge and English-language studies.²⁷ We are well aware of the role of the colonial state in sponsoring boys' education, of the English education schools set up to train school boys to take on petty clerical tasks in the administrative bureaucracy, and of the history of the Presidency Universities.²⁸ And we know how the native male interest in education and social reform elevated conjugality as a mark of social progress.²⁹ Bombay University recorded its first bachelor of arts graduates in 1858.³⁰ The first generation of English-educated men did indeed, as I elaborate, seize upon the pedagogic inclination of the civilizing mission. But by doing so, they performed a specific twist. They turned the demands of the social contract with colonial power toward the management of sexual difference, responding to allegations that they were inherently different from the West by citing "woman" as the next constituency in need of cultural pedagogy and then using their acquisition of English to manage new, internal hierarchies. This was how they domesticated English.

Posed as evidence of the native ability to close the civilizational gap between Europe and India, the move by native elites to educate their women in English repeated earlier histories whereby women of elite households were trained to become literate in the language of power.³¹ But for those opposed to women's education, this nineteenth-century development was

a hideous aberration in the logic of “native” social relations. Feminist historians have delineated the tremendous unrest spawned by the centering of women in the nineteenth-century contest between individual rights and native social relations, between ideas of Western and indigenous culture, and between social reform and caste patriarchy.³² But a cultural history of English education reveals that the differences, in this case, were spurious. Instead, the debate on anglicization served the collected interests of a new class of upper-caste men, who through institutions such as The New English School for Boys (discussed in chapter 3) lamented the decline of the “golden” age of Hindu civilization in the face of “the Muslim invasion.” The “danger” of effeminacy and nonconjugal female sexuality was invoked to secure upper-caste authority over English. Ultimately, the battle over native English education saw the ready amalgamation of liberalism with Hindu and upper-caste strictures and the growing acceptance that native men must mediate the transfer of English to Indian society. Sexuality was interjected into the history of English, a process that permitted some natives to seal their national, Indian status.

Surprisingly, extant scholarship has overlooked the symbolic role of gender in fueling the native history of English.³³ In general, social histories of English education and colonial education policy in India continue to be narrated through the historicist or the gender-free mode. Either muting the tendentious battle over gender and sexuality while relating an anodyne history of women’s education, or providing gender-neutral accounts of English, the majority of historical work separates gender from the history of English. In all cases, woman and English appear as natural, self-evident categories. For instance, by studying collaboration between colonial and indigenous elites, scholars of the Cambridge School have noted that the English language was the most tangible marker of negotiation between British and Indian social groups.³⁴ There is, indeed, much to be learned from this body of scholarship, primarily its resolute interest in the local mechanics of caste and sociopolitical power. But the neglect of gender instigates other problems: the privileging of a rather archaic notion of the political and the elite, the separation of caste from sexual power, and the determination that English was fully formed prior to its introduction to India.

A significant shift in the scholarly analysis of English came in 1989 in Gauri Viswanathan’s *Masks of Conquest*.³⁵ Viswanathan diverted the history of English studies away from social history accounts of collaboration

between Indian and colonial elites. Specifically, she probed the relationship between power and knowledge and revealed the importance of literature in magnifying the cultural power of colonial English: “English literature appeared as a subject in the curriculum of the colonies long before it was institutionalized in the home country.”³⁶ This elevation of English “literature” in British India was central to the “imperial mission of educating and civilizing colonial subjects . . . [which] in the long run strengthen[ed] western cultural hegemony.”³⁷ Furthermore, “humanistic functions” were integral to English literary studies; these could be “taught” to colonial people while appearing to guide their progress toward civilization.³⁸ Viswanathan’s research itself stops at colonial education policies and administrative debates, but her contribution dramatically shifted the debate over English studies, inspiring a host of important postcolonial analyses of the long life of English literature, both in the curriculum as well as in everyday reading practices.³⁹ Just as important, her work invigorated the postcolonial assessment of liberal humanism.⁴⁰ Significantly diverting from the focus on the inner workings of colonial power, Kumkum Sangari provides a vivid picture of the re-narrativization of English literary texts in colonial India. With her signature focus on the primacy of gender, Sangari powerfully illuminates Indian efforts to translate and indigenize the English literary tradition, showing how native contests over community and identity recast English texts in an Indian context.⁴¹

