

Volume II
March 2019

NEGOTIATIONS

An International Journal of
Literary and Cultural Studies

Published by the Registrar, University of North Bengal
Printed at the University Press, University of North Bengal



ENLIGHTENMENT TO PERFECTION

Department of English
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL
Accredited by NAAC with Grade A

**WHAT DOES YOUNG SOUTH ASIA WANT? CAN CHETAN
BHAGAT, MOHSIN HAMID, AND ARUNDHATI ROY
TELL US?**

JOHN C. HAWLEY

In the 70 years since independence and partition, South Asia has produced many writers with theories to structure public understanding of what national identities now mean. Such writers, whether working in the subcontinent or abroad in the diaspora, struggle to imagine what a “postcolonial” condition means, and whether the use of such a term implicitly continues the hermeneutics that came along with the British. As part of that conversation, some contemporary writers seek other frames of reference, like globalization, to break free from the baggage of history. In its 2017 conference in Philadelphia, for example, the South Asian Literary Association suggested that the subcontinent is “now marked in some ways by neoliberal globalization and shifting diasporic and transnational flows” (taken from its call for papers), thus signaling that these “flows” blur the notion of nation itself. In this essay I would like to suggest one arguably less academic site where one might find an intersection of the transnational and the diasporic with a discourse trying to redefine the subcontinent on, as it were, its “own” terms—that is, terms not only set by western literary theorists, or powerfully ensconced social scientists like the Subaltern Studies Group within the subcontinent and dispersed across the globe.

One place to look would be writers of fiction who also venture into political writing. In 2008, novelist Amit Chaudhuri published *Clearing a Space*, a collection of his essays from various literary journals. In an interview with Salil Tripathi in the year before its publication he records the direction he would be trying to take in the collected essays: “I am trying to clear the space for a discussion of Indian culture in the context of modernity, as distinct from the post-colonial discourse. This is not a post-colonial response to the Empire, but a 150-year story of self-division and creative tension.” The implication seems to be a reference to an internal discussion within an extended family, rather than an extended argument with one’s landlord.

We saw indications of the complexities of this conscious self-fashioning and positioning in the global community, for example, in Amitav Ghosh’s disinterest in being considered for the Commonwealth Writers’

prize some years ago. This seemed straight-forward enough: India is no longer defined by Britain, is no longer to be forever referring back to those years in which the colonizer set forth in political and economic terms habits of memory whereby south Asians would be “post” anything. But at the same time, Ghosh coupled his dismissal of a “Commonwealth” award for writing to his resistance to withdrawing from the lucrative Dan David prize. The first, he said, perpetuated the colonial vision, whereas the latter was “awarded by a university in conjunction with a private foundation” (Chowdhury) and not by the state of Israel. Some may have found the distinction unconvincing, but such disagreements indicate the ferment in which India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the rest of south Asia still finds itself, continuing to ponder national identities and widely-held values.

The roles the younger generations will assume in answering these questions is obviously of great importance, since 60 percent of the world’s youth (i.e., 750 million people between the ages of 15 and 24) live in the Asia-Pacific region; in 2010 India had 234 million people of similar age (19% of the country’s population) and the youth of similar age in Bangladesh was 20 percent of that country’s population.¹ Who is speaking for, and to, this next generation of South Asians, who will fashion this ‘post-postcolonial’ world?

Beyond their popular novels, recent essay collections from Chetan Bhagat, Mohsin Hamid, and Arundhati Roy are case studies of South Asians carrying out the negotiations that, in retrospect, may come to be seen as blueprints for the “new” south Asia that is now coming into being. The three writers clearly have different political agendas and interests, and differing suggestions for national improvements. But they share certain emphases, and first among these is their virulent condemnation of institutional corruption and political maneuvering.

In two collections of essays entitled *What Young India Wants* (2012) and *Making India Awesome* (2015) Chetan Bhagat sounds very postcolonial, indeed, noting that “kings and colonizers left our country nearly seven decades ago. It is time they left our minds” (Making 33). His appears to be a populist version of Kenyan novelist Ngugiwa Thiong’o’s frequent calls for the *decolonization* of African minds (1986)—though Ngugi’s call is more immediately controversial, focusing with great power on the languages in which formerly colonized peoples choose to write, going forward after independence. Ngugi, after all, dedicates his book “to all those who write in African languages, and to all those who over the years have maintained

the dignity of the literature, culture, philosophy, and other treasures carried by African languages,” but on this point, as indeed on many others, Bhagat is no ideological purist: he is a pragmatist. He begins one essay with a warning that “China may soon have more English speakers than India” (WYIW 114) and concludes it by stating that “English is not competing with the vernacular. . . . Hindi is your mother, English is your wife and it is possible to love both at the same time” (117-118). Bhagat knows his audience: hip young students who want to become cosmopolitan businessmen. As he sees it, using the master’s tools to one’s own advantage simply makes good sense: “As a developing nation, English is one of the few tools available to make Indians take their rightful place in the world. Let’s make sure we keep it sharp and share it wide” (118).² In global exchanges, he is arguing, a *lingua franca* such as English has become, serves the nation well—especially, perhaps, in a nation with so many officially recognized languages.

Taking another tack, Mohsin Hamid in the essays he collects in *Discontent and Its Civilizations* (2015) is much more “writerly,” watching himself as he composes, reflecting on how that very act shapes not only his sentences, but also his sense of purpose. He says of himself that “I am becoming a different person. . . inventing myself as I go along, as I suspect we all are” (3)—inventing himself, inventing “ourselves,” and thus, by stint of who we as his chosen readers self-select ourselves to be, inventing a particular subset of the nation. As might be expected from an author who ironically titles a novel, *How to Grow Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, Hamid takes a skeptical view of simplistic tribal and selfish recipes for dubious social improvement and ultimately short-sighted personal enrichment. One might wonder, for example, what he might think of the mercantile aspirations of the many readers Chetan Bhagat successfully addresses. Hamid noted the 60th anniversary of his nation of Pakistan and wrote that “my wish for our national anniversary is this: that we finally take the knife we have turned too often upon ourselves and place it firmly in its sheath” (135).³

In *The End of Imagination* (2016), a collection of essays written between 1998 and 2004, Arundhati Roy—who surely elicits the strongest response from readers, both pro and con—is the most lacerating of the three, complaining that “We *need* to feel like victims. We need to feel beleaguered. We need enemies. We have so little sense of ourselves as a nation and therefore constantly cast about for targets to define ourselves against. . . . If we are looking for a way out, we need some honest answers to some uncomfortable questions” (57). As with Bhagat and Hamid, Roy does not mollycoddle her readers.

It is instructive that three such varying authors are strong in criticizing their audiences (plural, because they are not addressing the same readers) for self-pity and defensive posturing, and it is a useful exercise to imagine the ideal reader implied by each of the three.⁴ Bhagat is published by Rupa Press in New Delhi and these two collections are made up from columns originally appearing in English and Hindi leading newspapers. Indeed, though the *New York Times* called him the biggest-selling English-language novelist in India's history and *Time* magazine named him one of the 100 most influential people in the world, Bhagat is hardly known in the United States, except among diasporic south Asians. Hamid is published by Random House in New York and Hamish Hamilton in the United Kingdom; all but three of his essays gathered here originally appeared in the west. Roy is published by Haymarket Books in the United States, and her book's essays were originally published or read in various spots in India, the U.S., the U.K., and Brazil. Hamid and Roy are quite well known in the west and have a global audience. These three are not addressing the same elements of society, and this demonstrates the complexity of the social divisions that make up the nations of south Asia.

On this point, Chetan Bhagat is straightforward: His style is light and doggedly optimistic, and he clearly seeks to appeal to a general readership. He is writing for Indians—but not *all* Indians; as we shall see, he really wishes to be read by the small majority of Indians who are willing to change their society rather than those who are complicit in its comfortable structural imbalances. He dedicates his second collection to “the awesome youth of India,” and both books were published by Rupa Publications in New Delhi. Mohsin Hamid, on the other hand, seems to have chosen a Western audience, no doubt including non-resident South Asians, since all but two of the 36 essays were originally published in the United States, Germany, or the UK. As with his *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, *How to Grow Filthy Rich*, and *Exit West*, his style is with-it, as if he and the reader have been friends for a while and they are having a conversation over a coffee. He imagines his ideal reader to be worldly, educated, probably not an academic—though he shows enough formal experimentation with genre to draw the professorial crowd, as well. Arundhati Roy draws an international readership of movers and shakers: of the 22 essays in this collection, one was presented in Brazil, two were published in the UK, seven in the United States, and 12 in India. She is aiming for a highly-educated audience, many of whom would be in academic jobs or positions of leadership, and her essays are generally chockful of statistics and renditions of historical events that would be relatively familiar to Indian readers, but

only slightly known by many non-south-Asians. Her tone is dismissive of those who disagree with her presentation and interpretation of events, and thus her writings are the most polemical. All three raise several common questions, but each goes his or her own way in analysis or in recommendations, and their emphases and passions have quite different tones. The issues dear to their hearts tell us as much about the issues of concern to their varying constituencies as it tells us about the authors. While hardly their sparing criticism of the world outside south Asia, they insist that blaming others is no longer helpful and they agree that endemic corruption is high on the list of items that must be dealt with.

Before he became a writer, Bhagat worked in the ratings advisory department at Goldman Sachs in Hong Kong. He decided to give up that certain career when he took responsibility for the future of his nation. Before that, he writes,

I became the typical armchair NRI advisor. Whenever I heard about bad policies created by Indian politicians, I became depressed. Every time there was news about communal or regional violence, I was in pain. ‘What the hell were we doing?’ I used to ask at NRI parties. ‘The finance minister of Malaysia went to meet Intel and lobbied for a chip plant near Kuala Lumpur. Our politicians fought with each other or planned scams!’ (WYIW xiv)

In response, he was advised to focus on himself and stay out of hopeless India. But he saw signs of hope. He found 80% of Indian youth were self-focused and indifferent; of the remaining 20%, 80% were permanently committed to a political side based on a personality—the ‘Modi-bhakt’ and the ‘AAPtards,’ as he puts it (MIA, 2). But the remaining 20% of that 20%, the 4% of Indian youth, are what he describes as caring and objective, and these are the readers he hopes to inspire to change their nation. It comes as no surprise that he finds in himself their embrace of neutrality, and sees it as his greatest strength in countering national cynicism (WYIW xxiv). So, though Bhagat is, of these three authors, arguably the one most focused on youth, even he aims for just 4% of them!

Writing of Pakistan, Mohsin Hamid argues for “a position that dispenses with the illusion that equality can be enhanced in a society prostrate before either its rich or its clerics. . . . We might,” he writes,

[s]hift from disputes over blasphemy laws to actually delivering due process of law, from arguments over curbing radical madrassas to actually building a high-quality state education system, from

alternately buying off and fighting tribal chieftains to actually empowering local tribes-people. (160).

Implicit in this view is an irritation with patriarchy, an impatience for a more democratic voice for those in Pakistani society kept in their place by norms that enable the reinscription of long-outdated customs and laws favoring wealthy men and privileged clerics.

Roy is the most scathing on this topic of intransigent privilege, and it is her *donnée* undergirding attacks on any particular political mess. “What do you do if you’re trapped in an asylum and the doctors are all dangerously deranged” (47), she asks, regarding the nationalist argument for India’s testing of the nuclear bomb. “With soldiers and barbed wire and enforced flag-worshipping in the mainland, it looks more and more as though India is becoming an integral part of Kashmir” (35). For her, the tail is wagging the dog; fake outrage over Kashmir distracts the public from inept officials who refuse a proper accountability for the social ills they might address. Roy is nothing if not clear in her contempt for politicians on both sides: “And now we’re stuck,” she writes, with these two strutting, nuclear-armed roosters, who are trained to hate each other, who hold their minority populations hostage as they mimic each other in a competing horror show of majoritarianism and religious chauvinism. And they have Kashmir to fight over” (7).

All three writers suggest that a corrupt gang of the powerful in society, instead of molding together a nation that finds its strength in pluralism, pits one group against another. They seek to upset this status quo by inciting their readers to activism. Hamid estimates that his readers are ten percent of society, “people with a certain amount of affluence and education. . . . who dominate social media” (MIA 160) but who care about themselves much more than they care about the 90 percent of “farmers, slum dwellers, domestic helpers and the hundreds of millions of Indians without proper healthcare, education and infrastructure.” The 10% “either shun them, or impose their new-found modern values on them” (160). “If we want people to change,” he writes, “we should not mock or deride. . . . [since] India’s poor are not a separate species from us” (161). Hamid, and indeed all three essayists, make a call for empathy from “us,” their ideal readers. Hamid writes:

If we can be silenced when it comes to Ahmadis, then we can be silenced when it comes to Shia, we can be silenced when it comes to women, we can be silenced when it comes to dress, we can be silenced when it comes to entertainment, and we can even be

silenced with it comes to sitting by ourselves, alone in a room,
afraid to think what we think. (145)

He sounds much like Martin Niemoeller, the Protestant pastor who spent years in a Nazi concentration camp and who wrote:

First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out—

Because I was not a Socialist.

Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak
out—

Because I was not a Trade Unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—

Because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak
for me.

Simply sticking to one's well-laid schemes for becoming "filthy rich" is not enough, Hamid writes: one must look beyond one's narrowly-defined self-interests and identify with the filthy poor.

Arundhati Roy makes much the same argument against self-centered mammonism. India, she writes, is "too diverse, too grand, too feral, and—eventually, I hope—too democratic to be lobotomized into believing in one single idea, which is, ultimately, what globalization really is: Life Is Profit" (192). She wraps this attack on venality in a protest against fascistic notions of Indian nationalism, describing contemporary elections as "mock battles that serve only to further entrench unspeakable inequity" (117). Against Hindutva she argues that "[t]here's no such thing as an Authentic India or a Real Indian," she writes. "There is no Divine Committee that has the right to sanction one single, authorized version of what India is or should be" (62). Echoing Hamid's plea to embrace the masses in society who are not included in one's natural tribe, Roy rejects the easy manipulations of castes by politicians. "It's far easier to make a bomb than to educate 400 million people," she writes:

This is their land too, you know. They have the right to make an informed decision about its fate and, as far as I can tell, nobody has informed them about anything. . . . This is the real horror of India. The orbits of the powerful and the powerless spinning further and further apart from each other, never intersecting, sharing nothing. Not a language. Not even a country. (62-64)

Striking, here, is her barely-concealed disgust over the lack of maturity of her readers, and their preference for the “ease” of making bombs in place of the universally recognized difficulty of educating the Indian masses. Her real power, perhaps, is in the humility of the answers she offers to the ecological disasters that she describes throughout her essays: nothing so grandiose that it can be dismissed by her readers as idealistic pabulum. “The only way to combat it,” she writes, “is by fighting specific wars in specific ways” (176)—one step at a time.

All three writers condemn communalism of various sorts, and they pointedly underscore the needs of the disenfranchised in south Asian society. Chetan Bhagat identifies non-Hindus, gays and lesbians, and women as the oppressed of Indian society, and concludes that “how we treat these three minorities in the future will determine how awesome our nation becomes” (MIA 118). Mohsin Hamid writes: “I believe that we co-create the overlapping societies we belong to, large and small, and that we should be free to try to invent new ways of being and interacting” (10). Roy’s identification of the oppressed is more pointed:

In 2015, in the state of Maharashtra alone, more than 3,200 farmers committed suicide. . . . We are a nation of nearly a billion people. In development terms we rank No. 138 out of the 175 countries listed in the UNDP’s Human Development Index. More than 400 million of our people are illiterate and live in absolute poverty, over 600 million lack even basic sanitation, and over 200 million have no safe drinking water. (29, 57)

She envisions

a sort of reverse engineering of the Hindutva project. . . an altogether different coalition of castes, one that is constituted from the ground up, instead of organized and administered from the top down: Dalit-Bahujanism instead of Brahminism. . . . A movement that challenges patriarchy, capitalism, and imperialism, that dreams of a casteless, classless society. . . . A movement whose comrades would include those from the privileged castes who no longer want to claim their privileges. (22)

And so, when we ask what it is that young south Asia wants, perhaps the popularity of these three writers can suggest an answer. Perhaps their readers are ready to hear their challenging messages, or perhaps not: perhaps they read as voyeurs rather than as individuals who are ready to step beyond their narrow self-interests. After all, Bhagat, Hamid, and Roy analyze their

readers through a rather critical unromantic lens, and if Bhagat sounds somewhat upbeat, Hamid and Roy are only modestly hopeful. The essays of these three diverse writers are calls to arms, and the three seem to have accepted that this call will be heard by only a small fraction of their readers. All three have apparently concluded that south Asia has long ago moved beyond a position from which a postcolonial attack on the British oppressor would be an adequate response to the region's various challenges. Their essays, in fact, are incitements to maturity, to honesty, and to compassion. They are calling on south Asian youth in the subcontinent and in the diaspora to . . . well, to make India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka *awesome* by assuming a public position of mutual respect for the *common* good. If not envisioning all this in a "postcolonial" context, therefore, one might say all three authors are attacking the *neo*-colonial state that successfully pits one element of society against another, and that thereby saps all the energy that might otherwise be turned against corrupt public officials and unjust social structures.

Bhagat records that he is addressing just 4% of Indian youth. Included within that small percentage, he sometimes specifically addresses the young Muslim community in India and, while acknowledging their oppressed status, recommends that they "take a leaf out of the book of other successful communities. The Jews in America and the Parsis and Sikhs in India. . . " (154): they should, he recommends, emphasize education, assimilation (which, he says, means not voting for the Congress Party in lock-step), an acceptance of liberal values and personal liberties, and an encouragement of and rewarding of merit (155-156). Mohsin Hamid, less a populist than Bhagat and less consciously focused on youth, is addressing the 10% of South Asians, principally Pakistanis, capable of shaping public policies through social media and legislative pressure. Arundhati Roy addresses liberal well-educated Indians, of whatever age, who retreat behind the unspoken privileges of an unacknowledged caste system. All three echo (with varying levels of volume and harmony) Frantz Fanon's invocation in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) to all colonized peoples to wake up and assume responsibility for their *common* futures—their common wealth.

Notes

1. *United Nations World Population Prospects*, the 2010 Revision. Available online at: <http://esa.un.org/wpp/>
2. Far more typically postcolonial would be Audre Lorde's warning: "survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to take our differences and make them

strengths. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support." (110)

3. How similar to the injunction of Audre Lorde to her female readers is this wish from Hamid for his countrymen-and-women.
4. I have written elsewhere about the politics of an author's perceived audience. See Hawley 2003. For an interesting intervention in this discussion from A. Roy, see her "The Ladies Have Feelings, So. . ." in *The End of Imagination*, 177-193).

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**BETWEEN MEMORY AND HISTORY: THE DYNAMICS OF
SPACE AND PLACE IN AMITAV GHOSH'S *THE SHADOW
LINES* (1988)**

NADIA BUTT

1. Introduction

Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* has remained one of the most significant works of historical fiction, memory literature, Indian diasporic literature, partition literature, and above all postcolonial novel all in one. Not only does the novel point to the importance of historical events shaping private lives, but it particularly underlines the role of displacement and relocation in shaping the imagination of ordinary individuals in the middle of a political as well as geographical change. Ghosh seems to be interested in people on the periphery of society, striving to make sense of the disintegrating world around them; hence, the novel provides insight into the lives of those who do not dazzle, but those whose lives are a vivid reflection of cultural, national, and territorial transformations. This article, therefore, seeks to highlight the significance of the novel in the field of postcolonial studies by critically examining the relationship between memory and history and space and place in the plotline.

The fragmentary narrative of *The Shadow Lines* unfolds the narrator's experiences in different cultural locations and time periods. The novel was published in 1988, four years after the sectarian violence that shook New Delhi in the aftermath of the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's assassination. In fact, the novel is set against the backdrop of major historical events such as the Swadeshi movement, the Second World War, the partition of India, the communal riots of 1963-64 in Dhaka and Calcutta, the Maoist Movement, the India-China War, the India-Pakistan War and the fall of Dhaka from East Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh in 1971. The story, which takes place largely on the newly-created Indo-Pakistan border, spans three generations of the narrator's family, spreading over East Bengal, Calcutta and London. Opening in Calcutta in the 1960s, the novel portrays two families—one English, one Bengali—known to each other from the time of the Raj, as their lives intertwine in tragic and comic ways. The unnamed narrator as a family archivist travels between Calcutta and London in 1981 to tell the story which contains multiple stories of his grandmother Th'amma, and his grandaunt Mayadebi, of his uncles Tridib and Robi, of his cousin Ila, and of May Price, a family friend in London. All these

stories-within-stories are united by the thread of memory and imagination as the novelist treats both memory and imagination as a driving force of the narrative.

Within the flashback narrative framework, the narrator, Indian-born and English-educated, traces events back and forth in time, from the outbreak of the Second World War to the late twentieth century, through years of Bengali partition and violence, observing the ways in which political events invade private lives. Hence, the reader learns that Tridib was born in 1932 and had been to England with his parents in 1939, where his father had received medical treatment. May Price, with whose family they shared a close relationship, had begun a long correspondence with Tridib in 1959. Unfortunately, Tridib lost his life in a communal riot in Dhaka in 1964 while May was on a visit to India. Examining the ambivalence of cultural and national borders, connecting and separating individuals and families, the author addresses the fate of nations - India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh - to offer observations about a profoundly complex political conflict in the postcolonial and post-partition subcontinent between two major ethnic communities of Hindus and Muslims.

