

The Uneven Aesthetics of I. Allan Sealy's *The Trotter-Nama*: Secularization, Nationalism, and the Marginalization of the Anglo-Indian Community

Roger McNamara
Texas Tech University

I. Allan Sealy's debut novel *The Trotter-Nama: A Chronicle* garnered critical acclaim when it was published in 1988. It won the Commonwealth Writers First Book Prize (1989), and confirmed a growing confidence since the publication of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) that the Indian novel in English was a viable vehicle to capture the complex and diverse cultures in India. *The Trotter-Nama* tells the story of the Anglo-Indian community—an inter-racial group formed through sexual relationships between British men and Indian women—from its inception in the seventeenth century, through the colonial period, to its current status as a marginalized group of people in independent India. Since the publication of *The Trotter-Nama*, Sealy has consolidated his position as an established writer by producing four other novels—*Hero: A Fable* (1990), *The Everest Hotel: A Calendar* (1998) (which was short-listed for the Booker Prize), *The Brainfever Bird* (2003), and *Red* (2006)—and a travelogue *From Yukan to Yucatan: A Western Journey* (1994).

While these texts demonstrate Sealy's versatility as a writer who is comfortable shifting between realism and postmodernism, it is *The Trotter-Nama* that has received the most critical attention precisely because it echoes the thematic and aesthetic sensibilities of *Midnight's Children*. Like Rushdie's text, *The Trotter-Nama* explores colonial and national history from the perspective of a minority community. Furthermore, Sealy's text is also a mock epic and deploys postmodern features: an unreliable narrator, the resistance to a linear narrative through asides about fictional and real artifacts associated with India and the Anglo-Indians, and the juxtaposition of historical documents and fictionalized history, alongside parodies of historical, mythological, and literary figures.

Since *The Trotter-Nama* is viewed as following *Midnight's Children*'s lead, most of the criticism on the novel emphasizes its critique of colonialism and Indian nationalism. In fact, the title of Judith Plotz's essay, "Rushdie's Pickle and the New Indian Historical Novel: Sealy, Singh, Tharoor, and the National Metaphor," captures my point nicely. Yet, the novel's subject—the Anglo-Indian community and its history—simply becomes the means through which to launch the critique of

colonialism and nationalism. Only a couple of critics such as Geetha Ganpathy-Dore and Loretta M. Mijares actually examine in detail the story of the Anglo-Indians that is the focal point of the novel.¹ Thus, it is ironic that commentary on the text that criticizes nationalism for marginalizing Anglo-Indians unintentionally re-inscribes this marginalization by paying scant attention to Sealy's engagement with Anglo-Indian history.

This approach to *The Trotter-Nama* that prioritizes its critique of nationalism (and colonialism) is symptomatic of a larger trend in postcolonial criticism on Indian minority writing. In the last decade four critics have written important book length studies that examine writers belonging to ethnic and religious minority communities. Priya Kumar's and Aamir Mufti's texts pay attention to Muslim artists and writers and demonstrate the limits of secularism (as a political doctrine) to protect minorities. By contrast, Manav Ratti and Neelam Srivastava examine writers belonging to diverse minorities (including Anglo-Indians, Muslims, Parsis, and Sikhs).² Though Ratti and Srivastava agree that secularism has failed to protect minority groups, they remind us that the alternatives, specifically religious nationalism and communalism, are far more dangerous. Instead, they attempt to find conceptions of secularism that are not state oriented and that are flexible. All these critics make an invaluable contribution to minority writing by foregrounding its commentary on nationalism: how texts question and subvert nationalism, whether secularism is a viable means to protect minority rights, and what alternatives—non-secular and secular—can be imagined to challenge nationalism.

But this begs the question: is minority literature and, by extension, minority identity pre-occupied with nationalism? Also, are we to assume that minority identity, politics, or culture is exclusively determined by nationalism? To be fair to the critics previously mentioned, some of the texts they examine primarily critique nationalism and secularism. But when nationalism becomes the primary lens through which minority literature is viewed, I would argue that we lose sight of the larger historical context in which minority identity is created. We need to consider how minority groups actively engage colonialism, the relationships between minority groups (that do not include the majority), and the conscious choices that minority communities have made in constructing their identity during colonial rule and after independence. For example, to understand the debates regarding the crisis of Parsi identity today (whether to maintain racial purity or recognize inter-community marriages), we need to consider how the Parsi community revised and rationalized Zoroastrianism, constructed the identity of the Parsi gentleman, and redistributed power from the priestly hierarchy to the laity. However, this Parsi identity began to evolve prior to the rise of Indian nationalism. It was a response to colonial policies and internal pressures within the community.³ But when critics such as Catherine Pessoa-Miquel and Martin Genetsch examine Rohinton Mistry's *Family Matters* (2004),

they focus on the novel's critique of Hindu nationalism (and the Parsi fundamentalism that parallels it) but fail to recognize Mistry's sophisticated commentary about the construction of Parsi identity in the colonial period (mentioned above) and the way it is circumvented.⁴