But the history of literature is only one aspect in a complex story of change over time. Postcolonial scholars of English have largely been housed in English studies departments, which might explain why they privilege literature and literary productions in approaching English.⁴² But this perspective does not always destabilize the primacy of colonial power. Recently, dwelling on the work that English performs in the contemporary Indian landscape, Rashmi Sadana even suggests that “Indian English literature has outgrown the line of critique and politics that casts English as the language of colonization.”⁴³ For studies of the nineteenth century, however, the history of English continues to signal either literary study, public political negotiation, or the cultural conquest of the subcontinent. Colonial power is recentered often and predictably through the resolute deconstruction of Macaulay’s “Minute.” For my purposes, it is telling that the cultural conquest is itself most often characterized through psychosexual allusions. For instance, Benedict Anderson argues that Thomas Babington Macaulay intended “mental miscegenation” through his “Min-

ute on Education.”⁴⁴ Gauri Viswanathan says that the English literary text worked as a “surrogate Englishman.”⁴⁵ And Homi Bhabha, who recalls Macaulay for spawning the “mimic men” of the Indo-British encounter, traces the “line of descent of the mimic man . . . through [the colonial educational directives of Charles Grant and T. B. Macaulay] to the works of Kipling, Forster, Orwell, Naipaul” in order to argue that the mimic man “is the effect of a flawed colonial mimesis, in which to be anglicized is emphatically not to be English.”⁴⁶ In glossing over the *reproduction* of the mimic man, Bhabha suggests (even as he never explores) the politics of sexuality in controlling class and cultural change. Most recently, Sanjay Seth claims to speak as “one of Macaulay’s misbegotten offspring” so as to celebrate the “pleasing irony in the thought that Macaulay’s bastard children will have contributed to the critical appropriation of a knowledge that was once imposed on them.”⁴⁷

Macaulay’s “Minute” has received a fresh lease on life through the agenda of colonial discourse studies; for some, it indicates an entire mode of thinking about English literature, about liberalism, and about civilization. But my purpose is to look further, to probe more deeply within the spaces where English took root, to explain what happened to English in Indian society. Contrary to the picture of the nineteenth century disseminated by postcolonial studies, I argue that the social categories of Indian society shaped the history of English. Moreover, smooth references to sex that fuel the rhetorical style of some scholarship actually provide vital clues on the lingering, and largely unexplored, relationship between sexual power and the Indian history of English.

Language, Gender, and Knowledge in Western India

By directing their studies on specific, regional locations, historians have foregrounded an appreciation for historically contingent social categories. For western India, Veena Naregal has highlighted the “indigenous” class and caste interests nurtured by the extension of colonial education in western India.⁴⁸ Resisting a primary focus on colonial education policies, Naregal turns instead to a social history of print culture and the emergence of native Marathi-English bilingualism. By looking beyond English literature, Naregal demonstrates instead the class-caste relationship between English and Marathi linguistic practice, the rise of the “new colonial” Brahmans and Parsis of western India, and the determination among the

first generation of Western-educated “natives” to claim a dedicated intermediary position ultimately supportive of colonial knowledge.⁴⁹ Significantly, Naregal argues that the new knowledge economy of western India was characterized by “laicization,” or the necessary restriction of knowledge at the very moment of its dissemination. As she demonstrates, the rise of upper-class Parsi and Brahman power came at the expense of widening the base for modern education—a development immediately yoked to the ability of newly anglicized, bilingual social groups to claim the right to speak for indigenous interests.

The caste-stratified relationship between knowledge and power in western India reinforced the dominance of literate Marathi-speaking Brahmans in the colonial nineteenth century.⁵⁰ The standard British dismissal that native society possessed no literature, and hence no history, immediately provided new routes for the expression of caste power. An important example is the nineteenth-century nationalist historian’s desire to establish the antiquity and continuity of the Marathi language.⁵¹ This tradition identified all written productions from the precolonial period as “Marathi” and forged the consensus that Marathi and its literary-religious texts formed a recognizable corpus by the thirteenth century.⁵² But Muzaffar Alam’s important research has firmly established that throughout the medieval and Mughal periods, scholarly and secular-bureaucratic work was conducted and codified in Persian.⁵³ Alam’s assertion is corroborated by Stewart Gordon, who demonstrates that, in the case of western India, court records of the Bahmani kingdom were preserved in Persian by upper-class Hindus who held scribal positions.⁵⁴ Marathi rose to prominence only with the institutionalization of the Peshwa court in Poona in the second half of the eighteenth century.⁵⁵