By spreading the story over diverse geographical and national landscapes in which memory and imagination reinvent historical reality, Ghosh highlights how the 'shadows' of imaginary and remembered spaces haunt all characters in the novel as they struggle with the past in an uncertain present. At the same time, these 'shadows' in the form of 'national boundaries' not only manipulate private and political spheres, but also demonstrate an individual's lifelong effort to win over artificial borders, invading the space of home/land. In order to bring out the irony of dividing ancient cultures and civilisations by drawing borders and giving a new name to a piece of mutual territory, Ghosh contends the sinister smoke screens of nationalism hitherto unknown on the Indian subcontinent until the partition of the subcontinent in 1947 through the all-pervasive metaphor of 'shadow lines' in the novel.

2. Memory and History and Space and Place : Mapping the Terrain

Recently, the concept of cultural memory, first developed by German scholars Jan Assmann (2012) and Aleida Assmann (2013; 2010) and Astrid Erll (2011), is increasingly discussed with reference to its transnational and transcultural dimensions (see Butt 2015; de Cesari and Rigney 2014; Crownshaw 2013). The discourse of (cultural) memory, indeed, urges a more critical view of history. Hence, memory is often discussed as dramatically different from history. According to French philosopher Pierre

Nora:

Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name (...) History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past (...) Memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects; history binds itself strictly to temporal continuities, to progressions and to relations between things. Memory is absolute, while history can only conceive the relative. (1989, 8-9)

While for Nora, “History is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it” (1989, 9), for Ghosh memory is always sceptical of history – history that can be manipulated by politicians and historians. Ananya Jahanara Kabir takes one step further from the conflict between memory and history and introduces the notion of post-amnesia, which she defines as a way of ‘remembering and forgetting’ East Pakistan (2017 web), arguing that “For both Pakistan and Bangladesh, the time between 1947 and 1971 was best forgotten” (2017 web). Kabir claims post-amnesia as a more potent term to understand the twin phenomenon of partition in the history of South Asia than Marianne Hirsch’s term postmemory (2012), which indicates the transmission of traumatic memory, namely the memories of the Holocaust generation to the new generation.

Looking at the forgotten triangle of West Pakistan, East Pakistan as erased from the world atlas and replaced by a new nation-state Bangladesh is to engage with what Michael Rothberg has called ‘multidirectional memory’ (2009) – memory which recognises the interconnectedness of traumatic events on a large scale. Although Rothberg discusses multidirectional memories that connect the Holocaust and colonialism, “his model is highly useful for thinking through the relationship between 1947 and 1971, and between successive waves of memory and forgetting these engender” (Kabir 2017 Web). Kabir makes a remarkable observation in this regard, claiming: “Acknowledging the multidirectionality of cultural memory is to open the door to new ways of thinking about Partition(s) as well as seeking emotionally sustainable models for reparation and healing. East Pakistan is, in this context, an exemplary shared lost space for all three nations” (2017).

The concept of multidirectional memory takes me to Ghosh’s innovative representation of place and space in his plotline as ideas of space and place are crucial to his treatment of both memory and history in

his novel. Just as memory has been perceived in terms of a location (see Samuel 1996; see Klüger 2003), a significant number of critics have conceptualised cultural processes in geographical and metaphorical terms such as Mary Louise Pratt, Elleke Boehmer, Peter Hulme or Stephen Greenblatt; in particular, Homi Bhabha and Edward Sojatheorise these processes through the notion of Third Space. Space, as many critics have argued, does not merely provide a background for cultural configurations; rather, it is an essential part of cultural and political transformations. In Ghosh's fictional realms, however, local and global, seen and unseen space is perceived and imagined in the narrator's ritual of memory as a fundamental facet of individual, national, familial, and communal metamorphoses. Consequently, space is not merely remembered as an imaginative construct, but it is represented as a domain of political and cultural encounters, which actually shapes the connection of different characters with territory and location. Hence, space is represented as a dynamic arrangement between people, places, cultures and societies as James Clifford points out, "space is never ontologically given. It is discursively mapped and corporeally practiced" (1997, 54). According to Clifford, space is composed through movement, produced through use, and is simultaneously an agent and a result of action or practice. Therefore, it is essential to make a distinction between 'space' and 'place.'

The difference and connection between space and place have been examined by a number of cultural and postcolonial critics. According to Bill Ashcroft, for example, 'space' is the creation of colonialism, which virtually dislocated the colonised; 'place' in contrast is the pre-colonial perception of belonging in time, community and landscape – a perception that postcolonial transformation strives to retrieve, if in the "delocalised," that is, "spatialised" form of global consciousness (2000, 15). Finally, just as memory and history differ from each other, so are place and space which the following close reading of the novel aims to demonstrate.

3. Postcolonial Cartographies: Tridib's Art of Imagining Spaces as Opposed to Ila

While going down memory lane, the narrator seems to try inhabiting a space, like Tridib does, to achieve freedom and liberty in its entirety since freedom is central to every character's story in the novel. However, national uprising as a legacy of the partition of the subcontinent in 1947 pushes the characters from the old as well as new generation, as demonstrated by Tridib's killing in an act of ethnic violence, to the brink of tragedy.

Since the narrator contests artificial divisions of the subcontinent

as well as postcolonial cartographies, the novel presents space through the vivid imagination of the narrator and his most influential relative Tridib. This space is addressed not only as a space of human and cultural encounters, but of overlapping histories and territories, shifting countries and continents where different people, cultures, nations and communities seek to communicate above the 'shadow lines' of social, national and territorial barriers. Hence, the idea of space as a dynamic cultural site in the novel brings out the role of national ideologies in shaping personal memory and collective history. In fact, a profound preoccupation with spaces in the novel also points to the cartographic imagination of the Bengali community. According to Meenakshi Mukherjee, cartographic imagination is peculiar to Bengali imagination: "Whether as a result of a relatively early exposure to colonial education or as a reaction to it, real journeys within the country and imagined travels to faraway places outside national boundaries have always fascinated the Bengali middle class" (2000, 137). Thus, a deep fascination with distant space and place characterises the narrator's as well as his family's imagination in both parts of the novel. Indeed, spatial practices work on a variety of levels in the novel such as telling stories and events, evoking the role of imaginary and real places across distant cultures and communities, watching fading photographs, reading maps and old newspapers, reminiscing about forgotten episodes of mutual bonding, and playing childhood games.

The narrator claims that he has learned the practice of imagining space and place from his alter-ego Tridib. While recollecting him, the narrator reveals that it is Tridib who has given him "worlds to travel" and "eyes to see them with" (Ghosh 2005, 20). It is Tridib that triggers in him a longing to imagine familiar and unfamiliar places in memory and imagination. In short, it is Tridib's gift of imagination that kindles in the narrator a desire to travel around the globe. Both have a penchant to study maps to develop and discover their distinct sense of travelling to places without any kind of mental and physical border or barrier. Tridib has even suggested to the narrator to use his "imagination with precision" (Ghosh 2005, 24) in order to voyage into unknown spaces. He once said to the narrator that one could never know anything except through desire "that carried one beyond the limits of one's mind to other times and other places, and even, if one was lucky, to a place where there was no border between oneself and one's image in the mirror" (Ghosh 2005, 29). The narrator is sad to know that his globetrotter cousin Ila, nevertheless, has no concept of place because she cannot invent a place for herself but relies on the inventions of others:

I could not persuade her that a place does not merely exist, that it

has to be invented in one's imagination; that her practical, bustling London was no less invented than mine, neither more nor less true, only very far apart. It was not her fault that she could not understand, for as Tridib often said of her, the inventions she lived in moved with her, so that although she had lived in many places, she had never travelled at all. (Ghosh 2005, 21)

Instead of ever making efforts to understand him, Ila despises the narrator for having a dreamy view of distant places; for she could never believe in space as a human construction but looks upon it as a given reality. She dismisses the narrator's practice of imaginary space construction as a mere indulgence in fancy:

It's you who were peculiar, sitting in that poky little flat in Calcutta, dreaming about faraway places. I probably did you no end of good; at least you learnt that those cities you saw on maps were real places, not like those fairylands Tridib made up for you. (Ghosh 2005, 23-24)

The narrator realises that Ila is somewhat trapped in a static zone for having a rigid view of space and place, even though she has travelled to different regions of the world. The other problem is that Ila perceives the present without ever seeking its affinity with the past, especially when memory is not crucial to her conception of space and place. She is unable to see the past through memory or imagination whereas once the narrator has seen the past through Tridib's eyes, the past "seemed concurrent with its present" (Ghosh 2005, 31). The narrator points out:

Ila lived so intensely in the present that she would not have believed that there really were people like Tridib, who could experience the world as concretely in their imagination as she did through her senses, more so if anything, since to them these experiences were permanently available in their memories. (Ghosh 2005, 29-30)

Although Ila wants to enjoy a sense of bonding with the narrator, she tends to look down upon him at the same time for inhabiting middleclass suburbs of Delhi and Calcutta where no events of global importance ever take place, "nothing that sets a political example to the world, nothing that's really remembered" (Ghosh 2005, 102). The narrator is confused because he has always viewed the world as a mosaic of interconnected places. Calcutta for him is as much a part of London as London is a part of Calcutta, especially when all places are borderless space in the process of memory like hues of the same picture. Moreover, he is surprised to know that Ila has no understanding of events outside the colonial

motherland England:

I began to marvel at the easy arrogance with which she believed that her experience could encompass other moments simply because it had come later; that times and places are the same because they happen to look alike, like airport lounges. (Ghosh 2005, 101)

He confesses that many events of global importance might have taken place only in England, but this does not mean that the history of his country should be sniggered at. He recollects how his homeland has undergone untellable political calamities while confessing his perception of England only as a homeland of imagination, maintaining, “I knew nothing at all about England except an invention. But still I had known people of my own age who had survived the Great Terror in the Calcutta of the sixties and seventies” (Ghosh 2005, 103). Since he apprehends space as a cultural artifact (see Shields 197), he cannot, like Ila, imagine place as a closed container, independent of human subjectivity and agency.

The narrator underlines the role of memory and imagination throughout the novel in inventing place because he wants to be free of other people’s fabrication of space and place. In other words, he strives to read space above all kinds of artificial borders to imagine its truedimensions himself. As a school boy, the narrator conjures up a picture of London that is so vivid in his imagination that he could recognise places by their mere mention of name when he visits London years later and learns that real places can be invented inside your head:

the Tridib who had pushed me to imagine the roofs of Colombo for myself, the Tridib who had said that we could not see without inventing what we saw, so at least we could try to do it properly . . . because . . . if we didn’t try ourselves, we would never be free of other people’s inventions. (Ghosh 2005, 31)

The narrator is also deeply mesmerised by an imaginary space like Tridib’s ruin which he discovers at the Victoria Memorial in Calcutta. In 1959 when Tridib was twenty-seven and May Price nineteen, they had begun a long correspondence, but they met for the first time in that ruin in Calcutta in 1964. Tridib had expressed in his last letter to May that he wanted them to “meet far away from friends and relatives—in a place without a past, without history, free, really free, two people coming together with the utter freedom of strangers” (Ghosh 2005, 141). In fact, Tridib epitomises the narrator’s as well as every other character’s desire to overcome the shadow lines of borders and distance to inhabit a space of cultural and

human contact, shadows which tend to weaken the character's aspirations for freedom.

Despite ending as a story of unrequited love, Tridib and May's relationship is the most awe-inspiring experience in the narrator's memories because their vision of love and bonding is not constricted by either national fervour or racial hatred, hounding different ethnicities of divided India. In the course of remembering yet another particular spatial practice, the narrator points out that space at times can carry inexplicable marks of time. While recollecting Ila in London, he explains how he was suddenly haunted by the ghosts of time in the cellar of the Prices when he was playing Houses with her—a game he had actually played with her in their ancestral home in India. At that moment, he experienced time past as almost suspended in space:

Those empty corners filled up with remembered forms, with the ghosts who had been handed down to me by time: the ghosts of the nine-year-old Tridib, sitting on a camp bed, just as I was, his small face intent, listening to the bombs; the ghost of Snipe in that far corner . . . the ghost of the eight-year-old Ila, sitting with me under that vast table in Raibajar. They were all around me, were together at last, not ghosts at all: the ghostliness was merely the absence of time and distance—for that is all that a ghost is, a presence displaced in time. (Ghosh 2005, 178)

While witnessing the ghosts of time in the presence of Ila that are the ghosts of memory and imagination simultaneously, the narrator experiences a rush of multiple memories overwhelming his entire being. Real places in his recollection appear to be as much imaginary as real. This is the reason that there is a constant play on reality and imagination in the narrator's consciousness whether he is at home or abroad. For the narrator reality lies not in the obvious, but in what is evoked and understood by the shadows of memory and imagination over changing laps of space and time. It is imagination alone which can portray a lucid and an enduring picture of reality. Hence, the narrator gives more emphasis to the creative aspect of imagination in uncoiling memories even though both imagination and memory are an irresolvable mystery to him just as the murder of Tridib.

The narrator as a historian and Tridib as an archaeologist seem to complement each other in the novel as a narrative of memory. The narrator declares that even years after his death, Tridib seems to be watching over him as he tries "to learn the meaning of distance. His atlas showed me, for example, that within the tidy ordering of Euclidean space, Chiang Mai in

Thailand was much nearer Calcutta than Delhi” (Ghosh 2005, 227). Thus, time and distance like space and place appear to be a mystery that the narrator has to reckon with to relive and repossess his fast fading past.

4. The Past is Not a Foreign Country: Memory and Forgetting

Priya Kumar considers *The Shadow Lines* to be a testimony of loss and memory since the text compels the reader to concede “the past-in-presentness of partition as a history that is not done with, that refuses to be past” (1999, 201). Since the past permeates the present, the narrator is deeply preoccupied with it to understand not only his family history but the history of his country. In the opening of his essay “Separating Anxiety: Growing up Inter/National in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines*” (1994), Suvirl Kaul, therefore, points out that the question if you remember is the most insistent in the novel that brings together the private and the public. Kaul declares that this question “shapes the narrator’s search for connection, for recovery of lost information, repressed experiences, for the details of trauma and joy that have receded into the archive of private and public memory (1994, 125). While remembering his grandmother’s journey to Dhaka and Tridib’s untimely death afterwards, the narrator recollects a series of political incidents in Calcutta and Dhaka simultaneously to bring out the enormity of the central tragedy in his narration. It started with the disappearance of Mu-i-Mubarak, the hair of the Prophet Mohammed, from Hazratbal Mosque in Kashmir in 1963 and its recovery in 1964. In one of the riots in Khulna, a small town in the distant east of Pakistan, a demonstration turned violent on the 4th of January 1964. This demonstration is “branded in [the narrator’s] memory” (Ghosh 2005, 222) because it is in this demonstration that Tridib lost his life. While recollecting an individual’s sacrifice and his community’s struggle with senseless political and national barriers, the narrator states:

Every word I write about those events of 1964 is the product of a struggle with silence. It is a struggle I am destined to lose—have already lost—for even after all these years I do not know where within me, in which corner of my world, this silence lies. All I know of it is what it is not. It is not, for example, the silence of an imperfect memory. Nor is it a silence enforced by a ruthless state—nothing like that: no barbed wire, no check-points to tell me where its boundaries lie. (Ghosh 2005, 213)

The narrator has a twin motive in narrating from the sources of memory: first, to communicate the lurking political turmoil beneath the tender veneer of his childhood years in post-partition India; and secondly, to save his

memories from slipping into the realm of forgetting. The struggle with silence is not only a struggle with recollection, but also a struggle with the fading past in the fast-changing present. It is, therefore, justified to say that Ghosh's novel is a fine illustration of post-amnesia (Kabir 2017 web) as the narrator is anxious to hold on to the past and to document its significance. In 1979 the narrator recollects the events of 1964 involving his friend because he is determined not to let "the past vanish without trace; I was determined to persuade them of its importance" (Ghosh 2005, 271). The narrator uses memory not merely to comprehend the individual and collective cultural past that has been confounding him for fifteen long years, but also to figure out 'what' and 'how' to remember. Perhaps this is the reason that the narrative reflects a constant process of introspection; as Louis James proclaims, "if *Circle of Reason* is about knowledge, *The Shadow Lines* is about knowing" (1999, 56).

Ghosh's transnational vision of the Indian subcontinent is conspicuous in his representations of national borders as he seems to believe in cosmopolitan identity as much as being a global citizen like his narrator. The novel as a work of commemoration and reminiscence is an attempt not only to evoke the memory of the ethnic riots of 1964 and to mourn the death of innocent people, but also to pay a tribute to those who dream of the subcontinent without borders. The narrator recollects,

[b]y the end of January 1964 the riots had faded away from the pages of the newspapers, disappeared from the collective imagination of "responsible opinion," vanished without leaving a trace in the histories and bookshelves. They had dropped out of memory into the crater of a volcano of silence. (Ghosh 2005, 226)

The narrator is surprised to find out in his study of old newspapers that the riots in Khulna and Calcutta have not ever made the newspaper headlines, but became a mere bottom page story. At this stage the narrator has started the "strangest journey: a voyage into a land outside space, an expanse without distances; a land of looking-glass events" (Ghosh 2005, 219). He is deeply disturbed to know that the newspapers of 1964 in India have not given enough emphasis to communal violence in Dhaka and consequent riots in Calcutta. A sudden realisation that the distance of twelve hundred miles between Srinagar (Kashmir) and Calcutta, and Dhaka being in another country, could be used as a reason to keep people in Calcutta in the dark. This piece of news leads the narrator to discover a momentous truth, that is, national frontiers create a false sense of distance and reality. In

other words, national borders generate the illusion of differences. It is this illusion of difference he seeks to address in remembering his family in relation to the English, Indian and Bengali political histories.

The narrator also meticulously recollects trouble in Dhaka and Calcutta simultaneously as political tensions in these two cities coincide with each other. When Muslims poisoned the water of Calcutta in 1964 as a protest against the communal crisis in Dhaka as rumoured by the word-of-mouth, the narrator felt at that time that “our city had turned against us” (Ghosh 2005, 199). Out of terror of riots, he could not even trust his Muslim friend Montu. He remembers fear suddenly filling the familiar space of his native city:

It is a fear that comes of the knowledge that normalcy is utterly contingent, that the spaces that surround one, the streets that one inhabits, can become, suddenly and without warning, as hostile as a desert in a flash flood. It is this that sets apart the thousand million people who inhabit the subcontinent from the rest of the world—not language, not food, not music—it is the special quality of loneliness that grows out of the fear of the war between oneself and one’s image in the mirror. (Ghosh 2005, 200)

However, the irony is that Indians are ultimately compelled to shed borders and barriers because abstract concepts of nationalism can never replace human bonding. The grandmother’s orthodox Hindu uncle Jethamoshai, for example, has never let the shadow of any Muslim ever pass him all his life, but after the partition when he has almost lost his senses, he is happily looked after by a Muslim family. Jethamoshai claims that his fate is tied to his land whether his land is transferred to his enemies or not:

Once you start moving you never stop. That’s what I told my sons when they took the trains. I said: I don’t believe in this India-Shindia. It’s very well, you’re going away now, but suppose when you get there they decide to draw another line somewhere? What will you do then? Where will you move to? No one will have you anywhere. As for me, I was born here, and I’ll die here. (Ghosh 2005, 211)

By pondering over the sites of memory as sites of mourning, the novel depicts how nationalism invades private lives to such an extent that it breaks down families completely as some members are compelled to leave to feel secure whereas some are not ready to give in to the new political order. The narrator at the same time thinks about the lethal outcome of

cultural and national differences that do damage beyond repair as noticeable in the case of Jethamoshai who is in reality a non-political figure. But he is targeted as an enemy as he is imagined to be inhabiting a space and place, which is supposed to be no longer his own. While commenting on Ghosh's logic of drafting the poetics and politics of space in the novel, Mukherjee makes a pertinent comment:

Amitav Ghosh would like to believe in a world where there is nothing in between, where borders are illusions. Actually, three countries get interlocked in Amitav Ghosh's *Shadow Lines*—East Pakistan before it became Bangladesh, England, and India—and people of at least three religions and nationalities impinge upon one another's lives and deaths. It is very much a text of our times when human lives spill over from one country to another, where language and loyalties cannot be contained within tidy national frontiers. (2008, 181)

Due to a long silence within and without with respect to the individual and communal crisis of 1964, it takes the narrator “*fifteen* years to discover” that there was a connection between “my nightmare bus ride back from school and the events that befell Tridib and others in Dhaka” (Ghosh 2005, 214; emphasis in original). The narrator wonders at his stupidity for finding the truth only after such a long time:

I believed in the reality of space; I believed that distance separates, that it is a corporeal substance; I believed in the reality of nations and borders; I believed that across the border there existed another reality (. . .) I could not have perceived that there was something more than an incidental connection between those events of which I had a brief glimpse from the windows of that bus, in Calcutta, and those other events in Dhaka, simply because Dhaka was in another country. (Ghosh 2005, 214)

Despite condemning the masses' obsession with the shadow lines of hatred and hostility out of national sentiments, the narrator also shows how ordinary people try their best to seek mutual sympathy among various ethnic groups of the subcontinent. As in the wake of partition and later on during the trouble in Dhaka in 1964, there were innumerable cases of Muslims in East Pakistan giving shelter to Hindus and Hindus sheltering Muslims. “But they were ordinary people, soon forgotten—not for them any Martyr's Memorials or Eternal Flames” (Ghosh 2005, 225). However, he feels compelled to consider that some people like his grandmother believe in not only drawing lines as a part of their faith but respecting them with

blood. The narrator eventually arrives at the conclusion that “there was a special enchantment in lines” (Ghosh 2005, 228) as the pattern of the world. Therefore, ordinary people are enchanted with borders, with ‘imagined communities’ (see Anderson 1983, 15) no matter how much of ‘an invented tradition’ (see Hobsbawm and Ranger 2000, 1-14) these borders and imagined communities are. The narrator concludes:

They had drawn their borders, believing in that pattern, in the enchantment of lines, hoping perhaps that once they had etched their borders upon the map, the two bits of land would sail away from each other like the shifting tectonic plates of the prehistoric Gondwanaland. What had they felt, I wondered, when they discovered that they had created not a separation, but a yet-undiscovered irony— the irony that killed Tridib. (Ghosh 2005, 228)

Tridib’s death as a looming tragedy in the riots of 1964 is central to trigger the memory of the narrator in composing a family memoir. While underlining his profound association with Tridib as an embodiment of freedom, the narrator sheds light on space and place as subject to divisions and differences where there should be no border or barrier. The narrator hence seeks to demonstrate the irony of his relative’s sacrifice. He highlights that Tridib as a staunch believer of inventing and producing a space beyond borders gives his life away to save human lives, but the borders stay where they are. His death saves May but not his aunt’s uncle Jethamoshai for whom he has actually travelled from Calcutta to Dhaka. Because Jethamoshai is a Bengali Hindu and not a Bengali Muslim, he falls prey to fanatic Muslim Bengali nationalists despite Tridib’s attempts at rescuing him. Indeed, the narrator is left wondering why borders and not human ideals win in the end.