A similar point can be made about much of the criticism on *The Trotter-Nama*. Most of the critics focus on the novel's critique of nationalism and colonialism but fail to recognize Sealy's nuanced commentary on Anglo-Indian identity. Through a careful reading of *The Trotter-Nama*, I argue that the current marginalized status of the Anglo-Indian community in the text is not simply a result of nationalism but a consequence of choices that the Community made in constructing its own identity. I prove this assertion by an analysis of *The Trotter-Nama*'s content (its critical evaluation of Anglo-Indian history), and "uneven" aesthetics. First, I demonstrate that Sealy explores the transformation of Anglo-Indian identity—from one that was fluid and amorphous to one that is fixed and essentialized. I describe this as the "secularization" of the Anglo-Indian community, and I show how Sealy reveals that this process is largely responsible for the Community's marginalization. This Anglo-Indian identity is consolidated prior to the rise of Indian nationalism; furthermore, it is also hostile to and defines itself against the latter. Second, I demonstrate that as Sealy explores the Community's transformation from a pre-secularized to secularized identity, he changes the novel's aesthetic by restricting the use of postmodern elements and introducing aspects of historical fiction. To depict a fluid and amorphous Anglo-Indian identity prior to its secularization, Sealy uses a variety of postmodernist strategies—parody, the juxtaposition of historical texts and fictional representations, and digressions that explore real and fictional Indian and Anglo-Indian artifacts. The first half of the text is replete with examples of these postmodern strategies; consequentially, the narrative is barely linear. However, as the community becomes secularized, Sealy changes the aesthetics. The parodic elements are minimized, there are fewer digressions, the number of characters who are parodied decreases, and historical events move rapidly in the text. Though the text does not do away completely with postmodern parody, it introduces aspects of historical fiction, specifically the "typical" character and historical crisis, to depict the Anglo-Indian community in contemporary India.

Secularization and the Creation of Identities

In order to discuss why secularization is responsible for the tension in the aesthetics of *The Trotter-Nama*, I need to briefly explain the difference between secularism and secularization, and then expound more carefully on secularization's impact in the colonial context. Secularism refers to a political doctrine that either separates religion from the state (in the Western context) or celebrates and protects the rights of religious and

ethnic communities (in the Indian context). The goal of secularism in either case is to guarantee the rights of citizens and minority groups to pursue their personal and community interests in civil society and in the private sphere. Furthermore, secularism can also refer to a cultural ideology perpetuated by the state or some other entity. In India, “secular nationalism” (associated with Jawaharlal Nehru, India’s first prime minister) was the dominant cultural ideology until the 1980s. According to Aditya Nigam, secular nationalism promoted the idea of “unity-in-diversity” (to respect the religious, ethnic, and linguistic differences within India) and interpreted India’s pre-colonial past as the harmonious incorporation of different cultures (68-69).⁵

Secularization, by contrast, is not a political doctrine or a cultural ideology. Instead, secularization refers to a process integral to modernity that restructured, or to be more precise, created, the conditions that made secularism as a political doctrine and a cultural ideology possible. In fact, according to critics like David Scott and Charles Taylor, secularization is responsible for our contemporary understanding of religion and religious identities. I briefly sketch this phenomenon in Europe and South Asia so that we can gain a better grasp of how it restructured Indian society. In *A Secular Age*, Taylor argues that secularization, associated with modernity, is the process responsible for creating our contemporary understanding of “religion.” In pre-modern Europe, the word “faith” was used to describe what today we associate with religion. However, there are fundamental differences between the two. Faith informed not only the church and the individual’s morality but shaped all spheres of life, including government, commerce, and culture. During the Enlightenment, there was an attempt to separate “worldly” pursuits (government, commerce, and culture) from the church and individual belief. This separation could only be achieved if faith was redefined. It needed to be codified into a set of beliefs and practices that could be freely performed in the newly created private sphere. These newly codified practices and beliefs were defined as “religion.” Thus, governments were no longer allowed to legislate on these newly codified practices, just as these practices could not be imposed upon individuals in the public sphere (25-211).

Secularization was introduced to South Asia during British colonization. Apart from reformulating “religions,” it also helped develop newly fashioned “ethnic” and “religious” communities that came into conflict with each other. In *Refashioning Futures*, David Scott points out that early-nineteenth-century Christian missionaries in Sri Lanka were surprised when Buddhist monks, instead of feeling threatened by Christianity, helped the missionaries preach it. According to Scott, while there were Buddhist practices and beliefs in Sri Lanka, there was no religion called “Buddhism” to defend and contrast with (a secularized) Christianity. However, as Christian missionaries continued to denigrate Buddhist beliefs and began converting the Sinhalese population, the monks resisted. But they could only challenge the missionaries by creating a religion called Buddhism (referred to as “Protestant Buddhism”) that

was ideologically similar to Christianity. They selected certain practices and beliefs, codified these, and then pitted them against Christianity. While this newly developed Buddhism soon demonstrated its “superiority” over Christianity, it also helped facilitate the Sinhala-Buddhist national movement against the British. However, this Sinhala-Buddhist national consciousness also turned hostile to the other communities on the island—specifically the Tamil-Hindus and the Muslims. Thus, in the colonial context, secularization not only restructured religions but also was responsible for shaping ethnic and religious identities that considered each other to be rivals (58-70).

In her commentary on secularization in India, Srivastava glosses Gauri Viswanathan’s and Partha Chatterjee’s work to contrast the secularization of the British state and that of India (in the early phase of the Indian nationalist movement) during the late nineteenth century. She argues that this was a consequence of Indian nationalism’s need to differentiate itself from the West. If Britain promoted a national culture by separating its national identity (Englishness) from the dominant religion (Anglicanism), then Indian nationalism needed to assert its difference by identifying Hinduism and the Hindu community with the nation. However, to construct a modern Indian identity, Hinduism had to be partially secularized. This involved the “rationalization of tradition ... [in order to] to construct a Hindu identity for the Hindus as distinct from the identity of the colonizer, and which meant a self-consciousness of Hindu traditions, beliefs, and customs.” In addition, nationalists “selectively appropriate[ed] and refurbish[ed] certain traditions and historical events, while discarding others as inappropriate or ‘backward’ and constraining.” The objective of these was to bolster an identity that was both modern and intrinsically Hindu (25-27).

