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Syncretic Language: an Archive of History and Experience in a Postcolonial World

This paper aims to discuss the language that the new generation of novelists is deploying in their literature, especially in the context of Kamila Shamsie's novels. Bill Ashcroft writes in *The Empire Writes Back* that: "Syncretism is the condition within which post-colonial societies operate." This may aptly be applied to the post-colonial Pakistani society that Shamsie depicts in her novels. What makes this society syncretic is the collision and fusion of distinct traditions that has brought forth an entirely new cultural dynamism. Language has a creative potential which constructs culture by capturing the very essence of it. Just as culture remains in the process of change and continuity, language is also not a static entity, but keeps on changing in relation to the new social institutions that evolve in a society. In her novels, Shamsie makes language a means and tool to consolidate the identity of her nation through her syncretic linguistic strategy of appropriation and abrogation of English. She combines her poetic English prose with Urdu words and phrases and gives her readers a glimpse of her native culture and tradition. Through the adaptation of English language, she also renders false the concept of *universal* and reasserts the authenticity of so-called marginal and peculiarity and plurality of all experiences. Liberating the words and associating the concepts in new patterns, her prose gradually grows into being syncretic and hybridized as one proceeds to examine her novels chronologically. This paper will discuss certain techniques, such as metonymic gap, syntactical and lexical abrogation, appropriation and syntactic relexification, which allow Shamsie to resolve the pull between native and imported or received language and bring to consciousness and articulation a richly tessellated society which is subsisting under the weight of destructive cultural encounter, i.e. the encounter between East and West.