5. Remembering Tha’mma’s Deluding Dimensions of Space and Place

Several memory novels like Ruth Praver Jhabvala’s *The Shards of Memory* (1995) or Attia Hosain’s *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) narrate the family saga that focuses on the ambivalent relationships between parents and children or aunts and nephews and nieces in the historical context. But recently there seems to be a trend of dealing with the relationship of grandparents and grandchildren in a memory narrative. If Vikram Seth chooses to write a true memoir about his great-grand uncle and great-grand aunt in his biography *Two Lives* (2005), Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* as a fictional memoir underlines the relationship between grandmother and

grandson. The character of the grandmother is central to the presentation of space and place in the novel as the narrator goes down memory lane.

The titles of two separate parts in the novel, *Going Away* and *Coming Home* point to the dilemma of space and place for the people of contemporary India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh with reference to the life story of the narrator's grandmother dearly called *Tha'mma*. When *Tha'mma* tries to explain that in the past coming and going from Dhaka had never been a problem and that no one ever stopped her, the narrator as a school boy jumps at the ungrammatical expression of his grandmother and wonders why she could not make a difference between coming and going: "*Tha'mma, Tha'mma!* I cried. How could you have 'come' home to Dhaka? You don't know the difference between coming and going!" (Ghosh 2005, 150). At this juncture, the narrator tries to share with the reader a deep-rooted confusion and chaos in the psyche of partition victims that face an era of barbed wires and checkpoints on their old territory. The narrator infers:

Every language assumes a centrality, a fixed and settled point to go away from and come back to, and what my grandmother was looking for was a journey which was not a coming and a going at all; a journey that was a search for precisely that fixed point which permits the proper use of verbs of movement. (Ghosh 2005, 150)

The narrator is, at the same time, particularly concerned with the predicament of dogmatic Indian nationalists who are obsessed with drawing lines and shutting doors on each other when in history they were all one people. 'Going away' and 'Coming home' in the past was something one could achieve without risking one's life in the subcontinent; for Dhaka or Calcutta were places to enter without showing any passports or identity card. Ghosh states:

the simple fact that there had never been a moment in the four-thousand-year-old history of that map, where the places we know as Dhaka and Calcutta were more closely bound to each other than after they had drawn their lines—so closely that I, in Calcutta, had only to look into the mirror to be in Dhaka; a moment when each city was the invented image of the other, locked into an irreversible symmetry by the line that was to set us free—our looking-glass border. (Ghosh 2005, 228)

The narrative undercuts imagined differences between the newly created nation states on the subcontinent by emphasising similarities between Dhaka

and Calcutta through the recurrent leitmotif of the mirror. The reader is made to think that the “looking-glass border” (Ghosh 2005, 228) attempts to create a mirage of otherness but only sees itself reflected. Experimenting with a compass on Tridib’s old atlas, the narrator makes some startling discoveries. He notices that even though he “believed in the power of distance” (Ghosh 2005, 222) he could not help ignoring that Calcutta and Khulna, despite national barriers being created between the two cities, “face each other at a watchful equidistance across the border” (Ghosh 2005, 226). Consequently, he is convinced that border, however tangible, is a shadow of the mind; it is as fictive as it is real since human imagination can never perceive it as a fixed historical fact.

Just as Tridib and Ila have their own practices of inhabiting social and political space so has the narrator’s grandmother Tha’mma. Having a primordial view of nationalism, the grandmother equates native space with freedom and honour. According to Tha’mma who has a nationalist mindset, Ila has no right to stay in England because she is not a ‘national’ there even when the questions of national identity have undergone a radical change in an era of transnationalism. She questions furiously, “What’s she doing in that country?” (Ghosh 2005, 76) and reasons out:

She doesn’t belong there. It took those people a long time to build that country; hundreds of years, years and years of war and bloodshed . . . War is their religion. That’s what it takes to make a country. Once that happens people forget they were born this or that, Muslim or Hindu, Bengali or Punjabi: they become a family born of the same pool of blood. That is what *you* have to achieve for India, don’t you see? (Ghosh 2005, 76)

After her retirement in 1962 as a headmistress from a public school where she has worked for twenty-seven years, the grandmother begins to feel nostalgic about her house in Dhaka. She has reached a stage in her life where she cannot suppress old memories of her ancestral home any longer. She sadly recollects how her ancestral house was divided with a wall between two brothers, her father and her uncle Jethamoshai. The reader thus first encounters the partition of domestic space, a partition that is repeated on the national space with the partition of the subcontinent in 1947. The grandmother reminisces:

They had all longed for the house to be divided when the quarrels were at their worst, but once it had actually happened and each family had moved into their own part of it, instead of the peace they had so much looked forward to, they found that a strange,

eerie silence had descended on the house. (Ghosh 2005, 121)

Because the grandmother is convinced of the reality of borders, she asks her son before flying to Dhaka if she would be able “to see the border between India and East Pakistan from the plane” (Ghosh 2005, 148). When her son laughs at her question and taunts her if she thought that “the border was a long black line with green on one side and scarlet on the other, like it was on the school atlas,” (Ghosh 2005, 148) she retorts: “But surely there’s something—trenches perhaps, or soldiers, or guns pointing at each other, or even just barren strips of land. Don’t they call it no-man’s land?” (Ghosh 2005, 148). She ends up questioning some of the fundamentals of her definition of nationalism:

But if there aren’t any trenches or anything, how are people to know? I mean, where’s the difference then? And if there’s no difference, both sides will be the same; it’ll be just like it used to be before, when we used to catch a train in Dhaka and get off in Calcutta the next day without anybody stopping us. What was it for all then—the partition and the killing and everything—if there isn’t something in between? (Ghosh 2005, 148-149)

By highlighting the fact that even after the partition there might not be any difference between the two regions across the border, the novel questions the ideology of nationalism through temporal and spatial images. One of the paramount characteristics of the ideology of nationalism is that it defines itself in opposition to other countries across the border (see Renan 1990, 8-22; see Gellner 1994, 63-70; see Hutchinson 1987). Ghosh deplores the division of the subcontinent by challenging and contesting the “myth of nationalism” (e.g. see Sethi 1999) on the Indian subcontinent, which has erected walls among heterogeneous ethnicities in the false garb of freedom and liberty. When Tridib’s brother Robi recollects Tridib’s death in Dhaka in a Bangladeshi restaurant in England, fifteen years later, he expresses bitterly the cynicism towards the new nation states, which is seminal to Ghosh’s view of the present-day subcontinent:

And then I think to myself, why don’t they draw thousands of little lines through the whole subcontinent and give every little place a new name? What would it change? It’s a mirage; the whole thing is a mirage. How can anyone divide memory? If freedom was possible, surely Tridib’s death would have set me free. (Ghosh 2005, 241)

By recollecting the events of 1964 and their role in shaping private and

public spaces, Ghosh gives a new perspective on personal and historical memory. Even the development of story “becomes a commentary on the ways in which histories get constructed” (Singh 2005, 163). This broader notion of history is, indeed, a recurring theme in Ghosh’s writing, as noted by Brinda Bose: “Ghosh’s fiction takes upon itself the responsibility of re-assessing its troubled antecedents, using history as a tool by which we can begin to make sense of—or at least come to terms with—our troubling present” (2001, 235). As the story develops, the strands of memory, history, space and place are woven into each other in a fine tapestry in a family chronicle about individuals between different cultural and national belongings. Bose adds:

In Ghosh’s fiction, the diasporic entity continuously negotiates between two lands, separated by both time and space—history and geography—and attempts to redefine the present through a nuanced understanding of the past. As the narrator in *The Shadow Lines* embarks upon a journey of discovery of roots and reasons, the more of the one he unearths leaves him with loss of the other. He is forced to conclude that knowing the causes and effects of that history which he had not fully apprehended as a child was not an end in itself. The metajourney that this novel undertakes follows the narrator—as he weaves and winds his way through a succession of once-imaginary homelands—into that third space where boundaries are blurred and cultures collide, creating at once a disabling confusion and an enabling complexity. No story—or history, for that matter—can be acceptable as the ultimate truth, since truths vary according to perspectives and locations. (2001, 239)

By introducing the idea of ‘third space,’ Bose draws our attention to the core of Ghosh’s perception of space and place above all kinds of boundaries in relation to history and memory. Ghosh’s narrator narrates various versions of nation and nationalism by tracking their effects on his family members, hence highlighting ordinary people’s confrontations with spatial hurdles. The narrator’s family history and their connections with people of ‘other’ cultures and ethnicities confirm that cultures communicate in the ‘third space’ no matter how intensely the communalists strive to undermine such connections and communications. Consequently, the narrator reconciles with Tridib’s death as a sacrifice as well as an irony.

6. Conclusion

The Shadow Lines is not solely a novel about dreamers like Tridib or displaced

individuals like Tha'mma, but more importantly about the plight of the Bengali diaspora (see e.g. Chakravarti 1996). However, the novel presents the Bengali diaspora on a wider scale by spreading the story over different countries and continents. By tracing a contrast between personal memory and political history and between the space of cultural interactions and the place of barbed wires, Ghosh's narrator offers different ways of reading larger political design of the fate of three nations—India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Finally, the narrator's movement back and forth in time and space is not merely a structural device; it is a means of reminding the reader that the partition perpetuates in the current political spheres of the divided subcontinent with Kashmir as a disputed territory. Hence, by remembering a family tragedy, the author makes the impact of past political events current and shakes the readers out of their apathy, so that they are able to think beyond the shadow lines and believe in shared spaces and places.

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**SHARING A FUTURE: LOOKING FROM CULTURAL
PERSPECTIVES AT POSSIBILITIES OF PAN-ASIANNES¹**

HIMADRI LAHIRI

Introduction

Geographers in recent times have critiqued the politics of 'earth labelling' through the constitution of continents. Martin W. Lewis and Karen E. Wigen, for instance, in their influential book *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* argue that continents are irrelevant from geographical points of view. Analysis of floral, faunal and tectonic factors from the perspective of Zoogeography and Geology, they observe, would render the traditional continental division untenable. The taxonomy of continents is seen as a geopolitically constructed discourse to support the European hegemonic designs. The construction of Asia – the name itself having its origin in European mythology – is intricately connected with this ideological design. Edward Said, on the basis of his short analysis of a pair of plays – Aeschylus's *The Persians* and Euripides's *The Bacchae* – observes that the two aspects of the Orient that distinguished it from the West in the plays mentioned above will remain essential motifs of European imagination: first, 'Europe is powerful and articulate; Asia is defeated and distant.... It is Europe that articulates the Orient'; secondly, the Orient is seen as 'insinuating danger' because rationality is 'undermined by Eastern excesses, those mysteriously attractive opposites to what seem to be normal values' (Said 57). Asia was posited as Europe's 'other', an entity which accommodates the opposite and undesirable identities. It is in this process that other religious, cultural and even political ideologies like Islam, Judaism and Communism were embedded in the 'other' site. As Said says, 'the Orient, when it was not merely a place in which one traded, was culturally, intellectually, spiritually outside Europe and European civilization' (Said 71). The creation of 'Asia', with all its Orientalist associations, validates the distinctive identity of Europe and its superiority over Asia, its immediate neighbour.

As part of the process of 'otherisation', Asia and its people have been stereotyped. Literary creation of characters like Charlie Chan, a detective of Chinese descent, in the American context and the popularity of the films based on his character and exploits – forty eight Charlie Chan films were made – indicate the reception level of stereotyped versions of 'Oriental' characters². Rachel C. Lee contends that popular magazines of

the 1910s characterized Asians as less evolved, and a mass of 'undifferentiated difference', as unclean, and finally as unknowable (Lee 249). She asserts that the journals of the decade often appropriated scientific rhetoric (mainly the rhetoric of evolution and sanitation) to argue that Asians should not be allowed to be assimilated into the fabric of Western humanity. Rohmer's thirteen *Fu Manchu* books, according to her, 'helped to justify the many violences in America directed towards Asians (economic discrimination, political disenfranchisement, physical assault, social segregation, and exclusion from immigration) by framing that violence as a necessary means to preserve the integrity of Western character' (Lee 260). Asia had even been an archive of knowledge about 'peoples of peculiar habits and odd and even monstrous physiognomies' (Menon 60). Although European travellers' visits to India, China and other parts of the continent during the medieval period and their immediate contact with the inhabitants of the areas widened the archive of European knowledge, there was no significant change in overall European attitude to Asia. Marco Polo's *Description of the World* (1324) is regarded by Donald Lach as 'the first comprehensive and authoritative account of the East produced before 1550' (qtd. in Menon 60) in Europe and it also brought Japan's existence to the European knowledge for the first time. For a long time the territorial and ideological configuration of Asia revolved round India. The concept began to change only with the European imperialist engagement with the continent. The imperialist desire necessarily presupposes the project of territorial expansion and of governance out of which a better picture of cartographic details and profiles of the peoples emerge. Day to day interaction with the people of a country dispelled much of the wild Orientalist assumptions nurtured throughout the ages but nevertheless the main driving force was sustained through reformed ideological formulations having its roots in the old Orientalist paradigms. Sridevi Menon foregrounds this aspect when she observes that 'Asia' was a later formulation, which absorbed the existing ideas regarding the Orient:

Asia as a defined geographic region did not emerge until the rise of European colonial expansion when imperial boundaries and notions of territoriality inscribed new politics. The Orient as an imagined landscape therefore predated 'Asia' and was intrinsically the site that informed 'Asia.' On the other hand, in the European consciousness, Asia could not exist without the Orient, since the cultural meanings that informed this region were drawn from an archive that preceded 'Asia.' On the other hand, not until the conceptualization of Asia as a geocultural

space by European imperial ambitions was the Orient's otherness increasingly narrated through discourses of race. (Menon 60)

While in the European imaginary and cartographic reality Asia existed and exists as a continent in order to justify Europe's superiority, there has been no equivalent passion among the Asians to identify themselves as Asians. Individuals, firmly located in the material conditions of the nation states, are mainly concerned with regional, religious, class and caste politics and hardly go beyond the national identities. Rustom Bharucha has rightly pointed out, 'In this turbulent domain encompassing any number of identarian debates around caste, community, religion, gender, region, language and nation, the belongingness to a larger imagined community called Asia does not exist' (Bharucha xvi).

Yet the name and icon of Asia is often invoked by Asians to exploit the European weakness for remote and exhilarating locale in Asia to advance their own material gains. Television advertisements such as 'Malaysia, truly Asia' broadcasted and telecasted by Malaysian Tourism and spread through the internet by Tourism India, is accompanied by visuals to attract Euro-American tourists. The carefully chosen words in the advertisement suggest an inclusive concept of Asia. While the words in the advertisement refer to a geographical entity, they also suggest the presence of an essence which can be extracted from that entity. This idea of an 'essence' of the continent is in fact an appropriation of the European concept that underlies the Orientalist paradigm and is displayed for the gaze of the Western tourists. In fact, the topographical differences within Asia are so pronounced and Asian nations are so varied and heterogeneous from religious, social and cultural points of view that a unified, undifferentiated, essentialist concept of Asia appears to be no more than a Western construction. Asians themselves, as has been mentioned earlier, are hardly aware of such an 'essence' which marks them off as different. On the contrary, there have been both intra-national conflicts (the Civil War in Sri Lanka, movement for democracy in Myanmar) and inter-nation rivalries and wars (Indo-Pakistan Wars, for instance). Issues like 'Partition of India' or the creation of an independent Bangladesh out of Pakistan have contributed to a considerable amount of political bitterness in the region. Japan's imperialist designs in the past have also been noted by scholars who regard them as an impediment in the realization of a greater unity. Menon's discussion of an aggressive variety of Japanese nationalism, for instance, indicates the dangers lurking in many of the existing discourses:

Convergence of Japanese military aspirations in the region with

its imaginative geography therefore prevents any sense of shared fraternal sympathies. Thus, for instance, Japanese racialisation of Koreans as inferior peoples and painful memories of Japanese occupation in Korea make an unmarked Asian identity in Asia impossible. (Menon 62)

In the context of such an environment, the question naturally crops up: how far is the concept of pan-Asian fraternity practicable? This article will try to explore the above question from cultural points of view. In the process, it will examine some pan-Asian discourses and their implications, and will discuss earlier attempts at forging an Asian fraternity in the American diasporic space. The success achieved through such attempts indicates the possibilities of forging a similar bond in Asia itself through cultural activities like building up theatre movements and publishing and circulating anthologies of writings from across different Asian countries.

The Pan-Asian Imagination

Historically, there have been attempts by the Asians to figure out the concept of Asia, but that has been usually embedded either in the nationalist ideology or in the anti-West rhetoric. As a corollary of such attempts, discourses of some kind of pan-Asianness has also surfaced. Rustom Bharucha in his book *Another Asia: Rabindranath Tagore and Okakura Tenshin* (2006) demonstrates how Okakura Tenshin's theory of a unified Asia was informed by a civilizational discourse which basically produced the thesis of the superiority of Japan. Tenshin advanced this 'One Asia' thesis in his book *The Ideals of the East* (1903) where he speaks eloquently of 'two mighty civilizations, the Chinese with its Communism of Confucius, and the Indian with its individualism of Vedas' which defy 'the Himalayan divide and unite the Asians in civilizational terms. His vision embraces three civilizations – India, China and Japan – Japan being most prominent one in his own scheme of things. He observes that 'not even the snowy barriers can interrupt for one moment that broad expanse of love for the Ultimate and the Universal which is the common thought-inheritance of every Asiatic race, enabling them to produce the great religions of the world'. Okakura saw Asia as a 'united living organism, each part depends on all the others, the whole breathing a single, complex life.' The cultural geography of Asia envisioned by him is 'an imaginary unity of shared ideals' (qtd. in Bharucha 16-17). The three crucial elements in Okakura's artistic pedagogy – tradition, nature and originality – are closely intersected, and none dominating over the others, but in the civilizational discourse he prioritizes Japan as the focal point where the two other

civilizations merge to create a unique pan-Asian model. Bharucha critiques his basic contention in the following way:

In Okakura's Asian Triangle, however, there is no such inner dynamism, with Japan positioned at the apex of the triangle, embodying in its artistic heritage the synthesis of Indian religion (represented by the 'individualism of the Vedas') and Chinese communitarian ethics (represented, somewhat misleadingly, by 'the Communism of Confucius'). Unlike the magnetic triangle of Okakura's aesthetic model where tradition, nature and originality impact on each other, there has been no such interaction in Okakura's civilizational model. Within his hierarchical framing, the civilization of India and China are primary sources of knowledge, but in the final analysis, rather like the tributaries of a river they flow into the mainstream of Japanese art, where Asia in all its diversities is 'protected' and 'restored'. (Bharucha 17)

Interestingly, Sister Nivedita, a disciple of Swami Vivekananda, who wrote an introduction for Okakura's book, views Asia as a metaphysical and spiritual idea rather than a territorial and political entity. The kind of 'febrile form of Japanese nationalism' which Bharucha's study of Okakura's *The Ideals of the East* has brought out is intrinsically problematic in the context of pan-Asian studies as it impedes a dialogic construction of collaborative efforts with the perception of possible fields of cultural interaction and people to people contact.