Some minority communities in India also experienced a similar process of secularization. In *The Good Parsi*, Luhrmann argues that the Parsis in the nineteenth century constructed an “authentic” Zoroastrianism by rationalizing and codifying selective practices and denying others that were considered backward or influenced by Hinduism (96, 99-109). But whereas the nationalists in Sri Lanka and India secularized Buddhism and Hinduism respectively to challenge colonial rule, the Parsis secularized Zoroastrianism to align themselves with the Colonial order. For the purposes of my argument, the secularization of Zoroastrianism is significant because it was, as Luhrmann points out, ultimately a means to promote certain practices that would foreground the cultural similarities between the British and the Parsis—especially in conduct, morality, and masculinity (117-122). While this certainly involved the Anglicization of the community, there are two important distinctions to make. First, according to Luhrmann, Parsis considered Zoroastrianism to be more rational than Christianity. Thus, British missionaries failed to convert Parsis to Christianity (114-115). Second, Anglicization was only one aspect of a broader reinvention of the Parsi community’s cultural identity.

While much work has been done on the Parsis in this regard, not much work has been done on the secularization of the Anglo-Indian community.⁶ The only major account of the Community from its inception under British colonial rule to the post-independence period is a hierography entitled *Britain's Betrayal in India*, written by Frank Anthony. Anthony, perhaps the most important leader of the Anglo-Indian community in the twentieth century, gestures to the Community's transformation. He reveals that till the early nineteenth century, Anglo-Indian identity and culture was diverse, in terms of language, dress, and traditions. However, after the Revolt of 1857, the Anglo-Indian community became "homogenous"—it discarded its cultural diversity and self-identified as European. English became its mother tongue, and members wore European clothes and adopted European cultural habits (8, 353). And it is in this context that one must read *The Trotter-Nama*. The parallels between Sealy's and Anthony's text are more than coincidental, as Sealy borrows heavily from Anthony.⁷ However, whereas Anthony was convinced that the Anglo-Indians had an illustrious future in independent India, Sealy believes the opposite.

While it is true that the major shift in Anglo-Indian identity did not involve religion (though Christianity did become the default religion from the 1850s onwards), I would argue that the Community went through the process of secularization. Though secularization is associated with the construction of religion and religious identity, I want to consider a more expansive definition of secularization, one that acknowledges its core premise—the rationalization and codification of practices to transform a community's identity—but applies it to communities defined by ethnicity. I make this assertion on the grounds that non-religious communities, like religious communities (Parsis), experienced the same "process" (rationalization and codification) and the same "effects" (creation of a homogeneous identity). If communities—both religious and non-religious—go through the same process and experience the same effects, I would argue that secularization captures this reformulation of identity most effectively.

Secularization and Marginalization of the Anglo-Indian Community

To explore the relationship between *The Trotter-Nama*'s uneven aesthetics and the secularization of the Anglo-Indian community, I need to show how the novel depicts this gradual secularization. Therefore, I focus on three instances that reveal the transformation of Anglo-Indians in terms of their political and cultural identity. The first episode revolves around the Community's petition to the British Parliament in 1830 for a systematic set of laws. Anglo-Indians created this petition because in some instances they were considered European subjects and in others they were beholden

to laws created for “native races.” According to the Petition, the Community:

[is] descended, *in most instances*, on the father’s side, from *European* subjects of the Crown of Great Britain, and on the mother’s side, from the *natives of India*; and that in other instances they are the children of intermarriages between the offspring of such connexions; but that although they are closely aligned to the *European* and *Native* races, they are excluded from almost all those advantages which each respectively enjoys. (*The Trotter-Nama* 287-288, emphasis mine)

Sealy has inserted the Petition verbatim, after which he recreates the meeting where the Anglo-Indians debated whether they should remain politically and economically dependent upon the British Empire (289-290).

However, this petition that the Anglo-Indians submitted to the British Parliament and that Sealy includes in the *Trotter-Nama* demonstrates that the Community’s identity is amorphous. First, the definition of Anglo-Indian is unclear. While the Petition claims that the Community has descended patrilineally from Europeans and matrilineally from the natives of India, the phrase “in most instances” allows for exceptions. These exceptions could refer to Europeans who have settled down or been born in India. They could also refer to “natives” who have been adopted into the Community. Finally, they could mean non-European “non-natives” who have merged into the Community. (For instance, in the 1940s some Jews and Armenians whose ancestors had lived in India were incorporated into the Community.)⁸ At this historical moment, the Petition exposes the ambiguity of who can be considered an Anglo-Indian. Furthermore, in the Petition, the word “India” lacks political or cultural resonance—it is simply the name of a place that has been colonized by the British. The people living within India are called “natives of India” and not “Indian.” Therefore, the cultural and political connotations of “India” and “Indian” that would later be used to juxtapose British colonial rule and “Indian” nationalism and identity seem to be absent at this point in time.

While the Petition’s wording exposes the ambiguity of who can be considered an Anglo-Indian and the limited meaning of the word “Indian,” its primary concern is a demand for a systematic set of laws for a Community (irrespective of how amorphous it is) that was sometimes subject to laws for European subjects and at other times ruled by laws for other communities in India. For example, Anglo-Indians, like Europeans, were not allowed to own land. However, Anglo-Indians who lived outside cities, though they were Christians, were often judged according to Muslim criminal law (*The Trotter-Nama* 288). This demand for a codified set of laws that could be universally applied to Anglo-Indians reveals the Community’s attempt to secularize itself. In this process it attempts to extract itself from ties to other communities and shape a political identity.