Such a dynamic relationship between linguistic form and political power, between Marathi, Sanskrit, and Persian, underwent a further twist in the early nineteenth century.⁵⁶ Once again, it came about at the expense of Persian. New patronage of Sanskrit was encouraged during the governorship of Mountstuart Elphinstone, specifically through the inauguration of the Poona Sanskrit College (later Deccan College) in 1821.⁵⁷ The new institution aimed to nurture Sanskrit texts and produce linguistic knowledge for the benefit of the East India Company. It also served to further accelerate the literary dominance of Marathi-speaking, new colonial Brahmans. The Peshwa court had never initiated such an exclusive policy toward Sanskrit. Elphinstone’s efforts, therefore, worked to mar-

ginalize Persian, not Marathi; they rewarded a group of upper-caste men for referencing Sanskritic antiquity and the claim to represent the masses. The nineteenth-century emergence of Marathi as the iconic regional language of the Bombay-Poona area was borne on the wings of Sanskritization, Brahmanism, Hindu majoritarianism, and, as Naregal has demonstrated, English. This was a multilingual upper-caste formation, actively supported by the colonial state's educational policies.

What, then, are we to make of the native conviction that the British conquest of the Deccan deliberately initiated the marginalization of Marathi? There is no question that high-ranking colonial officials regularly explored the possibility of introducing English as the *lingua franca* for the entire country, going much further than Macaulay's desire to selectively anglicize an elite group of native men. The tenure of Sir Erskine Perry, president of the Bombay Board of Education from 1848 to 1852, was undoubtedly marked by a deliberate policy of anglicization.⁵⁸ But Perry argued that English, as a classical language, be made to replace Persian and not Marathi.⁵⁹ Despite that, a new group of Marathi nationalists reinterpreted colonial linguistic desires as a mounting threat to Marathi culture. Richard Cashman has identified the Chitpavan Brahman sub-caste as the leaders of this new strategy of beleaguered nationalism.⁶⁰ Prominent Marathi nationalists deliberately opposed any possibility of social change for members of other communities and famously agitated against the reservation of free scholarships in the Deccan and Fergusson Colleges for Muslims and "backward" Hindu castes. It is no coincidence that one of the leaders of this group, Vishnushastri Chiplunkar (discussed in chapter 3), portrayed Marathi as a vernacular under threat from English and closer to so-called real native political desires. Chiplunkar simultaneously quashed the anti-caste critique of Jotiba Phule when the latter drew attention to the rise of Brahmanic control over language and power.⁶¹

The role of education in consolidating the power of the Brahman caste cannot be separated from the systematic efforts made by some upper-caste men to negate attempts made by members of the Muslim community and the lower castes to gain access to the same facilities. In its partnership with the upper class of the commercially successful Parsis, this very same new colonial intelligentsia argued that the educational activities of the colonial state were surreptitiously anglicizing and eroding the vernacular. This was despite the fact that Marathi was undoubtedly ascendant. The Hindu nationalist and alarmist machinations of Chiplunkar's

Chitpavan-caste colleague, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, are well known in terms of his invention of the Ganapati festival, invocation of a beleaguered Marathi culture, and mobilization against Muharram.⁶² But Tilak's writings were, as I discuss in chapter 3, also at the helm of the new debates that forged fresh associations between normative sexuality, English, and caste.

I explore this history of language to demonstrate how the discourse of linguistic decline was relentlessly gendered. New sexual standards bolstered assertions that the Marathi language was under threat. The logic of sexual difference popularized the cause of the "mother" tongue, even as this very logic served to further exacerbate caste-based social hierarchies and the Brahmanization of Indian culture. The perception that the spread of English devalued the vernacular continues in the present day; but in reality, as I stress, Marathi was never replaced by English, either socially or materially. Instead, by the 1880s, as evident from the writings of R. G. Bhandarkar and B. G. Tilak, the hegemonic class of elite, anglicized Brahmins had completely embraced Marathi, a relationship that included the elevation of Sanskrit and English.⁶³