Menon too reveals that the Japanese elites in the nineteenth century posited the centrality of the Japanese in the scheme called *Toyoshi* or *Oriental history*. This is a counter discourse of Orientalism rooted in Japan's envisioning of itself as a civilizing and unifying force in East Asia. Taking the insights provided by Stefan Tanaka in his book *Japan's Orient: Rendering Pasts into History*, Menon observes that since 'the conception of *Toyo*, or the *Orient* delineates a geographic space identified in Asia, it is possible to construe the Japanese as historically thinking about the region in pan-Asian terms' (Menon 62). Aggressive pan-Asianness, based on the East versus West binary was also forged after World War I in response to the US racial policy against Chinese and Japanese immigrants. Thus, anti-Western impulse provided a basis for Japanese and Korean elites to share a pan-Asian ideology.

The narrowness of nationalist schemes is evident in the Japanese ideal of the East which has been discussed above. The same kind of

narrowness is also found in another form in Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir's call to unite against the West which, as Menon rightly points out, is based on the concept of an Asia forged through Muslim solidarity. His advocacy of pan-Asian Islamic nationalism is seen as an attempt towards consolidation of the Southeast Asia as the site of an 'Asian Renaissance'. Lee Kwan Yew of Singapore valorizes Confucianism as the civilizational discourse that defines Asia (Menon 61,77). Menon thus concludes from the above trends that the 'significance of being Asian in Asia then is contingent on the histories and political alliances being forged among nations in the region and in the integration of these alliances in the capitalist world system'(Menon 61). The same trend has been noticed by Bharucha also in course of his own active participation in inter-Asian theatre workshops and productions which were mostly centred in Singapore. He observes on the basis of his own experience that 'Asia-centricity could be the other side of the same coin as Eurocentricity' (Bharucha xv). He elaborates on how his own expectation of a pan-Asian cultural collaboration was belied:

What appeared a refreshing contrast to the Eurocentric discourse and practice of interculturalism, marked by appropriation, decontextualization, and cultural tourism, gradually began to take on more political dimensions as I became aware of the heavy investment in 'Asia' as state determined cultural capital. Over the years this capital has accumulated through accretions of intellectual and political discourse relating to Asian Values, the Asian Renaissance, and more recent propagation of New Asia, under whose aegis the state of Singapore has attempted to sell itself as 'the global city of the arts.' (Bharucha xv)

Underlying Bharucha's observations is his distrust of particular political, religious and capitalist ideologies that appropriates all forms of artistic-cultural activities in its proclaimed exercise of initiating and continuing a cultural dialogue in its own terms. Such attempts, for all practical purposes, subvert or sabotage pan-Asian dialogues.

Visions of Pan-Asian Dialogues

An effective cultural dialogue can perhaps be initiated not through state apparatus, which has its own interests to serve and has at its disposal tools to coerce, overtly or covertly, cultural activists who believe in transcultural dialogue and want to bridge the gaps existing between Asian nations. What is urgently needed is people-to-people contact because pan-Asianness cannot ensue only from state endeavours that, more often not, divide peoples rather than unite them. Cultural activists often have to

negotiate state prohibitions. Passports, visas and other documents of permission are used to great effect by state authorities for restrictive purposes, particularly with respect to people to people contact involving other nations with particular history of rivalry and bitterness. Not much has been done in Asia to promote cultural understanding between peoples at the ground level. That is perhaps because there has not been much of counter-constructions of the Asian identity by the Asians. At the literary-cultural level, a proliferation of attempts to project a pan-Asian image requires a perception of commonalities among Asians. There is, of course, enough evidence of historical intersections and common cultural traits which may be explored at the intellectual levels for the perception of the commonalities of the people. Since there are many Asias in Asia, and differences may outweigh the commonalities, attempts may initially be taken at the regional level (South Asia, or Southeast Asia, for instance) which may gradually embrace the whole of continent. Literary-cultural anthologies could provide a platform for multilayered discussion through multicultural and multinational writings with English as the common and unifying language. Translation would be an excellent means for understanding other cultures and for perceiving identity of cultural groups. Bilingual anthologies with indigenous writings and translated versions may be encouraged. There are many excellent short stories in different languages which promote the concept of transnational 'travels' which problematise the idea of 'foreignness' and thereby bring out human traits that triumph over narrow identitarian politics. Two such short stories, which demand translation into English and inclusion into anthologies, shall be discussed here. This will lead to the consolidation of pan-Asian efforts to improve 'Asian' identity and to the lessening of gaps between the local and the 'global'. Moreover, allowing plurality within unity would prevent monologic debates.

One model of achieving such consolidation may be through the conglomeration of different opinions and points of views. An anthology is a site where such multiple voices may enter into a dialogic relationship. Anthologies in fact in such a perspective have not received as much attention as they should have. The efficacy of the anthologies has been proved in the context of pan-Asian understanding in the American diaspora where, in the 1960s during the Civil Rights Movement, Asians felt it necessary to come together to contest the hegemony of the mainstream American culture. On the basis of an assumed sense of community women having ancestral roots in Asia too had the urge to consolidate. The anthologies were consciously planned as part of the politics of ethnicity and feminism, and

were published by small ethnic and feminist presses/collectives. Some such publishers are the Asian American Writers' Workshop, a non-profit collective with small financial resources, Calyx, 'an organization of dedicated sisters', Aunt Lute books, Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press and the like. Organized groups of committed women, like Women of South Asian Descent Collective and Asian Women United of California, undertook the task of editing some of the anthologies. The titles of the anthologies usually project the anger, anguish, resistance and the need for a strategic alliance: AIIIEEEEE!, The Big Aiiieeeee!, Charlie Chan is Dead, The Forbidden Stitch, Making Waves, Our Feet Walk the Sky, Home to Stay and so on. These anthologies present a wide variety of voices which interrogate stereotypes and hegemonic constructions of Asian men and women. They tried to build up cultural or gender coalitions as a strategy to counter attempts of controlling their voices. Jessica Hagedorn, a Filipino American writer, took upon herself the task of debunking the stereotypes and presenting a real picture of what Asians in America think, act, write and are like in reality. She edited an anthology of Asian American fiction significantly titled *Charlie Chan is Dead* (1993), where she blasts the 'demeaning legacy of stereotypes' like the Charlie Chan and Fu Manchu characters. Hagedorn notes the absence of counteractive efforts in the past, as the community had been unusually patient. She asserts that she 'created' the anthology for the 'selfish' reason that she wanted to read a book that had never been available to her in the past (Hagedorn xxx).³ However, prior to Hagedorn's anthology, Frank Chin, Jeffrey P. Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada and Shawn Wong collected some forgotten Asian American writers in a polemical anthology with the title *AIIIEEEEE!* (1974). These authors severely attacked the stereotyping of the Asians by the white Americans. The Asian is represented as one, to use Chin's words, 'utterly without manhood...at worst, the Asian American is contemptible because he is womanly, effeminate, devoid of all traditionally masculine qualities of originality, daring, physical courage and creativity' (qtd. in Cheung 237). This justifiably invited strong protests from Asian American feminist writers who label editors as 'masculinists'. In an article the noted Asian American feminist critic King-kok Cheung, for instance, has pointed out that the *AIIIEEEEE!* editors have in fact resorted to another type of stereotyping. They have, in her view, disparaged domestic efficiency as 'feminine' and slotted desirable traits such as originality, daring, physical courage and creativity under the rubric of masculinity (Cheung 237). Nevertheless *AIIIEEEEE!* and the subsequent volume published much later *Big AIIIEEEEE!* (1991) are important steps towards establishing a tradition of literary writings by Asians in the American diaspora. The earlier

volume set the tone of anger and frustration of the community for being excluded and discriminated. The editors observed that the white American culture pictured the yellow man as something that when wounded, sad, or angry, or swearing, or wondering whined, shouted or screamed “aiiiiii!” Asian America, so long ignored and forcibly excluded from creative participation in American culture, is wounded, sad, angry, swearing, and wondering, and this is his AIIIIIIII!!! It is more than a whine, shout or scream. It is fifty years of our whole voice. (Chan et al. vii-viii)

An interesting feature of the anthologies is that the editors or publishers, while stressing the uniqueness of Asian American experience do not deny the 'common threads' among different ethnic groups. They in fact celebrate the idea of cultural differences in the multicultural space. And they show an awareness of the broader perspectives within which they work. This is what Jane Singh, in her 'Foreword' to *Our Feet Walk the Sky* emphasizes,

It is through the voices in this volume that we begin to see how women of South Asian origin locate their positions within their respective communities, within wider interethnic networks, and within national and international, social, economic and political frameworks which impact upon women's lives, both in the United States and in South Asia.' (Singh vii)

While discussing how to approach an Asian American text Sau-lin Cynthia Wong refers to an approach which, allied with the 'race, class and gender school', offers a 'minority discourse framework' that 'shifts critical focus away from minority-white relations to minority-minority relations. Its premise is that shared historical experiences of oppression have created affinities among minorities that cannot be adequately addressed by a model centered on hegemonic culture' (Wong 4). This approach may be very relevant in the Asian geo-cultural context where the postcolonial countries have a shared history of subjugation and western domination. It is because of a perception of threat from the West that the need to fall back on pan-Asianism has been felt. Although political consolidation and solidarity may be an urgent necessity, more secure and permanent understanding will be on the literary-cultural front where possibilities of popular and activist support and building of infrastructure may be explored. It may, however, be mentioned that in Asia no proper, tangible literary efforts like launching anthologies have come to our notice. Only a few very preliminary, but potentially fruitful, attempts have been made. I shall mention here three anthologies that are the result of transcultural cooperation at the broad

regional level (i.e. South Asia or South East Asia) and which may bloom into full-grown pan-Asian literary fraternity in future.

A coming together of people of diverse backgrounds, however, is not easy. Bonding has to be created and sustained on the basis of a genuine urge. Wong rightly asserts,

Nevertheless this subsumption of identity as Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Japanese etc. in the larger pan-Asian identity has to be voluntarily adopted and highly context-sensitive in order to work; it is not meant to obscure the unique experiences of each subgroup, but merely to provide an instrument for political mobilization under chosen circumstances. (Wong 6)

Wong furthermore, in referring to the Asian American resistance to an official form designed by the US Bureau of the Census for 1990 census in which one could write in specific labels under the umbrella category of 'Asian or Pacific Islander' observes that the success of the resistance ensued from the collective endeavour:

In this instance, Asian American subgroup acted in coalition but the goal of such action is to ensure that interests of diverse subgroups do not get erased: they united with each other in order to protect their separate interests. In doing so, they illustrate one social science theory that sees ethnic groups as interest groups – political coalitions – rather than anthropological, cultural, linguistic or religious ones. (Wong 7)

While the political coalition of the Asian groups in the diaspora was prominently visible, the less visible but equally important was the 'emergent and evolving textual coalition'. Wong, interestingly, conceives of 'a professional coalition of Asian American critics' who would promote the textual coalition of the creative writers. The approach of the critics would be thematic mainly because there intersections and intertextuality could be discovered. Wong's own approach, as she says, is based on 'contexts' and 'intertexts' (Wong 10). By using the word 'contexts' she conveys the 'indispensability of historical knowledge to any responsible reading of the corpus' (Wong 10) and the pluralization of the word indicates that 'there is no single, conclusive version of Asian American history to anchor their works and safeguard "correct" readings' (Wong 10). She adopts Julia Kristeva's concept of intertextuality, which regards every text to be constructed as 'a mosaic of quotations' and 'the absorption and transformation of another' (Kristeva 37), and explores a wide range of

possible interests for the Asian American works:

What interests me first and foremost is how mutual allusion, qualification, complication, and transmutation can be discovered between texts regarded as Asian American, and how a sense of an internally meaningful literary tradition may emerge from such an investigation. (Wong 11)

The texts grouped under Asian American rubric, she says, 'build upon, allude to, refine, controvert, and resonate with each other. In doing so they contribute to a sense of an Asian American literary tradition' (Wong 12).

If the Asians can build up a 'textual coalition' in the American diaspora, there is no reason why the same example cannot be followed in Asia proper. One can envisage a 'textual coalition' where the emphasis will be to do away with the sense of distance and mutual 'foreignness' and establish a pan-Asian fraternal space. This can best be done in English which has wide currency in most of the countries by virtue of their being ex-colonies of the British Empire. In view of the rapid growth of economic and commercial prowess of some Asian nations, the medium may as well be a very convenient vehicle for artistic creations. There are some zones in Asia where nations have a history of common cultural traits or even share a common historical trauma. Anthologies based on creative and critical writings may create an environment of understanding and critical revaluations.

(Re)writing Asia and Why It Matters

In Asia proper, there is no essentialist demand for cultural nationalism, nothing that can be compared to the situation which gave rise to the Asian American identity during and after the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. But the mere fact that the diverse Asian national groups can come together gives hope to similar cultural consolidation in Asia. Considering the fact that friendly relations existed between nations and travellers of various hues reinforced the economic and cultural connections, there is no reason why the same sentiments cannot be reasserted. Reading literary works of other countries is a kind of cultural travel and cultural mapping that is free of hegemonic trappings. If the works of different countries can be brought together within the scope of anthologies, the strong bonds based on commonalities can be established, and the sense of 'foreignness' and mutual incompatibilities can be dissipated.

There is already a tradition of creative writings in English in different Asian countries. Despite internal oppositions to the English language, mainly

for nationalistic reasons, English has thrived as a medium of communication and creative literatures.⁴ For historical reasons it has developed roots in different countries and globalization has reinforced an effective circulation of the language not only in Asia but also in the countries all over the world. The economic prowess gained by the Asian countries in the last one decade or two has further developed the chances of the English language as the link language. In such a context, English seems to be the natural choice for the cultural activists in Asia. Anthologists like Mohammad A. Quayum, however, have some reservations regarding the narrow technological and economic spirit which dominates in Singapore and Malaysia and kills the spirit of imagination (Quayum xi). He also mentions Edwin Thumboo, one of the early poets in Singapore, who is pained to observe the overriding commercial fascination of Singapore and how it affected the writer. But both Quayum and Thumboo underline the importance of English in literary exercises. Thumboo observes in the 'General Introduction' to *The Fiction of Singapore* (1990) that the 'position [of English] as pivotal, bridge language, has strengthened [in Singapore] since 1985' (qtd. in Quayum xiii). Its importance has been acknowledged and accepted in many Asian countries. John McRae points out that

the geography of writing in English is extending its boundaries to grow far beyond the old colonial dimensions. Writing in English is not the prerogative only of countries which have emerged from British or American colonial domination. In Thailand, for example, Pira Sudham writes in English....In Indonesia, where the colonial presences were Dutch and Portuguese, linguistic identity and cultural roots are constantly under discussion and English writing although very much the expression of a minority of writers and readers, is the major vehicle for international recognition. (MacRae 11-12)

McRae points out that the South East Asian countries, principally Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines (with Myanmar/Burma on the sidelines), have found it useful to group themselves together for some political and economic purposes or for tourism. Although each of these nations has its distinct and separate culture(s), the grouping is also useful in terms of cultural identity and world perception (MacRae 9). McRae observes, 'If South East Asia is now beginning to see itself as embodying some kind of cultural, political unity, it is largely as a reaction to Western, colonial perceptions....Now that economic factors have empowered the area it is no longer possible to recycle tired old concepts such as "post-colonial" or even "developing" to describe the cultural ferment South

East Asia embodies' (MacRae 10). McRae thinks also that English, traditionally considered to be the language of imperialism, has to be seen now as the link language. It has a transformative role to play now: 'more than just mere communication, more than just the necessary language of airlines and business, English can, ironically, become the language which will put South East Asia on the world map as a cultural presence' (MacRae 11). As the local strength of the local languages matures, so also must develop an awareness of the polyglot's strength of a language: 'English has always been a polyglot language, and polyglot culture, able like chameleon to adapt to an incorporate myriad influences in every corner of the globe' (MacRae 11). In view of this, English can be employed for 'good, world class translations' and translators, to bring local writings to a universal readership, should take up translation projects. McRay argues that the 'best and the most universal writing starts out as local' and that its 'universal frame of reference comes later. What unites readers and writers is the shared element of humanity enriched by the endless diversity of culture, setting and belief' (MacRae 14).

In spite of English having gained an advantageous position in respect of inter-cultural transactions, very few English language anthologies have been published so far. Quayum has edited a collection of stories entitled *In Blue Silk Girdle: Stories from Malaysia* (1998) and added a valuable introduction to it. Deepika Mukherjee, Kirpal Singh and Quayum co-edited *The Merlion and the Hibiscus: Contemporary Short Stories from Singapore and Malaysia* (2002). The importance of contributions like *Silverfish New Writing 6: New Writing from Malaysia, Singapore and Beyond* (2006) edited by Dipika Mukherjee and *S.E. Asia Writes Back! Contemporary Writings of the Pacific Rim* (1993) cannot be overemphasized. All these further the understanding of the socio-cultural reality of the area. But the kind of anthology which goes a long way in creating an immediate impact on the people-to-people relationship is the type of collaborative anthology brought out by art historian Geeti Sen: *Crossing Boundaries* (1997).

That programmatic anthologies planned with the purpose of understanding and fostering regional inter-national fraternity can be very effective is exemplified by Sen's book. This volume includes contribution from three countries – India, Pakistan and Bangladesh – and offers an update on cultural contacts between them. The anthology celebrates the fiftieth year of Indian independence by 'crossing the borders – to find common cause and shared experiences in identity with Pakistan and Bangladesh' (Sen 7). Sen puts emphasis on 'the sharing of identities' and

expresses hope that 'we can build upon new futures where India forfeits its role as the big brother.... But we have a long way to go before we can become once again, in vernacular English "same to same"' (Sen 8). The anthology looks at the history of the cultural subcontinent and argues that the cultural link, which sustains human relationships in the region, has a regenerative role to play. Below, in the last section, I will attempt to trace the recent history of theatre movement between the three countries that created a healthy attitude of human understanding. As Sen contends, to resist the growing fundamentalism and the attempt to combine religion and politics to create a new, false identity, 'theatre has engaged in the wider political movement to impart alternative messages' (Sen17). Madeeha Gauhar's article 'Crossing Frontiers: Shared Concerns in Alternative Theatre' which is one of the most important articles in Sen's volume gives us a detailed picture of the effort of the theatre group of the subcontinent to break down the limited vision of the politician. This will be discussed in some detail because theatre can be one field where interactions may take place effectively and which can spread to a wider area and therefore potentially create a pan-Asian fraternal space.

Gauhar's essay speaks of the success of a Pakistani theatre group called Ajoka which had braved the prohibitory environment in Pakistan during the martial law regime in order to realize its objectives. Theatre has never been encouraged in Pakistan and non-traditional theatre groups, which interacted with transnational ones, were looked upon with suspicion. Commenting on the role of secular theatre in Pakistan, Fawzia Afzal Khan observes that 'the ruling Islamist ideology of Pakistan, the state's very *raison de'être* is intrinsically hostile to the fine and performing arts in general, and theatre in particular' (Khan 2). He has the following explanation to offer:

This antipathy is because of the latter's [i.e. theatre's] potential to question all belief systems and because of the foregrounding of the body, upon which performance is predicated – especially when it leads to an 'exposure' of the female body.... Thus it is combination of Islamist ideology, the vested interests of military and civilian (feudal) ruling elites, and profound anti-cultural bias of the Muslim middle class left behind in Pakistan after Partition, that has resulted in a contempt for dance and theatre, which are seen as 'borrowing' elements of 'Hindu' culture and life. This is especially so since one of the ideological imperatives of post-partition Pakistan was to carve out a cultural activity that was totally separate and distinct from India, and to insist on a denial of any shared common heritage (Khan 2).

Such an environment restrictive for smooth flow of cultural ideas is regressive in a rapidly globalizing world. Gauhar comments 'even today when the world has become a global village and the communications revolution is breaking all frontiers, the Pakistani establishment is still determined to blindly protect whatever it has defined as Pakistan's ideological and national interest' (Gauhar 251).

The specificity of historical background relating to the origin of neighbouring nations may therefore affect the growth of cultural understanding in a region, in this case involving three nations in South Asia, which were at one time parts of the same nation. The history of the birth and development of Ajoka Theatre testifies to this fact. I shall dwell a bit on Ajoka's activities, as described by Gauhar in the anthology mentioned above, because it appears to be indicative of what secular forces can achieve even in the face of surveillance by state agencies. Most noteworthy is its attempts to reach out to similar forces in the neighbouring countries for a consolidation of wider cultural understanding. In her essay, Gauhar – the lady behind Ajoka Theatre – brings out the dynamics of the activities of the state apparatus in Pakistan which operates to suppress 'deviant' cultural activities. Religious considerations play a large part in the determination of Pakistani state politics and state policies. The resulting attitude of politics of binarism and hate restricts, even prevents, literary and cultural exchanges. The fact that cultural activism by ordinary middle class citizens, many of them intellectuals, can overcome such 'politics of hate' speaks highly of their intellectual vitality and their conviction in freedom – the 'rights of man' – and the relevance of border crossing.