In *The Trotter-Nama*, if in the 1830s Anglo-Indians demanded a homogenous political identity, by the 1860-70s the Community imposes uniform cultural practices onto its members. It Anglicizes itself, attempts

to suppress differences within, and contrasts this new identity to other communities. This is apparent in the tension between the fourth Trotter, Thomas Henry, and his cousin Alina. Thomas Henry “had never much to do with his cousin [Alina], and the gulf between the Assistant Collector [Thomas Henry] and the dairy-woman [Alina] was widened by this *going native*. Alina’s Hindustani had become fluent, too fluent” and she wore a sari, used mustard oil on her body, and put a bindi on her forehead (385, emphasis mine). By default, Thomas Henry is Anglicized; he has not gone “native.” It is implied that he wears European clothes and styles himself in the fashion of an English gentleman. However, note that the connotations of the word “native” have undergone a change between 1830 and the 1860s. In the 1830 Petition, the word “Native” is used to describe the indigenous inhabitants in India. In the 1860s and 1870s it becomes a derogatory reference to Indian cultural practices that Anglo-Indians consider inferior. Furthermore, Thomas Henry’s belief that Alina has “[gone] native” implies that Anglo-Indians are “essentially” Anglicized and to practice “Indian” habits is to betray the Community’s identity. This is ironic, given that Alina has not really changed; she has carried out these cultural habits since she was a child. In reality, it is the Community that has changed and “betrayed” its pre-secularized past. While the clash between Thomas Henry and Alina reveals that secularization is never absolute—there is always resistance to this codification of religious and cultural practices—the majority of Anglo-Indians were Anglicized by the late nineteenth century.

In *The Trotter-Nama*, Sealy chooses to depict the secularization of an Anglo-Indian culture and the Community’s growing politicization in conjunction with “Indian nationalism.” He represents this secularization through the conflict between Anglo-Indians and Indians over the Ilbert Bill controversy in 1883. While Indian magistrates could judge cases involving Europeans in the major cities in colonial India, they could not do so in the countryside. The Ilbert Bill originally would have given Indian judges this authority. However, under pressure from Europeans living in India the Bill was revised to allow a jury, half of whose members would be European, to control the outcome of a case. While this appeased the European population in India, it offended Indians who felt they were being discriminated against by the British (Metcalf and Metcalf 120). It was also during the 1880s that Indian nationalism was established. While various Indian communities had been demanding political representation since the 1850s, by the early 1880s political parties in India began articulating a “national” identity in opposition to colonial rule. Shortly after the Ilbert Bill controversy, which no doubt encouraged political unrest, the Indian National Congress was founded in 1885 and would spearhead the national movement.

In Sealy’s depiction of the Ilbert Bill controversy and this simultaneous rise of Indian nationalism, Anglo-Indians are politically and culturally sympathetic with the British as they foreground their European heritage, not their similarities with the “Natives of India.” This response is

most clearly embodied in Thomas Henry's daughter Victoria (the fifth Trotter and the Community's matriarch) who is offended that the Ilbert Bill would allow an Indian to judge Anglo-Indians. She states: "[i]t's not right for servants *and all* to go judging their masters. I wouldn't want an *Indian* to sit in judgment of me, and that's that" (397, emphasis added).

These two sentences need to be unpacked. While the 1830 Petition reveals that Anglo-Indians have some sympathy for the "Natives of India," for the Community was "closely aligned" to both Europeans and Natives, by 1883 Anglo-Indians have become hostile towards "Indians." More importantly, the parameters that mark identity have changed. While Anglo-Indians in 1830 recognize the amorphous nature of their identity (they are mostly but not completely the result of miscegenation), by 1883 Victoria and the Anglo-Indian community clearly identify with the British and consider themselves to be in opposition to a newly created "Indian" identity. Also, in the late nineteenth century to be Indian did not mean to simply live in a place called India but to have a political and cultural identity, one that was often contrasted to that of the British. Both these points reinforce my argument that by 1883 the Anglo-Indian community has been secularized. This is apparent in Victoria's easy confidence when she categorizes different peoples. By emphasizing the difference between "Indians" and "me," Victoria reflects a clearly developed, articulated Anglo-Indian identity, one that does not seem to suffer from the confusion over identity that Anglo-Indians had in the early nineteenth century. Furthermore, the debate over the Ilbert Bill reveals that there are now legal distinctions between Anglo-Indians (who could not be judged by an Indian magistrate in the countryside) and other peoples in India.

However, in *The Trotter-Nama*, the rise of Indian nationalism in the 1880s also marks the beginning of the cultural marginalization of the Anglo-Indians. It is at this moment in the text that Sealy chooses to foreground the Community's minoritization. The term "minoritization," according to Mufti, refers to the imposition of minority status by the nation on a particular community through language, culture, and identity (11). However, this in turn has a paradoxical effect, for it undermines nationalism's claim to a universal status. Homi Bhabha describes this phenomenon as "a minority discourse" that "acknowledges the status of national culture—and the people—as a contentious, performative space" (157). In the context of this paper, the minoritization of the Anglo-Indians creates a space for a minority discourse that denies the universal status of Indian nationalism. If we return to Victoria's words—"[i]t's not right for servants *and all* to be go judging their masters. I wouldn't want an Indian to sit in judgment of me, and that's that" (397, emphasis added)—notice that I have italicized the words "and all." A few pages earlier in the novel, Victoria uses another term: "men." She says: "I'm telling you, it's there *men*" (392, emphasis mine). These terms—"and all" and "men"—are used not literally but colloquially, and are commonly spoken by contemporary lower middle-class Anglo-Indians in parts of North India. Prior to this moment in the novel Anglo-Indian characters use Standard English, but

when Indian nationalism erupts in the public sphere, Anglo-Indians begin to speak this “corrupted” dialect. Far from being a coincidence, this dialect reveals that Anglo-Indians are culturally minoritized and undermines Indian nationalism’s attempt to attain hegemonic status. As the novel progresses from the growth of the national movement, through Partition and Independence, and to the five-year plans in independent India, the Anglo-Indian dialect is used more frequently and reflects the continuing economic and cultural decline of the Community and the limits of Indian nationalism’s claim to represent all people.

