

## WHAT'S IN A WORD?

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If Dr. Otto Titzling, the inventor of the brassiere had been a Frenchman, rather than a German, the language might have been significantly enriched. It is regrettable that the Germans so seldom share the French penchant for applying their names to their inventions. The French practice is understandable, particularly in the matter of cuisine. The French are perhaps the only Western people with an appropriate respect for the sense of taste, hence the practice of applying the chef's name to a new concoction. For example, "le canard à la façon de Gilian Renard" is to the creation as a signature is to a painting. Similarly, naming a delicacy especially prepared for a celebrity, as for example Escoffier's Peach Melba, resembles a dedication.

While the French name things after themselves, two peoples, the Parsees and Jews, take their names from things or function. Parsees provide the clearest examples. The Bombay telephone book is unique in its inclusion of such names as Readymoney, Sodawaterbottlewallah, Canteenwallah, Engineer, Reporter, Contractor, etc. Is it not curious that these two conspicuously talented, energetic communities should derive their names from things, while one of the most self-possessed people on earth should assign their names to things?

We owe more to South Asia than is generally recognized. At sight, juggernaut might derive from Junker, of the same

name. However, it comes from the Sanskrit, Jugar nath, a town in present-day Orissa and is associated with Sanskrit mythology. Most of our imports from the sub-continent stem from the days of the British Raj, and so have a military flavour, as in Khaki, loot, puttee, dum-dum, mufti, gymkhana, dhobi, Blighty, and jodhpur. The latter, of course, has aristocratic associations paralleling those which English aristocrats have imputed to their apparel: norfolk, raglan, cardigan, etc. In these days of widespread travel we often forget that for centuries soldiers and aristocrats were the only social elements to move about and so had an inordinate influence as agents of verbal exchange.

Aside from the military sphere, we have taken many other words from Hindi/Urdu, such as chit, jungle, toddy, bungalow, pundit, cushy, pug, chi-chi, cumberbund, coolie, bangles, sice, bandana, chintz, pukka, sherbert, punch, dungaree, mugger. And goon might well come from the Hindi goonda, meaning thug, which also comes from the Hindi. It could be that Hindi/Urdu provides clues to some rather unusual usages once to be heard in Canada.

For instance, one use to puzzle over the use of "yeh", as in "so and so was 'yeh' high", usually accompanied by a gesture indicating height above ground. It was often to be heard in clubs and officers' messes which fostered British traditions. It could be rightly taken for an affectation, but it is also the Urdu demonstrative pronoun meaning 'this'. Another strange one was the use of "tickedy boo", a seeming slight absurdity now disappearing in Canada. From its milieu and time of currency it could very well come from "thik hai babu", meaning roughly, "O.K."