Ajoka's activities, I would suggest, may inspire emulation by other organisations in other countries, as its agenda no doubt indicates a gesture towards possibilities of sharing a future based on interactive motives. Ajoka's activities across South Asia have been at two levels. It established and fostered personal contacts through workshops and festivals at the one level. At the other level, the involved persons worked together on each other's scripts or joint productions. Gauhar recounts:

There was an attempt to institutionalise the interaction through the South Asian Theatre Committee (SATCO), established in Lahore in 1992 when the Asian Cultural Forum for Development (ACFOD) organised a South Asian Theatre Festival. This festival enabled Pakistani audiences and theatre workers to see theatre from Nepal, Sri Lanka, India and Bagladesh, and also provided theatre activists to have interaction with the visiting actors/

directors. SATCO decided to organise festivals in the region and facilitate contacts between theatre groups. (Gauhar 253)

Second and Third SATCO festivals took place in Dhaka in 1993 and Kathmandu in 1995, respectively. There were other occasions for sharing experiences with South Asian theatre activists, for example, the Centre for Policy Dialogue organised South Asian Dialogue in Dhaka in February 1997, where effective discussions took place between theatre activists and intellectuals. An interesting multi-national experiment for Ajoka was *The Sixth River*. The play, written by Shahid Nadeem of Ajoka Theatre and directed by Indian theatre director Anuradha Kapoor, had a multi-national cast that included Govind Singh Rawat of Sarwanam group from Nepal, and Vidya from India, the rest was from Ajoka itself. Gauhar says:

The play's theme was communal harmony and it castigated the insane violence committed in the name of religion or nations. The play was performed in Urdu, Hindi and Nepali and effectively linked the spiritual and cultural bonds of the three countries and their religions. The play was performed at the People's Plan for the ('the' has to be deleted) Twenty First Century assembly in Bangkok. The collaborative production and theme of the play became more significant as the Babri Mosque demolition took place only a few days before the performance, and led to the destruction of mosques and temples all over South Asia. (Gauhar 255-256)

I should also mention *Dukhini*, a play about the trafficking of Bangladeshi women to Pakistan. It was also a collaborative project between Ajoka Theatre and the Bangladesh Institute of Theatre Arts (BITA), a Chittagong-based group. Shahid Nadeem wrote the script, using research material collected in both countries. The play was directed by Sara Zakir of a Dhaka-based group called Nagorik. This project was particularly significant not only for transcending cultural and language barriers, but because of the history of relations between the two countries. Gauhar comments that the main challenge for the actors was to translate parts of the scripts into Bengali and to make the rest of it simple enough to be generally understandable for Bangladeshi and Pakistani audiences. It was necessary on the part of the Pakistani actors to learn a little Bengali and on the part of the Bangladeshi actors to learn some Urdu. *Dukhini*, moreover, was the first attempt to address the amnesia regarding the atrocities committed in the then East Pakistan during the Pakistani army action in 1971. The Pakistani actors were a bit nervous because of the memory of the carnage.

Before the play started on Shilpa Kala Academy Stage in Dhaka in 1993,

one of us stepped forward and expressed our deep anguish at the crimes committed in the name of the Pakistani people. This was perhaps the first public apology to the Bangladeshi people by Pakistanis. Once this barrier was transcended, the barriers of language or culture were easy to cross....Now that we have worked together in bilingual collaborative production of *Dukhini*, we feel no river is unbridgeable'. (Gauhar 258)

Antidotes against 'Foreignness': Two Case Studies

The concept of 'foreignness' in the strict sense of the term is also responsible for a lack of understanding between peoples of different nations. There are literary works which deal with this aspect of the issue and suggest an angle of humanism which to a great extent creates a sense of fraternity. Such works need to be translated into English and included in anthologies. Here we shall dwell on two 'foreigners' – they are not permanent settlers in India – in two Indian short narratives written in regional languages – Rabindranath Tagore's 'Kabuliwala' written in Bengali and Mahadevi Verma's 'Chini Pheriwala' (second part of her book *Smriti Rekhaon Me*) written in Hindi.⁵ Both narratives were made into Bengali films – the first by Tapan Sinha (*Kabuliwala*, year: 1956) and the latter by Mrinal Sen (*Neel Akasher Niche*, year: 1959). The first story projects a 'Kabuliwala' – a man from Kabul in Afghanistan – as a prototypical father figure – while in the latter a man from China is presented as a brother figure. In both the stories the protagonists pine, vicariously, for kinship relationship with Indians, thereby ignoring the shadow lines that exist between peoples of two nations. The two narratives show that, despite popular misconceptions regarding 'foreign' characters, true understanding can be reached between human beings belonging to two cultures and nationalities, transcending class barriers in the process.

One problem in dealing with the 'other', generally involves certain amount of exoticization. He or she is made part of another, unfamiliar culture having no or negligible point(s) of intersection. In the relationship, a hierarchical order is established. In the stories discussed here, the unfamiliar 'foreign' protagonists are conceived of as universal. The narrators in both the stories therefore draw the alien characters closer through human compassion. Both the stories acknowledge linguistic-cultural gaps and admit of prevalent mistrust of and prejudice against these characters. Tagore accepts *Kabuliwala*'s propensity to violence but in his story, through the strategy of authorial/narratorial distance from such misconceptions, an

attempt is made to dismiss the popular mistrust but at the same time he admits its existence. In Verma's story, there is a progress from initial stage of stereotyping to a gradual realization of the human traits of the Chinaman.

Rabindranath Tagore's short story 'Kabuliwala' written in Bengali is a first-person narrative. The narrator, an author by profession, describes how his five-year-old talkative daughter Mini befriended Rahmat who used to sell dry fruits, moving on foot from house to house in Calcutta. Rahmat who had left his own little daughter in Kabul grew very fond of Mini. His gift of dry fruits dispelled Mini's initial fears that his 'big bag' (jhuli) carried some abducted children in it. Mini's mother too had her own share of apprehension, which no amount of reasoning could allay:

When I tried to laugh away her suspicion, she posed me some questions one after another, 'Has nobody's child been ever kidnapped? Is there no slave trade in the land of Kabul? Is it absolutely impossible for a hefty Kabul to carry away a child?'(Tagore 342; my trans)

However, despite the narrator's patriarchal intervention, Mini's intimacy with Rahmat continued. The conversation sessions between the young girl and the grown-up man usually revolved round some pet topics.

...as soon as my daughter saw Rahmat, she would ask, laughing, 'Kabuliwala, O Kabuliwala, what do you have in your hanging bag?'Rahmat would laugh and respond, unnecessarily adding a nasal tone, 'An elephant, of course'. (Tagore 341; my trans)

He would also talk about the inhospitable house of the in-laws about which Mini did not have the faintest idea and joked about how he would beat up the 'unknown animal' called sasur ('father-in-law') who, she must have assumed, might be in all probability a fearful figure. This innocent relationship was interrupted when Rahmat was imprisoned for stabbing a person, who lied about a loan he had taken from Rahmat. In his absence, Rahmat's memory began to fade from the mind of Mini and her family. Mini in the mean time grew up and her marriage was arranged. After a gap of eight years, Rahmat was released from jail and visited Mini's house on her wedding day. He perhaps had the impression that nothing had changed during his imprisonment and that Mini was still the little talkative girl. So he was shocked to hear that it would not be possible for him to meet Mini on that auspicious occasion. When the narrator wanted to pay for the gift of some grapes and raisin he had bought for Mini, Rahmat said,

'Listen, sir, as you have a daughter, so do I have one in my own country. I recall her face and bring some fruits for your daughter, I don't come here to sell the fruits'. Saying this he brought out of his big loose shirt a piece of an old, dirty paper from somewhere near his heart. He unfolded the paper very carefully and placed that on my table with both his hands. I saw the impression of a small hand on the paper. It is not a photograph, neither is it an oil painting, it is rather the impression of a sooty hand on the paper. Rahmat comes to Calcutta every year to sell dry fruits with this memento of his daughter kept in close proximity to his heart – as if the touch of the soft hand of the child spreads a heavenly bliss through his huge, pining heart. (Tagore 344; my trans)

The narrator, touched by his story, called Mini from the indoors. She appeared in her Bengali bridal dress. Rahmat failed to continue the old dialogue in the same old spirit. He realized that his daughter too must have grown up like Mini and that he would have to re-establish his old ties with her. The narrator felt that there was no difference between him and Rahmat and that Rahmat too was a father like him. He requested him to go back to his daughter. Curtailing the budget of the marriage ceremony, he offered some money to Rahmat for his trip back home.

Mahadevi Verma's 'Chini Pheriwala' too, like Tagore's 'Kabuliwala', is a first-person narrative about the female narrator's sisterly relationship with a Chinese pheriwala ('hawker') who visited India during the pre-independence period to sell Chinese-made silk wares. The story opens with the narrator's observation on the mysterious similarities in the appearances of all Chinese – they all look alike. They share identical physiological features like flat faces, small eyes, yellow complexion and so on. 'From the perspectives of their physiological shape, dresses and so on these people from a distant land appear to be just machine-driven dolls' (Verma 10; my trans.). It appears, therefore, that she in the beginning views the Chinese as 'others' as the emphasis appears to be on the 'difference' which makes them inscrutable. Her observations reflect, at the surface level, the bewilderment of the Indians at the exotic otherness of the Chinese, and the physiological difference often disrupts and defers attempts to know these 'others' and to enter into socio-cultural dialogue with them.

The narrator, however, soon shifts his attention to a particular Chinese and finds human qualities in him that dispels the sense of otherness. She met this Chinese in front of her house in Allahabad and she disliked his calling her memsahib ('translation of the term' in the sense of 'madam'

to show respect but the word also refers to a British woman, and has therefore a colonial connotation). This address sounded to her as non-Indian because Indian women are in the habit of being called 'mother', 'sister', 'daughter' and so on. Her irritation became evident when she refused to buy anything that was 'foreign' as she did not use foreign goods.

The word 'foreign' (Main bideshi – 'foreign' – nahi kharidte, meaning 'I don't buy things foreign') pained him infinitely as he wondered in astonishment, Ham foreign hain? Ham to China se aata hai ('Am I a foreigner? I have come from China'). She said, Nahi chahie bhai! ('I don't require anything, my brother!'). He was elated by the address bhai ('brother') and from that point onwards he began to consider her as his 'sister'.

The Chinese, however, missed the nuance of the word bhai ('brother') which is used even in neutral contexts, having nothing to do with any kinship relationship. Spurred by an emotional upsurge, he went on keeping contact with the narrator, told her of his past and the relationship erased the differentiating factors like the national identity.

Interestingly, the idea of 'foreignness' has been problematized here. Perhaps, as the story seems to suggest, all foreigners are not foreign. The narrator's objection to foreign goods was the nationalist outcome of her resistance to colonialist British subjugation, an aspect which has been forcefully brought out by Mrinal Sen's film version Neel Akasher Niche ('Under the Blue Sky') where the lady is made to address a public gathering that was later raided by the police. The Chinese, who would later go to China to join his own nationalist struggle against foreign subjugation helped her flee the police. At one level, therefore, these two persons (who may be regarded as the representative of their nations) collaborated against the 'foreigner', the colonialist-imperialist force, reaching an understanding against the subjugating forces.

At the level of the plot, Verma's story is a narrative of brother-sister relationship complicated by the implications of national differences of the characters. What is interesting here is that the 'foreigner' here, like that in 'Kabuliwala', pines for a vicarious kinship relationship as he saw in the narrator the reflection of his own sister, who was forcibly inducted in the flesh trade and was lost forever. As in Tagore's story, the narrator in 'Chini Pheriwala' helped the Chinese go back to China – to be reunited not with the loved one like a daughter, as in 'Kabuliwala', but to the nation itself which he regarded as 'the only centre of all affection'(Verma 18). In both the stories the emphasis is on the element of compassion and empathy which transcends narrow borderlines of nations and helps people meet

each other on humanitarian grounds.

The film adaptation of the story made some significant changes. The background is shifted from Allahabad to Calcutta. Even though the Chinese was a temporary migrant, he is placed in the Chattawalla Gully which is part of the location of the diasporic Chinese in Calcutta. As pointed out by Jawhar Sircar, the original Chinatown was in Central Calcutta – around Bentinck Street, Phears Lane and the adjoining part of Rabindra Sarani, which has been overtaken by a second one at Tangra in east Calcutta (Sircar 65). Chattawalla Gully is also part of the original Chinatown and it is the background of some of the stories about Calcutta Chinese in Kwai-yun Li's *The Palm Leaf Fan and Other Stories* (2006), a pioneering book in the sense that it is the first exclusive representation of the Chinese diasporic community in Calcutta. By placing the Chinese in this locality, Mrinal Sen, the director of this Bengali film *Neel Akasher Niche*, has undoubtedly given an artistic credibility to the story.

By introducing new characters which were not there in Verma's story – those of the narrator's husband and a servant – Mrinal Sen reinforces the element of resistance to a smooth process of bridging of differences. They stereotyped the Chinese by pointing out their perpetual untrustworthiness and their opium peddling careers. It is only through the lady's determined effort that all such hindrances were overcome and a healthy relationship between a sister and brother was established.

Conclusion

The above narratives offer us a roadmap to be followed for a closer understanding of other peoples across national borders. It has been argued earlier that it is through common man's efforts that a strong fraternal space can be carved. It is true that at the governmental level initiatives may be undertaken to build up platforms like ASEAN or SAARC but the benefits derived from such efforts must percolate to the popular level. A people's government can provide a friendly environment in which creative activities can be undertaken to bridge the gulf that may exist between nations. Cultural exchange programmes are a very good means for promoting better understanding of other cultures. That government funding can be utilized in an effective way is shown by Sahitya Akademi, the National Academy of Letters in India. It instituted, for instance, the Anand Coomaraswamy Fellowship of the Sahitya Akademi to promote research on Art, Culture, Literature, History and Social Sciences by Asian scholars. Azad N. Shamatov, Senake Bandarnyake, Chie Nakane and Mami Yamada are some of the recipients of this Fellowship. Through their lectures and

interactive sessions with writers and academics in India, the Fellows offer a picture of the literatures and cultures of their countries and take back with them a better knowledge of the country they visit. Mami Yamada, a Japanese writer who was a recipient of this Fellowship last year, for instance, in a lecture in New Delhi on 29 October 2007 elaborated an analogy between the Japanese and Indian deities. According to her, Japanese goddess Benzei Ten (ben means 'speech', zei means 'talent' and ten means 'deva' or 'goddess'), who is a goddess of music and war, holds, like her Indian counterpart Saraswati, goddess of learning and music, a musical instrument like the Indian veena which is known in Japanese as biwa (Sahitya Akademi: Bi-monthly Newsletter 25). Areas of commonalities can be discovered through explorations of such cultural analogies. This in its turn can minimize the chances of stereotyping the 'other' and pave the way for creation of a better relationship. Another effort of Sahitya Akademi, which created possibilities of sharing cultural products, may also be mentioned here. An Indian writers' delegation visited China in September 2007 on a Sahitya Akademi sponsored cultural exchange programme. The delegates discussed the similarities and differences between the two countries in terms of their linguistic landscape and China's cultural contacts with India and other neighbouring countries. They were informed that China imported many Indian serials and showed them with dubbings in Chinese which had become very popular. Indian writers of the past like Rabindranath Tagore and Premchand are still much respected figures. But there are not many translations of Indian English fiction writers – a fact that was recognized by the Chinese counterparts as a big gap. In a country like China, where English as a language does not yet have a popular base, works of translation is the best possible way for communication. It is no wonder, therefore, that the Shanghai Writers' Association and P.E.N. at Shanghai have been involved in considerable amount of work through exchange, particularly with immediate neighbours like Japan, and through translation programmes. In their meeting with the Indian delegates, the Association expressed its hope that 'translation traffic between Indian languages and Chinese would make our two cultures and literature come closer'(Sahitya Akademi: Bi-monthly Newsletter 9). The members of the Indian delegation asked questions related to, among others, the steps being taken to encourage translation of Chinese texts into other languages and about the circulation of journals and magazines. The Newsletter report goes:

An important idea emerged from the discussion that the only ISO certified transliteration package for Chinese language was from Chinese characters into Roman, and that it was high time

the Indian government thought of an authenticated and ISO-certified Devanagari transliteration system for its 230-odd speech sounds and combinations. This would greatly facilitate reproduction, writing and pronunciation of all Chinese names in their original form, as there are numerous distortions in these in both Indian print and mass media, and in the text-books as they come through English (Sahitya Akademi: Bi-monthly Newsletter 7).

It is through such cultural exchanges that we come to figure out areas of difficulties in the matter of understanding other cultures. Chances of not only mispronunciations but also misrepresentations can be minimized through implementations of the ideas and projects born out of such close interactions. This largely depends on the government funding.

We should take full advantage of such cultural exchange activities but the initiative should be taken to the grassroots level. We are not fully aware that in many Asian countries there already exist strong cultural ties that need to be reinvigorated. Ashutosh Bhattacharya in a book titled *Sundari Indonesia* ('Beautiful Indonesia') – published in 1976 but not much in circulation now – maintains that the vigour of Indian civilization that once spread to South East Asian countries is still to be found there. He went to Indonesia as a representative of the Government of India to attend a seminar organized there on the occasion of the first World Ramayana Festival in 1971. The book he wrote after coming back to India is a commentary on how close the South Asians and South East Asians are from the point of view of culture. Ramayana, the great Indian epic, is a significant link among these nations. The festival itself presented Ramayana dances performed by the dance troupes from different countries like India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma, Malaysia, Singapore, Cambodia, Philippines and the like and in the process showed how strongly could this cultural aspect bind the people of this region together. He toured the countryside of Indonesia and observed Ramayana dances performed in the courtyards of village temples. So strong indeed is the Ramayana connection that a kind of 'Ramayana tourism' is being promoted now in a country like Sri Lanka. Differences of religion were no bar in assimilating the influence of this cultural aspect. It has indeed percolated into the common cultural life of the nations. This is what should be projected in achieving a focal point of commonality. The Asians are not mostly well aware of their common strength – their cultural ties that go into centuries and that had spread throughout a good part of the continent to be strengthened by the common mass. It is the political difference at the governmental levels that

clouds this aspect of the cultural commonalities among the nations. If Asia is to share a future, it has to initiate inter-national dialogues and build cultural platforms which will facilitate the process of coming together.

Notes:

1. This article was originally written, and submitted for publication, in 2008 as a chapter of a book to be edited and published by Ulrike Middendorf. The book never came out. The final shape of the article owes much to her useful suggestions and meticulous editing. I am immensely indebted to her.
2. Elaine H. Kim tells us how Earl Derr Biggers' Charlie Chan novels and Sax Rohmer's Fu Manchu novels contributed to the formation of contemporary American national attitude towards Asians. Rohmer's characters Dr. Fu Manchu is represented as having an inordinate lust for power. He is ready to use any means to achieve his goal of overthrowing the white race. The drugs invented by him can transform white men into yellow people or corpses into zombies, who would blindly follow Fu Manchu's instructions. Similarly, Charlie Chan was also a very popular character in fictions and films. Kim catalogues the reasons for his popularity among the white Americans: (i) the humour of incongruity (an overweight Chinese occupying the unexpected position of a police inspector); (ii) humour of speech (pidgin and pseudo-confucian aphorisms); (iii) presence of mysterious and exotic chinatown; and (iv) public approval of a non-threatening, non-competitive, asexual ally of the white man. (See Kim 18). Parts of the information, ideas, and language used on this point is taken from my Ph.D thesis mentioned in the 'Work Cited' of this article.
3. The discussion on Asian American anthologies as a platform/coalition has largely been taken from my doctoral thesis cited in the 'work cited.'
4. In Malaysia, for instance, emphasis on 'Bahasa Melayu' – renamed 'Bahasa Malaysia' after May 1969 riots – which became the lingua franca and the national language, affected the spread of English that had been in the nation for about two centuries. Mohammad A. Quayum explains the situation thus: 'First, in spite of its long historical presence, English is still considered an “alien” language in this part of the world, rooted neither in the soul nor in the soil. Second, because of its role in the colonial era when English was used as an instrument of oppression, nationalists often cast aspersions on the language and castigate those who write in it. They, albeit falsely and unfairly, accuse these writers of being cultural anomalies, looking

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SHADOW LINES AND THE GHOSH OEUVRE

ABHINABA CHATTERJEE

The Shadow Lines (TSL) is the perhaps the most acclaimed novel of Amitav Ghosh, which happens to be only his second novel. Since then Ghosh has gone on to write several other novels, including the recent *Ibis Trilogy*. This paper attempts to identify and analyse the influence of *TSL* in the making of the oeuvre of Amitav Ghosh. In doing so, it will examine and analyse how the major themes of *TSL* continue to influence his later novels and how the later novels can lead the reader to newer interpretations of *TSL*, that, in a sort of way, paved the way to the fame that Ghosh enjoys.

TSL, like its author, is interdisciplinary. It encompasses several themes, such as postcolonialism, border-crossing, historicism, emigration, exile and cultural displacement. The later novels of Amitav Ghosh continue to explore and elaborate the same themes and this, I believe, is done with the intention to suggest that the issues of culture and national boundaries are illusory, as the title of the novel suggests.

Ghosh and Colonial History

It is interesting to observe how a historian and a novelist treat the subject of history. A novelist's relationship to the past becomes substantially different from the historian's because the former approaches history through the characters he creates. This goes without saying that in most respects the novelist's understanding of the subject is far less comprehensive, far less accurate than that of the historian. However, the novelist who has created his character proceeds with an intuition, to demonstrate the logic of how a certain character would apprehend the events of history. Viewing it this way, we find that there are also some respects in which seeing the past through the prism of a character's experience allows for a kind of wholeness which is unavailable to the historian.