This degradation of the social status and language of the Anglo-Indian community is complete at the very end of the novel. Eugene, the novel’s narrator and the last of the Trotters, claims that he is the “New Promise” of the Community. However, Eugene is an unreliable narrator. He believes he has a glorious future because he claims to embody the spirit of the first Trotter, Justin. However, he embodies all the negative stereotypes of Anglo-Indians in modern India. He is physically deficient, for he is “short” and “fat”; he is immoral because he earns money by forging miniatures; and he is sexually degenerate—he is not masculine and is briefly involved in an incestuous affair with his aunt. At the novel’s conclusion, he becomes a tourist guide who hoodwinks susceptible visitors.

The Decline of Postmodern Parody in *The Trotter-Nama*

Critics have paid much attention to the postmodern features of Sealy’s text. While Ganapathy-Dore provides a good overview of how Sealy uses postmodernism to complicate Anglo-Indian representations of history, home, and identity, Glenn D’Cruz and Mijares provide a more detailed account. D’Cruz argues that Sealy affirms the Anglo-Indian community by foregrounding its history, its culture, and important figures but resists the temptation to provide an “authentic” picture. Thus, Sealy refuses to deny the negative stereotypes of Anglo-Indians as alcoholics, degenerate, and licentious because he recognizes that all identities (including positive ones) are discursively constructed. Rather, D’Cruz concludes in his evaluation of *The Trotter-Nama*, “minority groups need to consider how specific discursive practices order and effect the ways in which particular ‘stereotypes’ acquire their meanings” (118).⁹ Though D’Cruz’s examination of the postmodern strategies is astute, he is primarily concerned with an overview of *The Trotter-Nama*’s approach to Anglo-Indian identity. He does not pay attention to the relationship between Sealy’s depictions of Anglo-Indian identity within the broader narrative of the Community’s history in India. Mijares attempts to do just this. She points out that despite Sealy’s use of postmodern parody to challenge the negative representations of the Anglo-Indian community, the novel ends on a depressing note. This is because Sealy must ultimately work within

history and acknowledges the Community's cultural and economic marginalization in present-day India (18-19).

While Mijares's article recognizes that Sealy's aesthetic choices (postmodernist techniques) are limited by history (the marginalization of the Anglo-Indians), I argue that there is a more intricate relationship between the two. For instance, when the novel depicts the earlier years of the Trotter family it is the epitome of a postmodernist text: it is non-linear because it is punctured with descriptions of real and fictitious artifacts associated with the British Raj and the Community; Eugene, the narrator, is unreliable and constantly intrudes with asides; and there is a sense of postmodern "play," recording—and then undermining—the significant moments of Anglo-Indian history: its origins, its contribution as soldiers to the armies of the British and Indian rulers, its official marginalization by the East India Company, its Petition to the British Parliament, and the Revolt of 1857. However, after the Revolt of 1857, these postmodern features are reduced. The text turns more into a linear account of Anglo-Indian story as the narrator intrudes less frequently, there are fewer descriptions of artifacts, and there is lack of postmodern play when narrating important events (the rise of Nationalism, the two World Wars, independence, and the five-year plans).

This shift in the novel's aesthetics is most apparent in the change in the quality and quantity of postmodern parody, specifically with regard to the depiction of the characters. When describing the first two generations of the Anglo-Indian community—Justin (the first Trotter and the founder of the Anglo-Indian community) and his son Mik (the second Trotter)—the parody is well developed and nuanced. However, the parody becomes less inventive as the novel depicts the lives of Justin and Mik's descendants, the next six generations of Trotters: Charles, Thomas Henry, Victoria, Philip, Eustace, and Eugene. While some of these latter characters are parodies, Sealy injects aspects of "typical" (as opposed to parodic) characters associated with historical fiction. This is especially true with Montagu (Victoria's husband) and Eustace. I assert that Sealy reduces the postmodern parody and incorporates aspects of historical fiction to reveal the consequences of secularization on the Anglo-Indian community. However, to prove this assertion, I will need to show in some detail how Sealy creatively deploys and juxtaposes postmodern parody and historical fiction.

According to Linda Hutcheon, historiographic fiction challenges history and historical fiction's claim to provide an accurate representation of the past. She argues that narratives are discursively constructed and that historiographic metafiction uses postmodern parody to consciously reveal the constructed nature of its depiction of history. Thus, whereas historical fiction strives to portray historical figures "accurately" and introduces characters that are "typical" with the purpose of depicting the truth of the historical situation, postmodern parody does the opposite. It introduces atypical characters and problematizes the representation of historical

figures to reveal that its account of the past is not absolute truth, but only one interpretation (115-129).

In Sealy's text, historiographic metafiction serves two purposes. First, following Hutcheon's argument, it reveals the arbitrary construction of its representation of Anglo-Indian history, thus inviting the reader to recognize how official Anglo-Indian, colonial, and national histories suppress alternative narratives that would undermine their own ideologies. Second, and more interestingly, *The Trotter-Nama*'s strategic use of postmodern parody (deploying it to its maximum capacity in the first half and reducing it in the second half) with elements of historical fiction reveals the traumatic effects on characters and the Community when an Anglo-Indian identity that had once been fluid and flexible has become secularized.