Just as Macaulay's posturing cannot stand in for the fraught, contradictory, and miserly realities of colonial education policies, nor should our reading of the projections of colonial policy be allowed to erase the historically produced contingencies of language, knowledge, caste, and sexual power. In 1901 Marathi was officially recognized as an academic subject for the entrance examination to the Bombay University. In 1909 the language was made compulsory for the statewide matriculation examination. Both developments were lauded by the writings of the native elite in English- and Marathi-language publications. But potent expressions regarding the humiliation of the Marathi language by the encroaching power of English continued and even accelerated. For instance, writing on the occasion of the public examination of matriculated school boys, Tilak's English-language paper, *The Mahratta*, cautioned against the "absurdity and tyranny" of the present educational system, deploring "the unnatural phenomenon of a student being deplorably ignorant of his Mother Tongue and its Literature. . . . The root cause of all these phenomena is what we may call the tyranny of the Dominant Language—English—over the vernaculars of the subject races." The article first blamed "the British administrators [who] invested their own language with undue and unnecessary importance and predominance in all the Government Departments and Secondary Schools," and then went on to make the following claim: "The

result of this policy has been so disastrous that a boy of eight years, before he is scarcely well acquainted with his mother tongue is weaned away from it, and is not only forced to learn a foreign language, but is also soon compelled to learn all other subjects through that foreign language as if it were his mother tongue.”⁶⁴

English, as is so evident in this editorial, was a sign that gained traction through culturally specific discourses of sex. It was separated and differentiated from Marathi through an investment in the inevitability of maternal and reproductive functions. Heteronormative expectations rendered both languages as volatile signifiers, competing for cultural space. Polarities between the indigenous and foreign, as well as the vernacular and English, were bolstered through the use of gendered imagery: English encroaching on the mother language. Anxieties about the decay and decline of this feminized culture spurred the call to protect national culture. Sexual-citational grafting, the association of sexual signs with languages, brought Marathi into the center of political and cultural history. Despite the growing recognition of Marathi in educational institutions and through printed forms such as newspapers and magazines, upper-caste discourse maintained that English was supplanting her rightful position.⁶⁵ The sexualization of language took place through an evocative discourse of decline and effacement, at the very moment that standardized Marathi (in its Devanagari script) rose above the history of Persian and other regional dialects.

Sexual Normativity and Caste Power

Warning against the decline of Marathi was a potent rhetorical strategy, with wide-ranging social consequences. But the subject most captured by this discourse of decline and degeneration was that of woman. Elevating or reforming the condition of women brought together otherwise competing social groups and provided the field for a new kind of class and caste homosociality.⁶⁶ Nineteenth-century records certainly corroborate that Chitpavan Brahmans and commercially successful Parsis concurred on the value of using English to redirect “native” social relations once English was brought to native females. But if we concede that gender is being produced at the moment of its invocation, then a more complex picture emerges. Ideas of sexual difference were directed upon English. As chapter 2 describes, successive school reports testified glowingly on the amal-

gamation of English with native culture, an amalgamation performed by native women at parades and recitations held at annual functions for the interested gaze of colonial and native audiences. Gender performativities enabled some social groups to claim exclusive control over English. The battle over women's education, over anglicization and indigeneity, thus disguised a wider development, the ability of upper-caste patriarchy to restrict the dissemination of knowledge through the performance of normative sexuality.

Feminist scholars have illuminated the socially conservative role played by the concept of woman in the battles over social power throughout the nineteenth century.⁶⁷ Fixing, or reforming, the relationship between woman and sexuality actually served to consolidate anticolonial nationalism with caste interests.⁶⁸ Of course, the expectation of female obedience, chastity, conjugality, and the ritualizing of sexual difference did not emerge purely through the colonial encounter; rather, the ritualization of restrictions over female sexuality had long historical roots in India. In western India, the power of normative sexuality in thwarting change was firmly entrenched in the caste-based logic of the area. Before colonial rule, upper-caste power had systematically articulated its exclusivity through the performance of female chastity. For those castes seeking state sanction for upward mobility, the demonstration of inviolable sexual strictures of monogamy and chastity was essential.⁶⁹ This compounded over time and was exacerbated by the selective union with Victorian sexual mores. Susan Bayly identifies the nineteenth century as the period in which marriage became "the paramount social act [whereby] people whose so-called caste life styles permit divorce and the remarriage of widows have been seen as distinct from the more refined populations who regard these practices as low and uncivilized. . . . For people claiming exalted caste status . . . the greatest merit accru[es] to those who display the most elaborate and restrictive kinship rules."⁷⁰

By the nineteenth century, marriage was essential to caste exclusivity and hence caste status. Uma Chakravarti has illustrated how the strictures against nonconjugal female sexuality multiplied with the caste ambitions of a social group.⁷¹ The rituals of social mobility necessarily proliferated the discourses of sex. Enforced, punitive widowhood was the most visible means of claiming and maintaining upper-caste status. Simultaneously, those women uncontainable by marriage were immediately marked as outside of caste and hence society itself.⁷² Rosalind O'Hanlon has corrobo-