Ghosh adopts a complex inversion of the subaltern method that involves two processes: one, the selection of small, neglected events from the national story in a concession to subaltern practice –the little narrative against the grand; and two, the neglect by the narrative of some aspect of these stories. He does this by choosing his historical area carefully, keeping some part of it silent and invisible and then meditating on silence as it is revealed as a fictional and historical necessity. In *TSL* Tridib's death is a

silent moment in the narrator's memory that has to be retrieved and understood so that Tridib's dominating presence in his life may also be exorcised. In *The Hungry Tide (HT)* the marginal highly personalised genre of the diary through which the Morichjhapi incident is recounted is retrieved from its silent existence even as the incident is similarly retrieved. These retrievals are a necessary aspect of both the method of subaltern history and of its critique that the Ghosh text offers. That is precisely what an attempt to overcome the impact of the monolithic version of history would be like.

Ghosh's declaration that he is not writing the "19th c dynastic European novel form" but a "contemporary memoir," "a project in chronicling a family history" (*Ghosh and Aldama*, "An Interview" 85) has been echoed by critics who have re-presented it as a fictional practice tacitly set against subaltern theoretical assumptions. This is apparent in critics developing interpretations based on the novels' interest in the lives of "ordinary people," a "more genuinely human experience" and an "alternative history" (Wassef 76). It also appears in a more sophisticated version of subaltern practice that identifies a discursive basis in the vernacular, identified as the "other" archive that is "grafted" on to the European novel form and haunts it. Bishnupriya Ghosh demonstrates this in *The Calcutta Chromosome (CC)* where two Indian language texts by Rabindranath Tagore and Phanishwarnath Renu are embedded in a combination of "ghosting" and "grafting" (197).

In the process, what the Ghosh text offers by way of opportunity to examine the subaltern practice itself—and one glimpses a little of this in the exchange with Dipesh Chakrabarty—is missed. There is a tacit critique at Ghosh's end of the exchange and in Ghosh's work in general, of the limitations of the subaltern method and if one arrives at this critique through the choice and deployment of historical material in his novels, it becomes clear that Ghosh is not simply 'using' the subaltern method but in taking up the other side of even the subaltern narratives—an alternative to alternative histories—pointing to the possibilities of reparation.

The arbitrary dividing lines called 'Border': Migration and Transculturalism

TSL is concerned with issues of exile and migration, and a related critique of a particular construction of belonging. This notion of belonging presupposes the conjoining of a specific space and a single culture in a unified nation state. The individual is inserted into this unity through birth and descent s/he is born on a culture's territory and descendant of its

adhereants. The text stages the negative consequences of this conception in the trajectories of two of its main characters. The narrator's grandmother is trapped between her birth in Dhaka, now capital of the Muslim Bangladesh, and her descent from Hindu ancestors. Forced to flee from her imaginary home, she becomes an eternal refugee, always longing to return to a home that never really existed. Ila, on the other hand, rejects a Hindu culture that limits her independence, and thus also rejects any form of belonging, becoming a dislocated nomad. Against these two forms of dislocation, the narrator struggles to assert a different form of belonging and motion that constructs belonging out of the painful and powerless desire to come to know the other that produces a dialogic relation to difference.

In her book *Cartographies of Diaspora*, Avtar Brah finds 'borders' as "arbitrary dividing lines that are simultaneously social, cultural and psychic" (Brah, 1996: 198). When spatially considered, the existence of the border seems more real, but the idea of border also acts temporally in separating one historical period from the other (as the event of political independence could be seen as a border between the colonial and the post-colonial periods in the history of a nation-state). In her book *Borderlands*, Gloria Anzaldúa finds a border thus: "Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge." (Anzaldúa, 1987: 3) Seen from a postcolonial perspective, the concept of the border is important both geographically and historically as the history of colonization shapes the borders of many new nation-states. The political identities of these new nations are mostly conditioned by the reality of the geographical borders of the erstwhile colonial territories and not by the socio-cultural realities. These arbitrarily created borderlines have "little or nothing to do with 'ethnic' fault lines, linguistic demarcations, religious affiliations, geographical landmarks or other such 'natural' lines of cleavage between territories" (Krishna, 2003: 304). But as relics of colonial rule, these borders are appropriate sites for a renegotiation of 'national' identities. In an article entitled 'Beyond the Nation: Post-Colonial Hope' (2009) Bill Ashcroft finds 'border' as something severely disrupted by an interplay between memory and place: "The concept of the border is disrupted in many ways in postcolonial literatures, but most powerfully in the relationship between memory and place: memory rather than nostalgia and place rather than nation" (Ashcroft, 2009: 17). The concept of border is essential as ideological, which generates and reinforces a sense of difference and its impact on individual identity, with particular reference to Amitav Ghosh's *TSL* (1988).

The nation is an “unprecedented” institution, contends Sudipta Kaviraj, which attempts to replace premodern communities, marked by “fuzzy” boundaries and intense emotional ties with an “enumerated” and modern national community. The latter is territorially specific, has clear boundaries and must “enumerate” what belongs to it. Hence, “the endless counting of citizens, territories, resources, majorities, minorities, institutions, activities, import, export, incomes, projects, births, deaths, diseases” (1992: 30-31). Benedict Anderson defines the nation as “an imagined political community % and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (1983: 15). It is imagined by its people and ideologues, imaginings fraught with inc. One of these is that nation-states, although historically “new” entities, “always loom out of an immemorial past” (1983: 19) as the same entity of a united people sharing the same heritage. Modern India needs to be judged from this perspective. The Indian nation is “not an object of discovery but of invention” (Kaviraj 1992: 1).

Ghosh’s writings focus on migration during the pre-national space that was continuous and permitted boundary crossings as well as on colonial and post-colonial spaces. While critiquing the concept of borders, he engages with the frequency of boundary-crossings within and outside India, focusing on Bengal in particular, which challenges essentialist definitions of nations and societies. Although Ghosh’s fiction and non-fiction throws light on both pre-colonial and colonial movements and displacements in general, he focuses in particular on the dislocation caused by the formation of nations through the marking of what he has called “the shadow lines” across nations (Ghosh, *TSL*).

Through uncovering these on-going histories of migration and transnational flows that began several centuries ago as well as through the construction of borders, Ghosh interrogates the idea of the nation and borders. In *TSL* (1988), Ghosh captures this difference between boundaries and borders in the character of the grandmother or Tha’mma’s consternation when she is informed about there being no physical markers between India and Bangladesh: “But if there aren’t any trenches or anything, how are people to know? I mean, where’s the difference then?” (*The Shadow Lines* 151). In contrast to modern national borders that are policed and implicated in issues of legality and illegality, pre-national boundaries were essentially permeable and permitted frequent crossings, as Tha’mma points out in the novel:

And if there’s no difference both sides will be the same, it’ll be just like it used to be before, when we used to catch a train in Dhaka

and get off in Calcutta the next day without anybody stopping us. What was it all for then – Partition and all the killing and everything – if there isn't something in between? (151)

As one who gave her consent to the idea of the nation through her allegiance to the nationalist cause, Tha'mma does not realise that she is herself complicit in the closure of those boundaries that could be crossed effortlessly before the formation of borders and nation states.

As novelist, Ghosh prioritizes space over time as the structuring principle in narrative. In "The March of the Novel through History", he applauds the novel's ability to eloquently communicate a sense of place and also to interweave the entire spatial continuum from local to global:

The novel as a form has been vigorously international from the start; [...] And yet, the paradox of the novel as a form is that it is founded upon a myth of parochiality, in the exact sense of a parish — a place named and charted, a definite location. [...] Location is thus intrinsic to a novel [...]. (*The Imam and the Indian*, 294)

Reflecting on "the rhetoric of location" (*The Imam and the Indian*, 303), Ghosh stresses that he is not thinking merely of place or the physical aspects of the setting. Asserting that the links between India and her diaspora are "lived within the imagination" (*The Imam and the Indian*, 247), he examines the modes in which "the spaces of India travel with the migrant" to create what Rushdie calls the imaginary homeland:

That is the trouble with an infinitely reproducible space: since it does not refer to actual spaces it cannot be left behind. [...] Eventually the place and the realities that accompany it vanish from memory and [...] [t]he place, India, becomes in fact an empty space, mapped purely by words. (*The Imam and the Indian*, 248-249)

These "words", which signify memories and inherited values, are the "metaphors of space" that constitute "the symbolic spatial structure of India" for the migrant (*The Imam and the Indian*, 248). Ghosh calls this kind of alternative mapping, in terms of sites of lived experience and memory and not of material location, "the cultural representation of space" (*The Imam and the Indian*, 250). In Ghosh's fictional realms, local or global, seen or unseen space is perceived and imagined in the narrator's memory as a fundamental facet of individual, national, familial, and communal metamorphoses. Space is not merely remembered as an imaginative

construct but is represented as a domain of political and cultural encounters, encounters which actually shape the connection of different characters with territory and location. Hence, space is represented as a dynamic arrangement between people, places, cultures and societies. James Clifford argues that “space is never ontologically given. It is discursively mapped and corporeally practiced” (1997: 54). According to Clifford, space is composed through movement, produced through use, at the same time an agency and result of action or practice. The construction of space in Ghosh’s *TSL* does not simply manifest territorial struggles but serves to show the interplay between local and global influences, national and transnational reconfigurations and above all the search for community and alliances that cut across boundaries of cultural and ethnic identity.

Journey, especially sea journey, has a vital role to play in many of Ghosh’s works. His passion for describing journeys comes involuntarily, and his special taste for describing sea journeys can be witnessed even in his early writings. In *The Circle of Reason (CR)*, narrating Alu’s journey through Calcutta to Goa, Ghosh writes, “it was still dark, though the eastern sky behind them had turned scarlet. The sea, tinged with violet, was lapping gently at *Mariamamma’s* sides” (183). Likewise, the following lines from Ghosh’s *TSL* illustrate his urge to look beyond boundaries, “And then I think to myself why don’t they draw thousands of little lines through the whole subcontinent and give every little place a new name? What would it change? It’s a mirage; the whole thing is a mirage” (272). Admitting the influence his transnational journeys and Evans-Prichard’s works had on him Ghosh calls both Bangladesh and Sri Lanka his home. Referring to Egypt he states that he was interested in historical connections in general and connections between India and Egypt in particular. Writing is the point of integration for Ghosh the Anthropologist and Ghosh the novelist. It is very interesting to note that Ghosh, despite having been established as a renowned novelist, acknowledges the limitation of novel as a form. He feels that the “novel with its conventions of naturalistic dialogue, is most at home within monolingual speech communities” (*The Imam and the Indian* 78). This is significant in the light of the fact that Ghosh, in *Sea of Poppies (SP)*, brings together characters speaking different languages on board the *Ibis*. Ghosh’s imagination has got its own structure and is well defined. He says his research is driven by his characters. He reveals his interest in anything past, as past is both ‘unique’ and ‘unrepeatable’. Ghosh reveals that the ship episodes in his novels are a ‘sweetened version’ of reality.

Ghosh’s novels often imagine the world from the perspective of displaced peoples and focus on peoples’ histories often relegated to the

margins of Eurocentric narratives of history. In *The Glass Palace (GP)* (2000), Ghosh focuses on the “forgotten” histories of WWII such as the “Forgotten Long March,” the harrowing march of Indian settlers from Burma to India in the wake of a Japanese advance. In *An Antique Land (AL)* (1992) explores African-Asian connections preceding British colonialism and “other” non-European worlds and connections. *TSL* (1988) interrogates both the legacies of Partition in the subcontinent as well as the silence surrounding riots in nationalist histories since riots call attention to the failures of the postcolonial nation-state. The massacre at Morichjhãpi of Bangladeshi refugees by the Indian state in 1979 finds voice in *HT* (2004), where Ghosh focuses on the islands of the Sunderbans to unsettle the notion of progress by showing the costs of developmentalism through the predicament of refugees and indigenous peoples. And, in *CC*, Ghosh questions the colonial narrative of discovery and progress by disputing the colonial “truth” of Ronald Ross’ discovery of the cure for malaria. Thus, Ghosh has variously exposed the limits of (imperial) archives and questioned the myth of progress in his corpus. In *SP*, Ghosh revisits themes and preoccupations of his earlier work and presents a historical novel of panoramic scope and great depth, populated with characters from different continents with complex histories and conflicting interests.

In *SP*, the readers were shown the desperate cast of indentured slaves, stowaways, and seamen at sea on the *Ibis*, heading for Port Louis. In the turmoil of a storm into which the passengers of the ship were hurled, a band of captives managed to free themselves by fleeing to escape to Singapore. The second volume of the trilogy picks up with Deeti, the widow saved from the fires of self-immolation at the beginning of *SP*, now the respected elder of an extended clan in Mauritius - La Fami Colver. Her memories form the novel’s outer structure into which Ghosh goads his most fascinating characters for three of the other *Ibis* shipmates: Neel the bankrupt Raja; Ah Fatt, his opium addicted cellmate; and Paulette Lambert, the aspiring botanist. Given the cumbersome number of characters with whom Ghosh was juggling at the end of *SP*, his bizarre ploy here is to add two key principals: Ah Fatt’s father, Seth Bahram Modi, a rags-to-riches opium merchant hailing from Bombay, and Robin Chinnery, a dazzling painter and childhood companion to Paulette.

SP, the first volume of Amitav Ghosh’s *Ibis* trilogy, an impressive and detailed account of the events leading up to the first opium war of 1839-42, throws light on opium production in India, enforced labour and its impact on the people of Bihar and the Bay of Bengal. The *Ibis*, a former slaving schooner repurposed as a transporter of opium, tracks Deeti, the

chief character in the novel, up the Ganges, who travels on the black-water, with high hopes of starting a new lease of life, ignorant of the hardships that lie ahead. Through *RS*, Ghosh takes his readers to the opium's destination, Canton, and highlights the growing tension between the Chinese authorities and the opium traders. In his third instalment *Flood of Fire (FF)*, Amitav Ghosh recreates "that tension – essentially between a state resisting an unfettered trade that has kick started widespread addiction in its population and a conjunction of personal and corporate interests messianically committed to the cause of free trade – culminates in full-blown conflict" (Lalami). Ghosh's ambition is also to show how it redrew the map of the region, prompting, "the transformation of the backwater port of Hong Kong into a globally influential centre of enterprise" (Lalami). Making the narrative "simultaneously wrong-footing and delightful, riveting and diverting" (Lalami).

The later novels of Amitav Ghosh cast a new insight into the readings of *TSL*. The later novels have highlighted and explored similar themes that were introduced by Ghosh in *TSL*. Essential to an understanding of the postcolonial migration in the *TSL* is the *Ibis Trilogy*. The three novels that comprise the trilogy explore the various implications of the migration, both forced and voluntary. The *TSL* traces the impact of partition and the forced migration thereon. Another aspect of *TSL* is the dilution of the physical borders and boundaries in the increasingly reduced global space. The cosmopolitan nature of the border in a world of shadow border lines is demonstrated in the global citizenship of Ila and her family, which is strictly in contrast to the ideals of rigid nationalism of Thamma. The global nature of this global citizenship that is a characteristic of Ila and her family is due to their frequent migration across various borderlines that separate the nations. While in *TSL*, Ghosh depicts that such migration does not provide any citizenship, he goes on to explore another aspect in the *Ibis*. In the *Ibis*, the migration is forced upon the laborers and indentured who escape from the *Ibis*, which was supposed to carry them to Mauritius as indentured labor. Ghosh goes on to explore the fact that though they have been cut off from their 'homeland', they create their own 'homeland' in the place of their settlement where they continue to maintain their cultural heritage (*Flood of Fire*).

As he states in many of his interviews, Ghosh is investigating the silence around Britain's role in the "drug trade" of the nineteenth century. Ghosh, who refers to opium as "among the most precious jewels in Queen Victoria's crown" in his novel (*Sea* 83–4), is in agreement with economist Carl Trocki's contention that, "Without the drug, there probably would

have been no British Empire” since “the economic foundation of the imperial economy lay on opium” (Trocki xiii). Trocki states that by the middle of the nineteenth century, opium was a major source of government revenue in British India and a major export. In Ghosh’s novel, the British merchants’ heavy surveillance of the opium factory leaves no doubts about the immense value of the commodity:

The fortifications here were formidable, and the guards particularly sharp-eyed—and well they might be, for the contents of those few sheds, or so it was said, were worth several million pounds sterling and could buy a good part of the City of London. (*Sea* 84).

This inversion of the roles of the colonizer and the colonized is one of the major themes in *TSL*. By giving voice to such minor characters as Tridib, who do not figure as an important figure in the relations of the imperial project, Ghosh not only disrupts the monolithic version of history, which lays an overwhelming emphasis on the dates and the stories of the kings and great warriors, but also examines the roles of the common man in the making of the present by means of their pasts. In doing so, Ghosh explores the various trauma, both the physical and the psychological, that the characters undergo.

Conclusion

Amitav Ghosh’s *TSL* continues to be his most debated and highly critical novel till date. The later novels of Ghosh has gone on to develop the issues of migration, exile and nationalism that he developed in *TSL*. At a time when there is an overwhelming discussion on the various aspects of migration and exile, Ghosh’s *TSL* proves to be a touchstone against which the various literatures on migration and exile can be read, for, the novel is perhaps the earliest and a well-researched narration on the themes. Notwithstanding the fact that Ghosh’s novel is essentially postcolonial as it gives voice to the subaltern,

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**THEATRE, SUBALTERNEITY AND COUNTERPUBLICS:
READING MAHESH DATTANI'S PLAYS**

ABIN CHAKRABORTY

In an illuminating discussion of political performances and attendant scholarship, E.J. Westlake remarks,

Ultimately, the “political” in the performances we study springs from the new constellations of relationships we form; hinges on being able to locate ourselves and our work and our intended audience in a way that highlights our position on a map of political context and political action. The politics of representation is the politics of multiple relationships... Being able to see those relationships, and hopefully the possible consequences of forming them, leads to an opening where political change can take place. (Westlake 8)

Such openings become possible only because the performances are able to intervene in the public sphere and thus contribute to various democratic processes. In this paper I will first go over the concepts of public sphere and subaltern Counterpublics and then apply them to some of Dattani's plays in order to discuss some of the specific features of his representation of subalterneity.

Public Spheres and Subaltern Counterpublics:

Habermas represents the bourgeois public sphere as “the sphere of private people come together as a public” in order to claim “the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labour” (Habermas: 1989, 27). This is precisely why Habermas sees the development of the public sphere as an integral feature of gradual democratization since this public sphere was characterized by a sense of “parity of ‘common humanity’” (36), emancipation of the “domain of ‘common concern’” from the monopoly of the Church and the Court and most importantly, the establishment of “the public as in principle inclusive” (37). As Habermas notes, theatre also played a crucial role in the formation of such public spheres as it became delinked from the province of the court and created a space where enactment of issues related to

public relevance coalesced with the emergence of a public which was no longer constituted by a parading of ranks. While the situation of the British, French or German societies cannot obviously be associated with the development of the public sphere in colonial and postcolonial India, there is no denying that in India too newspapers, public associations of many kinds and various congregational spaces (for example, the Indian Coffee House in Kolkata) played a crucial role in the development of a public sphere through which issues of 'common concern' and general rules of social existence were debated as part of an attempt to contest the power of public authorities, both British and Indian. Theatre in India also played a crucial role in the formation of such a public sphere which is eminently evident from the Dramatic Performances Act, 1876 and the wrath of the colonial authorities against certain plays that lampooned the representatives of colonial authority as well as their native collaborators. The same process continued in post-independence India as well which necessitated governmental crackdown against Utpal Dutt's plays like *Angaar*, *Kallol* or *Dushvapner Nagari*.