As a critique of history and historical fiction, the two most important figures that embody postmodern parody in *The Trotter-Nama* are the first two Trotters—Justin and Mik. As atypical characters they represent various historical, literary, and mythological figures, with the objective of challenging a number of historical truths. Thus, Justin represents the Mughal emperors Babar (the founder of the Mughal dynasty in India) and Akbar (perhaps the most well-known and ecumenical Mughal emperor), and the French adventurer Claude Martin (who settled in India and whose legacy consists of the two Anglo-Indian schools founded on his property). The parody opens up the possibility that the historical truths associated with each figure are constructed and suggests that alternative narratives might be suppressed. For example, Justin is similar to Akbar, who embraced different religions and created his own religion (Din-i-Ilahi). However, Justin's newly created religion "Din Havai" ("Religion of the Winds") has only one follower, and immediately after this religion is described, Justin whips a servant for "impertinence" (162-163). This juxtaposition of religious tolerance with the founder's violence invites us to question or doubt a historical narrative that simply celebrates Akbar's humaneness.

However, it is with Mik, Justin's son and the second Trotter, that postmodern parody is developed most effectively. Mik embodies multiple identities: an Anglo-Indian general, an Indo-Briton literary character, a Hindu deity, and the subaltern. As an adult, Mik represents the famous Anglo-Indian general James Skinner, who successfully fought under Indian princes and the British. As a youth, Mik is a parody of Rudyard Kipling's "Kim." "Mik" is Kim spelled backwards and he travels with a lama throughout the country. Mik also simultaneously represents dominant Hinduism and subaltern classes. As a child, his skin turned blue because he played in the indigo baths where the subaltern peasants worked. But Mik also resembles the Hindu deity Krishna: both are blue-skinned and have amorous relationships with gypsy women.

Critics seem to focus primarily on Mik as a critique of colonial narratives, especially *Kim*. Rukmini Bhaya Nair argues that Mik as a parody of Kim becomes a commentary by a subaltern group (Anglo-

Indians) upon colonial rule. Sealy's text "simply will not allow *Kim* its blissful innocence; it rips up the colonizer's [text] as if it were the paper it is written on, interleaving Mik's story with 'other' historical records that reveal the Raj's shabby treatment of the Anglo-Indians" (180).¹⁰ Another critic, Ralph Crane, points out that Mik, as a parody of *Kim*, undermines the myth of British responsibility. While Kipling reinforces British self-esteem because *Kim* is taken care of by his deceased father's regiment, Sealy reveals that the British abandon their responsibility to Anglo-Indians. Mik destroys colonial buildings when the British employees, in embarrassment, refuse to accept that they could be his father (157-158).¹¹

Nair and Crane make important contributions that show us how Mik's parody of *Kim* becomes an insightful critique of colonial rule. However, in this criticism, Anglo-Indians are only represented as victims. They are not recognized as actors whose actions are also critiqued. As a parody of the Anglo-Indian general James Skinner, Mik's character exposes how contemporary Anglo-Indian narratives suppress alternative stories of the Community's heroism. Thus, Mik's accidental victories against the enemy troops undermine Skinner's martial prowess, inviting the reader to realize that Skinner's success might have also been the result of good fortune (266-274). Mik's resemblance to Krishna is a reminder of cultural affinities between pre-secularized Anglo-Indians and upper-caste Hindus. However, Mik's liaisons with gypsy women (unlike Krishna's) end with him being duped, thus undermining the slightest temptation to imagine that Anglo-Indians are essentially a virile and masculine people (198).¹² More significantly, the blue-skinned Mik reminds the reader of the close association between subaltern peasants and Anglo-Indians. Sealy draws parallels between the lives of Anglo-Indian boys in an orphanage (that Mik attends) and subalterns. The regimented daily life of both groups—from the food they eat to the work they do (169, 175)—reminds the reader that like subalterns, Anglo-Indians were cogs in a wheel that promoted colonial interests. While subalterns grew indigo, Anglo-Indians were trained to work in the lower echelons of government service. The irony is that while the subalterns finally rebelled (the indigo rebellion between the 1830s and 1850s), Anglo-Indians, as embodied in Mik, helped to suppress this rebellion (299-306).¹³

While I have explained how Sealy challenges historical accounts of India and the Anglo-Indians, to appreciate Sealy's originality in using postmodernism, I need to show how he uses it in conjunction with historical fiction. It is important to notice that Sealy reduces the quality and the quantity of this parody when *The Trotter-Nama* begins to describe Justin and Mik's descendants. The more recent Trotters either embody one historical figure or none at all. Thus, Mik's son, Charles, represents the Anglo-Indian artist Charles Pote; Mik's grandson, Thomas Henry, is a parody of Anglo-Indians who were loyal to the British during the Revolt of 1857; and Mik's great-granddaughter Victoria is a parody of Queen Victoria. But after Victoria, the Trotters—Peter, Eustace, and Eugene—do not parody any historical or mythological characters. Other minor

characters in the novel do resemble prominent twentieth-century Anglo-Indians (Sir Henry Gidney, Cedric Dover, and Frank Anthony) but these are treated perfunctorily.

As Sealy reduces the postmodern parody, he introduces elements of historical fiction, specifically “typical characters” and an “authentic” representation of history. In *The Historical Novel* (1962), Georg Lukacs points out that historical fiction focuses on moments of national crises that have been crucial for the formation of the nation’s identity. These crises are a result of two factions (classes, for Lukacs) coming into conflict and are embodied in the central character, who typifies this crisis: “It is [the central figure’s] task to bring the extremes whose struggle fills the novel, whose clash expresses artistically a great crisis in society, into contact with one another” (35-36). While no character can be called a protagonist in *The Trotter-Nama*, Montagu does play an important role when colonial rule is first challenged by nationalism. He is the last character (along with Victoria) who has parodic qualities, but he also has traces of a typical character. On the one hand, he is a parody of Thomas Babington Macaulay, a nineteenth-century historian and the infamous civil servant who promoted the belief of British superiority. But unlike Macaulay, who convinced the colonial government that Indians required a “Western” education because Indian literature and culture were inferior, Montagu, the historian, is a nationalist who strives to become “Indian.” During the Ilbert bill controversy and the rise of nationalism he supports the Indians against his Anglo-Indian brethren and the British. Still, because he fears Victoria’s wrath, he negotiates his Anglo-Indian heritage and his newly adopted Indian identity by wearing Western-styled suits at home and dressing as a nationalist by wearing a khadi achkan (an India-styled jacket made of homespun cotton) when he lectures at the university (415). On the other hand, Montagu also has traces of a typical character of historical fiction. Though he comes across as comical as he constantly changes his clothes, his conflicted position on his attire becomes an outward manifestation of the internal crisis of the Anglo-Indian community—its split personality—as it is caught in the conflict between colonial rule and nationalism.