However, Habermas' own conceptualisation has been subjected to a thorough critique by a number of theorists like Joan Landes, Geoff Eley and Mary Ryan who argue that not only have there been multiple competing publics from the very beginning of the public sphere but that far from being inclusive in principle, the public sphere has always operated on the basis of certain definite patterns of exclusion. As Nancy Fraser explains,

In general, this revisionist historiography suggests a much darker view of the bourgeois public sphere than the one that emerges from Habermas's study. The exclusions and conflicts that appeared as accidental trappings from his perspective, in the revisionists' view become constitutive. The result is a gestalt switch that alters the very meaning of the public sphere. We can no longer assume that the bourgeois conception of the public sphere was simply an unrealized utopian ideal; it was also a masculinist ideological notion that functioned to legitimate an emergent form of class rule. (Fraser 61-62)

This is further reinforced by Geoff Eley's Gramscian contention that the public sphere further served as an institutional vehicle of consolidating hegemony which was "never defined solely by the struggle against absolutism and traditional authority, but...addressed the problem of popular containment as well" (Fraser 61). This, however, is equally applicable to

the domain of Indian politics as well since the nationalist movement as well as the public sphere associated with it was in many ways a process dominated by a bourgeois, Hindu, masculinist, upper-caste, heterosexist elite which projected itself as the nation, often at the expense of the other sections. This is precisely why, in consonance with the Gramscian paradigm used by Eley, Partha Chatterjee defined the nationalist movement for independence as a 'passive revolution' in which the leadership was in the hands of the educated middle classes who went on to occupy the seats of power left vacant by the colonial administrators without effecting any substantial change either in the sphere of administration or in the sphere of production relations. Gramsci defines 'passive revolution', a term originally used by Vincenzo Cuoco, as a concept that "applies not only to Italy but also to those other countries that modernize the state through a series of reforms or national wars without undergoing a political revolution of a radical-Jacobin type" (Gramsci, 1996: 232). As Domenico Losurdo states:

The category of passive revolution is a category used in the *Prison Notebooks* in order to denote the persistent capacity of initiative of the bourgeoisie which succeeds, even in the historical phase in which it has ceased to be a properly revolutionary class, to produce socio-political transformations of significance, conserving securely in its own hands power, initiative, and hegemony, and leaving the working classes in their conditions of subalternity. (Losurdo, 1997, quoted in Thomas, 2009: 147)

As Partha Chatterjee has shown, this is exactly what happened in India as well as a mature and fully developed nationalist discourse, manifested through the writings of Jawaharlal Nehru squarely identified the masses as 'irrational' and 'backward' entities of India who have to be guided and steered by the educated and scientific elite, aware of the spirit of modernity and progress. What this meant was the implementation of a programme of socio-economic development that was based more on the bureaucracy and less on popular mobilization. While there is no denying that such processes did contribute to certain developments and associated economic upliftment, the larger portion of the population still remained grossly marginalized and disempowered as bourgeois nationalism effected a "molecular transformation' of the old dominant classes into partners in a new historical bloc and only a partial appropriation of the masses, in order to create a state as the necessary precondition for the establishment of capitalism as the dominant mode of production" (Chatterjee 30). The growth of several forms of protest movements, governed by various

factors of class, caste and gender which continued to mark the Indian nation-space during the sixties and the seventies of the previous century represent the gradual disillusionment of such subalternized classes and consequent unrest against the nation-state. Such manifestation of widespread dissent also testifies to the need for competing and plural public spheres which better secures the prospects of participatory parity and open access than the notion of an over-arching singular bourgeois sphere. Nancy Fraser therefore states how “members of subordinated social groups – women, workers, peoples of color, and gays and lesbians – have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics”. She identifies these alternative publics as “subaltern counterpublics” which operate as “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (Fraser 66-67). According to her analysis, such counterpublics not only contribute to the “widening of discursive contestation” but also as “spaces of withdrawal and regroupment” in the face of dominant, exclusionary and exploitative practices. As Fraser argues,

It is precisely in the dialectic between these two functions that their emancipatory potential resides. This dialectic enables subaltern counterpublics partially to offset, although not wholly to eradicate, the unjust participatory privileges enjoyed by members of dominant social groups in stratified societies. (Fraser 68).

The plays of Mahesh Dattani are particularly important and relevant because they are able to generate and circulate such emancipatory potential through the foregrounding of subaltern counterpublics.

Dattani’s Counterpublics:

Dattani’s plays focus on the subaltern in the metropole and analysesubalternization based on gender and sexuality. Such subalternization, in fact, is vividly portrayed in his plays through the physical, sexual, psychological and economic subjugation which the women persistently face and attempt to resist. Whether it is *Bravely Fought the Queen*, *Tara* or *Thirty Days in September* – in all of these plays what comes to the foreground is the sheer vulnerability of women owing to the pervasive nature of the patriarchal discourse which continues to subjugate women across generations. It is the acknowledgment of such crises that becomes evident from the following conversation between Hardika and her granddaughter Smita:

Hardika: I hope you have the same freedom in your own house, as you have here.

Smita: I think one can create one's own freedom wherever one may be.

Hardika: You are also very foolish.

Smita: Foolish?

Hardika: To think you can create your freedom.

Smita: Well, I suppose they could beat me up and lock me in a room...

Hardika: Yes. They could. (Dattani: 2000, 220)

Such statements seem to corroborate Habermas's assertion that "the exclusion of women has been constitutive for the political public sphere not merely in that the latter has been dominated by men as a matter of contingency but also in that its structure and relation to the private sphere has been determined in a gender-specific fashion" (Habermas: 1992, 428). It is precisely this realisation that necessitates the formation of alternative public spheres which too are glimpsed by Dattani on certain occasions. For example, in *Bravely Fought the Queen*, when Dolly, Alka and Lalitha listen to Naina Devi's songs and move into their world of sexual and affective fantasy we do notice the tentative emergence of a set of desires and demands which generally remain unarticulated within conventional orthodox public spheres. The trope/motif of art as self-expression does play a significant role in this context as a similar prototypical counterpublic is also suggested by the meetings and practice sessions of Ratna and Chenni Amma in *Dance like a Man*. While the nation-state can forge a self-image through dance genres like the Bharatnatyam which are elevated to the level of national heritage, the same patriarchal nation-state also marginalises former devdasis, like Chenni Amma, who were the original exponents of this genre, on account of the stigma of sexual promiscuity attributed to them by the contemporary patriarchal authorities. Through Dattani's plays such structures of hypocrisy, exclusion and marginalisation are scrupulously exposed and such critique indeed constitutes one of the constituent elements of subaltern counterpublics.

Similar alternative spaces are also staged in other plays like *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* where the play revolves around the conversations and relations of a group of queer Indians whose discussions foreground the many processes of abjection, isolation and humiliation which members

of queer communities experienced and continue to experience within the predominantly heteronormative nation-space of India where alternate sexualities are still subjected to manifold forms of subalternization. Written during the late 80's or the early 90's, most of Dattani's plays, dealing with queer individuals, were pioneering texts which sought to dramatize what he termed 'invisible issues' since most of these topics were considered taboo and were therefore subjected to stringent erasure. By presenting to his readers and audience, concerns that were rarely addressed till then, Dattani helped to add new dimensions to contemporary public debates and thus paved the path for the emergence of counterpublics focusing on and comprising sexual subalterns from various social strata. Consider for example the following dialogues from *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*:

Kamlesh: If only they could see how beautiful we are together.

Ed: Are we?

Kamlesh: What?

Ed: Beautiful?

Kamlesh: Yes

Ed: I don't know. (Points to the people on the road) They wouldn't think so.

Kamlesh: They don't really see us. (81)

Such lines are remarkable because they serve to humanize homosexuals and give voice to both their isolation and their need for mutual love which a typically heterosexist society neither acknowledges nor understands. Dattani's insistence on such issues is perfectly in keeping with Fraser's arguments about subaltern counterpublics as she categorically mentions that "In principle, assumptions that were previously exempt from contestation will now have to be publicly argued out" (Fraser 67). Especially notable in this regard is the play *Seven Steps around the Fire* which focuses on eunuchs or transsexual individuals who are victims of both wretched poverty and sexual subjugation of different kinds. Such individuals are generally ignored altogether by dominant public spheres and the dominant discourses generally represent them, if at all, as objects of ridicule or revulsion. The conversations of eunuchs like Anarkali and Champa with the sociological researcher Uma serve to unravel the extent of administrative, financial and sexual subjugation which eunuchs or hijras regularly face and these insights are complemented by the foregrounding of those desires which govern their lives – desires which are neither

recognised nor accepted by the dominant heteronormative and patriarchal discourse. Note, for example the following dialogues between two hijras in the play:

Champa: It hurts?

Anarkali: Yes...Do you think the doctor will see me?

Champa: I tried.

Anarkali: If we give him more money?...

Champa shakes her head. Anarkali winces

Champa: It will go away. Let me give you some brandy.

She gets up Anarkali pulls her back.

Anarkali: I drank it. It is not going away, the pain.

Champa holds her and puts Anarkali's head in her lap.

Champa: What can I do? What can I do?

Champa rocks her like a baby...

Anarkali closes her eyes. Champa sings a lullaby from a film. La lallalori, doodhkeikatori...Champa has tears in her eyes as she continues to sing. (273-74)

Such lines not only emphasise the yearning for family and maternal/filial affections which punctuate their lives but forces us to recognize that fundamental humanity which society often denies to them. Quite naturally, that universalisation of civil rights which is generally supposed to be the basis of public spheres, is often not applied to these sexual subalterns as evident from either Anarkali's imprisonment and torture or the murder of Kamla. Dattani's plays are critical in this respect as they serve to suggest an expansion of the public sphere where these individuals ought to be included as full citizens. Not only does this set up the possibility of polycentric public spheres but also sets in motion "a critical process of public communication through the very organizations that mediatize it" (Habermas: 1989, 232). Theatre thus becomes, in Jean Cohen's words, one of those institutions of "public reasoning and argument among equal citizens" that establishes "a framework for free public deliberation" (Habermas: 1992, 446-447) which is essential for an inclusive and functioning democracy.

What renders such a framework all the more significant is Dattani's relentless insistence on those material circumstances which are fundamentally responsible for various ongoing processes of subalternization. For example

one of the primary reasons behind the subjugation of Dolly and Alka in *Bravely Fought the Queen* is their absolute financial dependence on their husbands who can therefore repeatedly threaten them with expulsion from the house. Similarly, in *Tara* an entrenched network on patriarchal chauvinism and commercial interests collude to ensure Tara's literally crippled status and she is even left without any inheritance by her grandfather. Likewise in *Dance like a Man*, due to the hypocrisy and elitism of the nationalist discourse, the Bharatnatyam exponent Chennai Amma languishes in miserable poverty while the appropriation of her art makes it possible for middle-class practitioners like Ratna and Jayaraj to ascend to national celebrity. However, as Dattani shows in *Thirty Days in September*, financial independence does not necessarily ensure end of exploitation as Mala is made to bear the scars of the trauma of sexual abuse in childhood well into her adulthood. Similarly the homosexual characters of *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, despite belonging to middle-class society, remain constricted, ostracized and alienated by the dominant heteronormative social structures.

Furthermore, since Dattani presents before us a number of varied characters, the plays convey a sense of undeniable plurality which obviously serves to negate the vilifying stereotypes through which dominant discourses generally perceive sexual subalterns. It is this same sensitivity towards heterogeneity that also prompts Dattani to create uniquely individualized characters in all of his plays without ever creating a monochromatic mould for any particular social section. This is evident from a play like *Final Solutions* where Bobby and Javed, despite operating as representatives of subalternized religious minorities, virtually function as each other's foil and their individual voices are also complemented by the cluster of voices which together make up the chorus. Similarly in *Bravely Fought the Queen*, the characters of Dolly and Alka are pointedly different from those of Baa or Lalitha and even the sisters have rather different approaches to the same crisis within which they find themselves. Such examples demonstrate how Dattani is acutely aware of the fact that subalterneity is fluid and a person who acts as the subaltern in one context may well become the dominant character in a separate context. For example, despite their own subalterneity, Dolly and Alka are equally dismissive and contemptuous towards the beggar woman who frequents their house, without being concerned about their shared subjugation by the same patriarchal discourses. Even homosexual characters like Ed/Prakash or Kamlesh, despite their own role as sexual subalterns, are entirely unconcerned about the victimization faced by Kamlesh's sister Kiran. Likewise, someone like Baa, despite herself being a victim of patriarchal oppression, also operates as an agent of patriarchal

subjugation. These scrupulous representations of heterogeneous and fluid subjectivities leads to these plays that combination of authenticity and plurality which prevents them from falling into the trap of what Rushdie scoffs at as the process of “new-behaviorism” (Rushdie: 2002, 60). This is precisely why in *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* we see Kamlesh having no qualms about sexually objectifying the caretaker for his own gratification or Alpesh utilizing Mali in the same way in *Do the Needful*.

This is not to suggest, however, that the plays are bereft of emancipatory potentialities. Dattani succeeds in creating through his texts a number of powerful dramatic moments through which the spectators come face to face with their own prejudices which create the opportunity for bridging that gap between the self and the other which is at the root of many discourses of discrimination and victimization. For example, in *Seven Steps around the Fire* we have a dramatic representation of the moment of Subbu’s marriage with Kamala the eunuch, dressed as a bride with wedding garments and jewelry, when both of them passionately embrace each other. Not only does such a scene help to visualize a union which the public sphere is unwilling to acknowledge but it forces the spectators to confront their own biases and thus helps to open the space for discursive expansion through which their presence as equal citizens might be facilitated. Similarly the curtained space in *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* which serves as Kamlesh’s bedroom and also by extension his entire apartment, where the play unfolds, operates as a site for the emergence of a queer counterpublic where individuals are free to air their emotions and thoughts without worrying about whether it is possible to be Indian and gay at the same time. More importantly, the various representations of queer relationships on stage serve as reminders of the otherizing principles at work within us which prompt us to view many from a dehumanized perspective which contributes to their victimization. It is these very possibilities of challenging, clarifying, amending or re-shaping dominant attitudes and behavioural patterns which contribute to the creation of counterpublics.

In all of these plays, however, the crisis remains generally confined to either the individual or to family or to a close group of friends and the prospect of collective action of one form or another remains entirely absent. Even in *Final Solutions*, where collective actions are enacted on stage, collectivities only serve to disseminate communal violence and hatred and do not create the possibility of any substantial emancipatory action by subaltern agents. The only other play by Dattani where subaltern collective action does come to the foreground is *Seven Steps around the Fire* where the final dramatic intervention of Champa, Anarkali and their fellow eunuchs

during the minister's son's wedding does manage to uncover the truth behind Kamala's murder. However, even in this play, the single performative intervention by the hijras is shown to be utterly incapable of producing any substantial change as evidences are hushed up and doctored reports are circulated through the media so as to erase the subaltern out of the elite archives. As opposed to the historical failures represented by the plays of Utpal Dutt, which always looked forward to a future of fulfillment, Dattani's portrayals generally operate on a discursive level and project a scenario where either resistance is restricted within individual domains or resistance by subaltern agents is far too weak and isolated to make significant differences. To a certain extent, these features are indicative of the withering of emancipatory visions and constructive collective actions which may help to sustain those visions. In a rather postmodern turn of events, due to the absence of emancipatory macronarratives, Indian politics has been marked by the presence of a series of resistant micronarratives which, however, do not show any sign of crystallizing into a politics of praxis that will effect a convergence without any compulsory uniformity.

However, even if the plays are not always able to offer alternate visions of collective change, their representative characters still serve to effectively critique through their experiences and actions the dominant ideological paradigms through which several forms of subalternization are carried out. Such critique not only helps to thwart the continuation of existing predicaments but also implies the need for unborn futures capable of transcending such subalternizing processes which would obviously mean a radical redefinition of the nation-space of India. In a country where print and electronic media often seems far too preoccupied with vested interests of the elite and the rhetoric of shining India, theatre continues to operate as a significant site for resistant counter-discourses which contribute to the deepening of democratic ethos. Dattani's plays are enactments of such possibilities which also continue, in their own ways, the legacy of the IPTA during the inception of modern Indian theatre.

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**FRAMES OF REMEMBRANCE: DYNAMICS OF
TRANSNATIONAL HISTORY IN AMITAV GHOSH AND
KUNAL BASU'S WRITINGS**

ABHINANDAN BAG

George Orwell's Observation by now is a cliché, that the present controls the past has long been a central theme in the memory literature. Most conceptual assertion and empirical apprehension revolves round this kind of instrumentalist approach to memory. According to this theoretical approach the present socio-political interest and the dominant power structure of the nation-state project its ideological or rhetorical constructs onto the past.

Challenging the state-centric development of history, Amitav Ghosh and Kunal Basu draws on Michel Foucault's notion of counter-memory, paying attention to subnational entities like the socio culturally marginalized, economically diversified and specially fragmented subaltern groups with counter memory agendas. This conceptual orientation essentially considers political expediencies in the present as leading to the invention or construction of the past. For me the metanarratives of the future is not a matter of clinging to the past but primarily a response to the recent configuration of the nation state. The memory boom of the late twentieth century coincides with the various effects of Globalization & Transnationalism. The decline of nationhood as an overarching principle is mainly responsible for the 'fragmentation and pluralization of memory cultures' (Levy and Sznajder 657). The state itself misled the memory process and the historically situated understanding that interprets the intimate bond between the past, present and future. In Ghosh and Basu's memory literature, future goes hand in hand with the past. As Alasdair MacIntyre puts it "an adequate sense of tradition manifests itself in a grasp of those future possibilities which the past has made available to the present. Living traditions, just because they continue a not yet – completed narrative, confront a future whose determinate and determinable character, so as it possesses any, derives from the past" (MacIntyre 35). Here memory and its paraphernalia is not an impediment for the future but act as bridge over the present. A shared sense of past which is Transnational by nature becomes a meaning making repository framing the future aspirations. In this historical context of temporalities Reinhart Koselleck in his book *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Times*, points out that the present is situated

between past experiences which is 'present past', whose events have been incorporated and can be remembered and a horizon of expectations which refers to the future made present, points to that which has not been experienced or to that which can only be discovered. For Ghosh and Basu these 'past futures' becomes an issue of empirical investigation. In his framework of understanding the past which needs to be remembered have political principles in its core, which emanates the value for the future generations. Thus their memory literature becomes an empowering resource for a wide variety of Transnational groups.

The beginning of the twenty first century pioneered the Transnational fundamental transformations challenging some of the paradigmatic national assumptions and the underlining homology of history, memory and nationhood that have long underpinned sociology as a discipline and the study of memory. In this connection I have got influenced by Beck and Sznaider's idea on 'methodological nationalism' (Beck and Sznaider 23), which is bound by the remains of nationalism and nation-state encompasses the scholarly approach to collective memory, since the official memory discourse or the historical narratives and the unofficial, public memory remain within the container of nation-state. Ghosh and Basu can be read as a critique of methodological nationalism in the context of Transnational research. For Brown, Sodaro and Gutman, their writings hints on the idea that formation of a Transnation has arrived demanding a reflexive interrogation of the validity of a historically specific and thus contingent national figuration which has been instilled in the sociological imagination by the classical canon. Indeed history contains the variations of the past and generates past in the context of new epistemological context. An analytical perspective must be formed that can elope from the national caging as well as grasp the emergence of alternative ontological models that is very reflexive towards the cultural parameters. It may also transcend the national caging of global memory paving the way for Transnationalism.

"What happens to the centrality of national memory when peripheral or marginal pasts penetrate into the center and discontinuities command legitimate attention?" (Brown, Sodaro and Gutman 66) - With the advent of twentieth century the territorial concepts of national culture has experienced an epistemic shift. The idea of culture as 'rooted' faced a critical questioning. Sociology understood the new symbols, common values, transmitted primarily through the consolidation of cultural memories by establishing links to foundational pasts as means of integration into new Transnationality. This perspective is triumphant in the way that nation-state has obtained the status of a natural entity rather than being a construct.

Transnational remembrance averts away from the territorialized nation state configuration which is frequently analogous with the perception of collective memory. Instead of presupposing the integrity of nation, territory and polity, the transnational memory is based on the transcending idioms eclipse territorial and linguistic frontier. The national is slowly being dissipated but that doesn't entail a total obliteration of it, but transformation. They sustained to survive with collective memories being embellished with familiar rhythms amalgamated with pre-existing constituent to form something new.

The huge transformation of memory cultures has given birth to fragmentation of memory making it a private entity rather than a national one. It has also led to the formation of memory history. The conventional historical narratives are generally instructive in nature. It speaks of particular temporal sequences, articulating the nature and form of national development, whereas memory rejoices the presence of multiple pasts. Memory dissolves the structure and sequence of organized history. Thus memory history moves away from the state supported versions of the past and poses a big question in front of national history. The endeavor to monopolize history has craved fragmented history out of it by implementation of individual, scientific, ethnic, and religious agents. Though the state continues to impose its own versions of history but now they have to share the field of meaning production with the non-state actors.

“Works of literature signify history indirectly via the ways in which they signify the ideologies which mediate their relations to history” (Eggleton 95).

- Terry Eagleton

While observing the forms of history and fiction, one may discover a similitude between them. L. B. Cebik in his book, *Functional Narrative and Truth* has rightfully observed that “extensive probing into historical narrative led to the conclusion that the features of narrative that were epistemically fundamental to that form of discourse were common to both its historical and fictional instances” (Davis 213). More than any other genre of literature, the novel possesses a clear link with the form of historical narrative. The eighteenth century English novel was replete with history, since it contained a large portion of social, political and cultural events within its fictional frame. Henry Fielding captioned his novels as the histories of their protagonists. For a historical novelist ‘realism’ is the central element of technique. The Twentieth century novels maintained these traditions thereby continued making history problematic. A postmodernist novelist looks beyond realism and also brings to focus the elements of fantasy, surrealism,

magic realism, grotesque, allegory, anachronism, and so on. Thus we may say that the new novelist dismantles the orthodox framework of both historical novel and historiography. Like novelists, critics too initiated questioning history while talking about its association with narrative. They soon discovered that narrativity is not only limited to novels, but also it is a major component of history as well. In the view of many structuralists and poststructuralists, history is nothing but the stories people narrate about their past. Such a view became common in the fictional practice of revisionist novelists. Thus it becomes a presupposition that plot paves a way for the idea of history. Naturally, then we are struck with a question about the nature of history. However it is E.H. Carr, who accurately defines history as: “a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past”(E. H. Carr 50). There is an amalgamation of two affairs - the actual happenings of the past and their restoration by the historian. The task of the historian is to narrate, fictionalize & interpret the historical facts and this systematic delineation of the written past becomes historiography. The narrative becomes the sole important element for describing the past. Commenting on the aim of history, historian Carr remarked: “To enable man to understand the society of the past, and to increase his mastery over the present is the dual function of history” (E. H. Carr 55).