This conundrum over the Community’s identity becomes a significant issue in the latter half of the novel as is evident when it depicts India’s independence in 1947. Eustace (the seventh Trotter and Victoria and Montagu’s grandson) struggles to come to terms with being an Anglo-Indian by ethnicity and an Indian by nationality (the assumption being that until independence, Anglo-Indians did not consider themselves to be Indian).¹⁴ For him, this comes through his commentary on the definition of “home”:

The Hindus wanted theirs, the Muslims wanted theirs, the British were going back to theirs. What about us [Anglo-Indians]? A place for those who were neither Indian or European, who spoke English and ate curries with a spoon. ... And yet he too wanted a home. He was only half at home here. Could one have a home that one had

never been to, that filled one's chest with a prickly longing, like the plainsman's longing for the mountains he has never known? (491-492)

Queenie, Eustace's wife (and the narrator's mother), faces the same dilemma. She decides to immigrate to Britain but returns to India, unable to decide where she belongs. On her journey to England, as the airplane passes over Constantinople (midway between Britain and India), she suddenly discovers (in true postmodern fashion) that she is turning brown. When she decides to return to India, she suspects that she will turn white: "There was no ideal solution short of becoming an airhostess, and it was too late for that. Even they didn't remain forever suspended in the air over Constantinople" (554).

The point of foregrounding Montagu's typicality (and to a lesser extent, Eustace and Queenie) and this crisis of identity in Anglo-Indian history is to demonstrate a clear link between this shift in aesthetics and the secularization of the community. Notice that Justin and Mik are not typical, but parodic characters who do not suffer from a sense of historical crisis. While Mik is unaware of any tension in the identities he embodies, one could argue that Justin is more aware of his dilemma—whether he is European or Indian (when he begins to adopt Mughal dress and music), or whether he is a "third thing" (between European and Indian) (164-165, 195). Yet, for Justin this is only a momentary pause and the narrative breezes forward to depict his escapades as a parody of Akbar, Babar, and Claude Martin, his fraught relationships with his wives and mistresses, the comical tension between Mik and himself, and his obsession with his useless inventions. In short, Sealy uses postmodern parody to effectively capture a pre-secular fluid Anglo-Indian identity. By contrast, Montagu, Eustace, and Queenie are more typical. They embody the split consciousness of the Anglo-Indian identity at a moment of crisis, caught between being subjects of the British Crown and being Indian citizens. In doing so, they capture a secularized Anglo-Indian identity that is compartmentalized from the British and Indians, and all three are coded in opposition to each other.

My point here is that Sealy's decision to change the aesthetics—from using postmodern parody exclusively to introducing elements of historical fiction, especially through his later characters—reveals how secularization creates a trauma for the Community and the individual in a visceral and personal way. He brilliantly demonstrates that secularization redefines the terrain on which identities exist. While a pre-secular past allows for fluidity between cultures, in a secularized world there are only discrete communities that are defined by a range of prescriptive practices. These practices and the identity evoked through them make it far more difficult to resist community restraints. I do not wish to imply that Sealy romanticizes the pre-secular past because the novel is critical of Justin and Mik (as I've discussed above) through the access they have to economic resources, cultural capital, and the authority to use force, in contrast to other Anglo-Indians and "natives." However, inasmuch as the novel is

critical of the contemporary moment, it does explore how secularization—which the Anglo-Indians consciously chose—has created a crisis for the Community at the present. The pre-secular past, though by no means ideal, points out alternatives that are no longer possible in a secularized world, and so is a critique of the present.

Concluding Remarks

I have been arguing that Sealy uses an uneven aesthetic to depict the secularization of the Anglo-Indian community in *The Trotter-Nama*. To prove this I have demonstrated a clear correspondence between the secularization of the Anglo-Indian community and the decline in postmodern parody and the introduction of typical characters. However, one could claim that the decline in postmodern parody is a result of the rise of Indian nationalism, not secularization. Mijares has argued that the novel “can rebuke literature and supplement and challenge history [that represents the Anglo-Indians in negative terms], and in so doing reveal the silences of both. But it cannot alter the conditions of ‘the Anglo-Indian remnant’” (19). This marginalization of the Community occurs at the very moment when Indian nationalism erupts during the Ilbert Bill controversy. The Trotters, who spoke in Standard English until this point in the text, suddenly begin speaking in the Anglo-Indian dialect.

Extrapolating from this point, one could further argue that Sealy spends almost half of the novel exploring an Anglo-Indian past prior to the rise of nationalism because it is a means to escape the marginalization of the Anglo-Indian present. In a pre-national past Anglo-Indians had more freedom as their identity was not restricted to that of a minority. One could also suggest that Sealy uses postmodern parody to represent this pre-national past because he does not want the novel to turn into a lament for a glorious Anglo-Indian past, a narrative that is preoccupied by the disillusionment with the Community’s present condition. Because Justin and Mik are parodies and over-determined characters—they have multiple identities—the reader does not identify or sympathize with them. Instead, the reader’s response to them is cerebral, acknowledging the ways in which they engage the reader’s intellect, as their parodic qualities become a commentary on dominant Anglo-Indian, British, and Indian history and culture.

However, to claim that in *The Trotter-Nama* nationalism is responsible for the Anglo-Indians’ marginalization and the uneven aesthetics raises problems. First, it would be politically inappropriate. It would presume that Anglo-Indians have no role in making their own history, in choosing to create their own identity, or in selecting what constitutes being Anglo-Indian and what does not. It also ignores the internal struggles within the Community (after submitting the 1830 petition, Anglo-Indians disagreed as to whether they should continue to

work under the British or become economically and politically independent) and the suppression of some cultural facets and the promotion of others (the Anglicization of the Community). Second, and more relevant for my article, is that my argument above demonstrates that a careful reading of the novel clearly shows secularization's role in setting up the conditions for the Community's marginalization. The 1830 Petition to the British Parliament reveals the attempt by the Anglo-Indians for a uniform civil code, while Thomas Henry's criticism of Alina for not being Anglicized in the 1860s shows a desire for "westernization" and hostility and superiority to things that are "native." Apart from striving for political and cultural homogeneity, these two examples reveal that the creation of Community consciousness—its attitude and values—occurs before the establishment of Indian nationalism. Even when nationalism does erupt in the novel through the Ilbert Bill controversy, Anglo-Indian politics is not determined by Indian nationalism but is a conscious choice against it. Thus, Sealy's preoccupation with a pre-secular Anglo-Indian past is not simply a reaction to the rise of nationalism but is a recognition of the problems created with the Community's desire to secularize itself. It is this secularization that sets the conditions for the Community's minoritization and failure when Indian nationalism arrives on the Indian stage.

My objective in this article is not to deny that Indian nationalism has marginalized the Anglo-Indian community. Clearly, *The Trotter-Nama* does attest to the way in which nationalism has oppressed the Anglo-Indians, culturally and economically, and the majority of articles on the novel explore this issue in detail. However, my point here is to show that the marginalization of the Anglo-Indians and, by extension, other minorities is a complex phenomenon, one that must also acknowledge the role minorities have played in developing their own identity—through secularization—during colonial rule, often in relationship to colonial policies rather than nationalism.¹⁵ Thus, I suggest that we need to think more carefully about the relationship between nationalism and minorities and the active role that minorities have played in constructing their own identity through secularization.

Notes

1. Geetha Ganapathy-Dore's "Allan Sealy's *The Trotter-Nama*: A Postcolonial Synchronicle" and Loretta M. Mijares's "Fetishism of the Original: Anglo-Indian History and Literature in I. Allan Sealy's *The Trotter-Nama*" pay substantial attention to Sealy's engagement with Anglo-Indian history and culture.

2. See Aamir Mufti's *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture* (2007), Priya Kumar's *Limiting Secularism: The Ethics of Coexistence in Indian Literature and*

Film (2008), Neelam Srivastava's *Secularism in the Postcolonial Indian Novel: National and Cosmopolitan Narratives in English* (2008), and Manav Ratti's *The Postsecular Imagination: Postcolonialism, Religion, and Literature* (2013).

3. See T. M. Luhrmann's *The Good Parsi* and Jesse S. Palsetia's *The Parsis of India: Preservation of Identity in Bombay City*.

4. See Martin Genetsch's "Transcending Difference: Rohinton Mistry" and Catherine Pessoa-Miquel's "From Enlightenment to the Prison of Light: Reverting to Parsi Fundamentalism in Rohinton Mistry's *Family Matters*."

5. See Aditya Nigam's *The Insurrection of Little Selves: The Crisis of Secular-Nationalism in India*. Nigam's point is that even though secular nationalism consciously advocated a culture that was syncretic and respectful of difference, the ideals it promoted were infused with Hinduism.

6. Recent academic publications on the Anglo-Indians have not traced the Community's evolution from its inception to the present moment. Hawes's history of the Community only focuses on the first fifty years and Caplan's and Blunt's texts are an anthropological account of the Anglo-Indian community in Chennai, India, and a sociological study of Anglo-Indian women, respectively.

7. Sealy seems to be less influenced by other Anglo-Indian hierographies. Stark's account was published in 1936, and so does not address the dilemma of the Anglo-Indians after India's independence in 1947. Dover's and Wallace's publication wanted Anglo-Indians to join other Eurasian communities across Burma, China, and colonial Malaya in the 1930s to form an alliance that would have greater political clout. Sealy does not touch upon this movement in his novel.

8. See Anthony's *Britain's Betrayal in India* (372-373).

9. See Glenn D'Cruz's "My Two Left Feet: The Problem of Anglo-Indian Stereotypes in Post-Independence Indo-English Fiction."

10. See Rukmini Bhaya Nair's "The Pedigree of a White Stallion: Postcoloniality and Literary History."

11. See Ralph Crane's "Contesting the Can(n)on: Revisiting *Kim* in I. Allan Sealy's *The Trotter-Nama*."

12. One of Frank Anthony's primary arguments is to proclaim that Anglo-Indian men are masculine and virile (i-iv). Sealy risks perpetuating

this stereotype by drawing parallels between Mik and Krishna. Therefore, he foregrounds how the gypsy women exploit Mik.

13. The subalterns were farmers in Bengal who were forced to grow indigo (a cash crop) for the British. Between 1859 and 1861 they rebelled against their oppressive conditions under which they were expected to work. See "The Indigo Revolt in Bengal" by Subhas Bhattacharya.

14. See Anthony's *Britain's Betrayal in India* (150-151).

15. I have touched upon this point in the introduction with my comment on the Parsi community and Rohinton Mistry's *Family Matters*. See the introduction.

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