Like history, the novel is also concerned with the narrative of the past. Not all of but those novels that are engaged with the retelling of the past in fictional terms. Thus in the fictional re-writing of history, the characters and plot interweave with the actual historical actions and activities. A novelist has a definite vision of history which he projects in the fictional form of expression. So each novelist has a divergent and well-defined perception and representation of the past. In Shashi Tharoor’s most celebrated novel, *The Great Indian Novel*, he remarks remarks: “For every tale that I have told you, every perception I have conveyed there are a hundred equally valid alternatives. This is my story of the India I know with its biases, selections, omissions, distortions all mine” (Tharur 114). Likewise, Milan Kundera in his book *The Art of the Novel* also illumines important differences between the role of the historian and that of a novelist: A historian tells you about events that have taken place. A novel examines not reality but existence. And existence is not what has occurred, existence is a realm of human possibilities, Novelists draw up the map of existence by discovering this or that human possibility. If a writer considers a historical situation a fresh and revealing possibility of human world, he will want to describe it as it is. Still fidelity to historical reality is a secondary matter as

regards the value of the novel. For Kundera “the novelist is neither historian nor prophet: he is an explorer of existence” (Kundera 76). A novelist’s function, however, of re-writing the historical content issues from his understanding that what an official historian offers is never adequate for knowing the past. He therefore embraces the imaginary but human dimension of history. Furthermore, different writers of fiction have their own purpose of re-telling history. No two novelists have therefore a similar version, though they may have employed the similar method or mode. This happens due to their aim of revisioning history with their own distinct purpose. Jonathan Culler, a renowned structuralist critic was preoccupied by the difficulty of differentiating narrative discourse from the story. Though, both non-fictional and fictional narratives give supremacy to story over discourse. He, therefore, concludes:

The founding narratives are powerful and effective and that is all that counts, but it seems important also to preserve a critical awareness of the way in which groups, as a way of constructing an identity, produce fantasies of a lurid past, and ask what sort of signifying purposes or demands determine these stories. Another strategy is to construct a different story, a competing narrative of origins that would produce a different identity (Culler, *Making History : The Power of Narrative* 5).

Such revisionist historical narrative is most blatantly epitomized in the works of Nayantara Sahgal, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Rohinton Mistry, Qurratulain Hyder and Kunal Basu. The present research aims at examining novels of Kunal Basu and Amitav Ghosh within the paradigms of contemporary theory, focus being laid on the nature of the narrative - both in history and fiction. It has been attempted to examine how the content of a historical text is decided by the method in which it has been furnished. In their attempts at telling or narrating historical facts, both history and fiction are governed and controlled by narrative laws. Examined thus, historical data become subordinated to the question/quest of narrative. It has been attempted to cogently argue how different authors look at history and use it in their fictional texts and by what modes and methods they re-tell history.

The motto of these postmodern, Transnational fictional narrative is to unwrap the power structures acting behind the mainstream truth and uncover its mobile army. Exercising its power and authority, the official version of history suppresses the plural voices that try to make themselves heard. The Transnationalist, revisionist historian strives to restore the

suppressed voices that are subaltern, marginalized and minorities, thereby imparting them a legitimate narrative space.

In order to understand an ongoing process of history, Amitav Ghosh and Kunal Basu endeavours to reassess its troubled antecedents and thereby come to terms with troubling present. In his findings, however, they realize the Transnational nature of all history which indicates that diaspora cultures are not only oriented towards lost origins or homelands, but that they are also produced by ongoing histories of migrations and transnational cultural flows. In the words of Robert Dixon, by historicizing such a diasporic space in its multiplicity and heterogeneousness, Ghosh & Basu clearly points out that similarity and difference simultaneously co-exist in any given history of diaspora. In Indian context, Ghosh & Basu explores such a “Transnational trajectory of history that at once dismantles and demythifies the rigid notion of nation and its boundary and re-narrates and re-invents the smooth and uninterrupted flow of intermixed culture of diaspora that make up the relations between cultures” (Dixon 12)

Ghosh and Basu revisions history using disparate fashions, viz., historical reconstruction, magic realism and the narrative of third space. They also involve the narratives of personal history, memoirs and recollections which return to homeland. Underlying this historical concern they seek to frame a transnational identity, for defining different selves and locating sites of resistance. The novelists strive to fill gaps in metahistory by narrating alternate revisionist stories suppressed or elided by nationalism’s dominant discourse. G. J. V. Prasad in his book, *Re-writing the World: The Circle of Reason as the Beginning of the Quest*, appreciates Ghosh as a cosmopolitan writer who creates a pluralistic and self-reflexive understanding of the world that challenges the smugness of accepted narratives. At times Ghosh & Basu also makes uses fantasy elements to provide propulsion to his narrative energy exclusive of Rushdie. Finally, in their own distinctive way, Ghosh & Basu devises the mode of the third space by going away from the moorings of homeland and the land of adoption. Doubtless, Rushdie’s innovation, resourcefulness and fearlessness in re-visioning of history became a liberating force for a large group of Indian writers living at home or abroad. Many of those writers like Shashi Tharoor, Mukul Kesavan, Upamanyu Chatterjee including Ghosh & Basu are known as “Rushdie’s children”, but over the years some different sect of writers with distinctive voices have emerged who possess only a indistinct family resemblance with Rushdie. Ghosh & Basu must be considered as one of these writers who have chronologically followed Rushdie in the history of the Indian novel in English. Despite a few occasional touches of Rushdie,

they have evolved accomplishing their desired aim in forming a distinctive voice of their own.

The Circle of Reason (1986), Ghosh's first novel tracks the fortunes of a juvenile weaver, Alu, who is brought up in rural Bengal and after a false accusation of being a terrorist; he escapes to a fictional Gulf state and later to Algeria. The novel weaves a Transnational trope transcending the national origins and uniting worlds that have habitually been viewed as discrete; and in this process it foresees Ghosh's subsequent argument in *In an Antique Land* that the medieval trade-routes acted like a motile Transnational network that was largely unaware of Western Oriental/Occidental fornications. Like Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Ghosh's *Circle of Reason* portrays collective realism embedded in fantasy. Thus *The Circle of Reason* travels through various portrayal modes and steers the trade-routes that fills up the gap between disparate countries and cultures. Such fluidity in the novel challenges notions of mainstream nationhood and other forms of identity. While it dramatizes a range of cultural conflicts but finally it calls for a humanist creed, which disrupts the range of stereotypes & binaries like- tradition and modernity, nature and technology, East and West in a manner that foretell the orientation of Ghosh's later work.

The Shadow Lines (1988) Ghosh's second novel, focuses on a very particular microcosmic history - experience that circulates round a single family - as a microcosm for a broader national and international experience. Critic Vinita Chandra observes *The Shadow Lines* with the eye of a revisionist historian and holds the view that Amitav Ghosh accentuates the 'minor riots' within the Indian subcontinent whose canceled memories form the foundations of the accepted historiography in the implicit consensus of historiographers to leave them unveiled. Neelam Srivastava also affirms that in his writing Ghosh "...is at pains to foreground the cultural syncretism of the Indian subcontinent in strategic opposition to the historicism of nationalistic discourse" (Jain, *Structure As Symbol: Sahgal's Plans for Departure : A Mistaken Identity* 79). The Bengal Partition and the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 leading to the creation of Bangladesh peremptorily changed the unnamed narrator's family life. The title "Shadow lines" signifies the borders and boundaries that split up people and Ghosh's novel focuses on the arbitrariness of cartographical demarcations. Towards the end, when members of the family are about to undertake a journey from Calcutta to their former home in Dhaka, the narrator's grandmother wants to know whether she will "be able to see the border between India and East Pakistan from the plane" (Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 167), a guileless rejoinder which unquestionably foregrounds the conceptual

absurdity of the political map makers. Meenakshi Mukherjee explains that in the novel personal memory and official metanarratives of freedom and nationalism are often fused together. She also proposes that Ghosh has incorporated maps and mirrors to understand the real nature of space and time in politicizing history:

Just as cartography is the science of codifying space; history is the discipline of narrativising time. The public chronicles of nations are interrogated by highlighting the reality of the fictions people create around their lives...and, by recording the verifiable and graphic details of individual memories that do not necessarily tally with the received versions of history (Mukherjee 134).

In other words, she holds the view that the novel "...obviously questions the idea of nationhood that is consolidated through the baptism of wars or coercive state apparatus" (Mukherjee 134).

The narrator's family travelled to Dhaka, to save an aged relative who was struck amidst communal violence, but this rescue endeavor has taken Tridib's life. He was hacked to death by a rioting mob at Dhaka exposing the deadly effects of borders. Although he concedes that the political map-makers were well-intentioned, he is struck by the fact that the bonds that link Dhaka and Calcutta are closer than ever: "each city was the inverted image of the other, locked into an irreversible symmetry by the line that was to set us free - our looking - glass border" (Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 167). These semi-darkened contours however have deeper connotations, more than just being political demarcations, they also separates present and past, self and image, nation and Transnation. They are the signifiers of discrete identity imposed by the governments. It's a torment for the author to portray permeability/porousness of topographical borders and the artificial creation of cultural binaries hovering over human sub-consciousness.

This Transnational characteristic is overtly explained in his next novel, *In an Antique Land* (1992). The novel's transcultural world of medieval Indo-Arabic trade, *In An Antique Land* challenges the stereotypical conceptions of 'purity' or political enclosure. In other words, Ghosh is absorbed with the plural universe of cultural multiplicity and alternate versions of fragmented history. The use of family connections and personal letters makes the sense of history intensely personal in the novel. The domestic oeuvre keeps a deliberate distance from the grand historical narratives. It is a natural space, where people interacts freely and make their own connections. The novel speaks about the Jews, Muslims, Hindus and

finds a way for their inter-relationships. The narrator of the novel is a Transnational historian who traverses diverse cultures and negotiates the Transnational space in various societies. He tries to interpret the present through a subtle comprehension of the past, proposing not to accept truth as fundamental since they are multifarious and variable, depending on perspectives and locations. Ghosh's narrator, therefore, sees history as the trajectory of events that causes dislocations, disjunctions, movements and migrations, eventually replacing solid markers with shadow lines, destabilizing one's notions of the past in the reverberations of the present. Instead of conflicting with other cultures, the narrator accepts the difference wholeheartedly. M.K.Naik the renowned historian observes that *In an Antique Land* "... demonstrates how history can be enriched by imaginative reconstruction of the past" (M.K. Naik 205). The novel narrates the connections between Egypt and India the way in which as *The Circle of Reason* tells us stories about the sub-continent, the Middle East and North Africa and *The Shadow Lines* talks about the unnaturalness of political borders that ruptures peoples, places and spaces.

Like the fictional character Ishmael in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, Amitav Ghosh is attracted towards the oceans. And - like the crew of Captain Ahab's Pequod, a motley crew set sail in the Ibis thereby charting the histories of the crew and human cargo of this floating ark. The story sets sail on the metaphorical sea of opium, four hundred miles inside India, in Northern Bihar where 'for mile after mile, from Benares onwards, the Ganga seems like glowing between twin glaciers, both its banks being blanketed by thick drifts of white-petalled flowers ... as if the snows of the high Himalayas had descended on the plains to await the arrival of Holi'" (Roy, *Sea of Poppies* : Amitav Ghosh). Already the reader is conscious of the structure and the agenda of the novel:

It is March 1838, a peasant woman named Deeti, is worried about the lateness of her crop. Like the others of her village, she has been forced to cultivate poppies to feed the ever-hungry opium trade that stretches from England in the west to Malaysia and China in the east. This forms a supply chain with enslavement at both ends. Unable to grow their own food, poppy farmers such as Deeti are bound by the harsh economics of cash cropping and indentured labour. And the final consumers are enslaved by their addiction to the drug.

In *The Glass Palace* it was Burmese teak extractions which constructed the railroad networks that amalgamated British India and framed the oeuvre of the novel. Here, in this novel it is the trade of poppy: 'In the

good old days people used to say there were only two things to be exported from Calcutta: thugs and drugs - or opium and coolies as some would have it' (Ghosh, *Sea Of Poppies* 5). Ghosh is totally comfortable in describing the 'coal face' of economic activity. The section of *The Glass Palace* that describes teak logging in the Burmese jungle, and the passage where Deeti intrudes inside of the opium factory cannot be forgotten easily. Ghosh's humanitarian politics propels him to concentrate not on the grand narratives of trade and empire, but also on the common people who comprised its base. The mixing room of the opium factory was grotesque from every angle and is vivid as a 'Hieronymus Bosch painting' (Roy, Anita Roy):

No sooner had Deeti steadied herself, than her eyes were met by a startling sight - a host of dark, legless torsos was circling around and around, like some enslaved tribe of demons. When her eyes had grown more accustomed to the gloom, she discovered the secret of those circling torsos: they were bare-bodied men, sunk waist-deep in tanks of opium, tramping round and round to soften the sludge. Their eyes were vacant, glazed, and yet somehow they managed to keep moving, as slow as ants in honey, tramping, treading. When they could move no more, they sat on the edges of the tanks. These seated men had more the look of ghouls than any living thing she had ever seen: their eyes glowed red in the dark and they appeared completely naked, their loincloths so steeped in the drug as to be indistinguishable from their skin. Almost as frightening were the white overseers who were patrolling the walkways - for not only were they coatless and hatless, with their sleeves rolled, but they were also armed with fearsome instruments: metal scoops, glass ladles and long-handled rake (Roy, Anita Roy).

Ghosh is neither a mediocre and disdained writer nor does he pose a simple sense of narrative form. Like his other works *The Ibis Trilogy* is about remolding the geographies by disrupting the markers of borders that have willy-nilly carved up the subcontinent. In *The Glass Palace* Ghosh revisited and connected the history of Burma to larger South Asian histories; in *The Hungry Tide* he revisited the role of the Sundarban archipelago and the 'maw of the tides' in sub continental history of modernity and urbanism. In *The Ibis Trilogy*, he assembles India, China, Britain, and North America together in the port of Calcutta and on the deck of the *Ibis*, a cargo ship travelling to Mauritius. This is the vibrant, polyglot, transnational world of Bengal Presidency that we scarcely see in contemporary historical scholarship.

Such incessant whirlpool— of language, identity, color, class, and religion— can only be visible in transnational histories. What I really admire about Ghosh’s writings is that it represents Transnational histories. The rambling description we thoroughly follow in *The Ibis Trilogy* crisscross distances small and large- throwing all kinds of people together. Deeti, Zachary, Bahram Modi, Rajkumar, Ah Fatt, Serang Ali—in these are fictional characters that historians posit their utmost interest. The lesser known stories of Transnational connection are very difficult to get as because of the scarcity of documentation, and especially the lack of those that permit us some access to the inner lives of coolies, ship hands, and the like. To be sure, historians have not given up in the face of such challenges. Jennifer Morgan tries to imagine what it might have been like for West African women captured by slavers and taken to Barbados and South Carolina in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Marcus Rediker has spent his life as a professional historian chasing the stories of commoners in the hidden history of the Revolutionary Atlantic. And Verene A. Shepherd’s meticulous reconstruction of indentured Indians in a different kind of middle passage, from India to the Caribbean, alongside trial transcripts of the shipboard rape of a woman passenger—thus offers a micronarrative against the facts of law and history.

Ghosh’s novels share the impulse of all these storytellers, which tries to capture poetics of transnational history, suggesting both the legitimacy and the urgency of relying on verse and fragments of evidence in order to “bring a historical moment to life, even sear it into memory.

Like Amitav Ghosh, Kunal Basu is also obsessed with history and it is well reflected in his writings. In an interview with Asha Chowdhary of Times of India, Basu says that he is primarily driven by stories. When I think of one that’s exciting to me, I go about researching it and bring it to life. It isn’t a particular historical period or a set of themes that draws him into his writing, but the demands of a tale that keeps him awake at night. Basu is not timid about his intention to explore the heinous trade of opium. *The Opium Clerk* starts off with a quick tempo, where the hero, Hiranyagarbha Chakraborty is born amidst the turmoil of the Mutiny that builds him fatherless. The young boy progresses with a Bengali aesthete being educated at a mission-school that enables him to mingle into babudom, as a clerk in an auction house, dealing with the opium, though popularly referred as mud. The auction house in Calcutta enables Basu to discover the complete ramifications of the opium merchandizing—through the visions of Hiran. It’s a Dickensian realm occupied with Bengali characters. When Hiran comes into sight for the first time before his colleagues at the auction

house, he looked like a David Copperfield in an ill-fitting jacket and serge trousers with a dot of sandalwood paste on his forehead stamped by his distraught mother, stricken by the thought that her delicate child must now become a clerk and not a Brahmin priest, the clerks give him the once over: “From desks piled high with files, the gentoos examined Hiran, polishing eye-glasses as if inspecting a letter from an unknown sender” (Doctor). Hiran tread on the heels of opium route that lay hold of the opium chests through several hindrances like cholera and sea storms, past Malacca, Macao and Hong Kong to Canton, where he understood the ruler’s game of underhandedness, villainy and collusion. The novel in a sense makes a greater hold on microcosmic history and concentrates on Hiran and Douglas though sometimes the plot loses focus but ultimately retells and reframes Calcutta of that time.

Basu’s another novel, *The Yellow Emperor’s Cure* is the story of a Portuguese doctor — who brilliant surgeon, a lady killer, a venturer — According to his friends, he’s “rock steady with the scalpel, but a prize idiot when it comes to women”. The good doctor immediately leaves the Lisbon fiesta with the news that his beloved father has been stricken by the then-incurable syphilis. He plans travelling to China to find a cure for the “French Disease, Spanish Itch, German Rash or Polish Pox — it was the same old curse Dom Columbus had brought home from Hispaniola along with gold and talking parrots” (K. Basu, *The Yellow Emperor’s Cure* 28). The novel speaks about how disastrous syphilis was during nineteenth century and how the protagonist’s father was being affected by it. As Antonio’s teacher says, “No one even believes in a cure for syphilis anymore. In Naples they’ve built walls inside hospitals to separate the patients from the proxies, just as in Glasgow where the police have replaced doctors on the wards. In the lands of Calvin they’ve been left to die as punishment for their sins. The civilized world has simply given up” (K. Basu, *The Yellow Emperor’s Cure* 28). There were numerous deceitful medical practices and experimentations around, but the doctor was up to the real medical diagnosis. The doctor has observed the fact that Chinese sailors seem to be free of syphilis and goes on an ocean voyage to China. Amid the pavilions and plum trees of the Dowager Empress’s summer palace, he becomes the pupil of the Empress’s private physician, Dr Xu, and his incomprehensible assistant Fumi. In one year, Antonio experiences a culturally peculiar and plural world of invisible royalty, eunuchs, new food and new customs. He learns to overcome his impatience so that he may get the opportunity learn the secrets of the Nei-Ching, the ancient medical canon that teaches a doctor to diagnose a patient simply by listening to the

pulse. He must replace sphygmograph and ophthalmoscope with a reading of the four seasons and the five elements, the twelve channels of the body and its eleven organs. In the process he learns Mandarin, falls in love, and finds himself as a doctor and as a human being. Dr Maria's personal frustrations and achievements are set in the cauldron of the historical Boxer Rebellion, the Transnational cultural movement that rose from the ashes of the Opium Wars. Basu's characters—including a Jesuit priest, merchants, diplomats and spies at the Foreign Legation, a flamboyant manuscript collector, and Dr Maria himself—animate the larger Transnational historical context. Basu creates a whole and absorbing world rich with detail, and peopled with characters that, despite a fair level of suspense, refuse to deliver a reformed and restructured Transnational history.

Basu's *The Miniaturist* frames a new historicist version of the history, where skillfully interweaves his story set in a historical situation—Agra and Fatehpur Sikri, under the rule and reign of Akbar. Basu begins his portrayal of the *Sahensab* from where the historians end their narration. Bihzad was ordered to describe Akbar's exploits, his court activities but instead he cajoles his brush and color to indulge in presenting the secret personal life of the king. Basu's utilization of history is invested in Bihzad's personal 'Akbarnama'—an artist's ability to provide flesh and an bone to the dry official narratives of the emperor's exploits, exercises and explorations. Bihzad is uncomfortable to art that narrates the mainstream official history thus he inscribes the rich, luxurious and grandiose Harem of Akbar with vivacity and minute graphic observations. Voyeurism into the secret chasms of Akbar's Harem is what Basu deliberately indulges in. As a voyeur, the reader delves into the imagined but least discussed harem of Akbar, as Zuleikha (the young foster mother of the protagonist) opens its doors for the readers' admission. She skillfully delineates the picture of Akbar's Harem, the hundred and more begums, their boudoir, the jealousy that ran high amongst them to be the Emperor's favorite, and more: 'A race was on .To become the mother of Akbar's son' (Banerjee 12). The emperor had more than a hundred begums, each a rival to each. They spend all day bathing and perfuming, braiding their hair, dressing up in robes and jewelry—only to be disappointed at night. The first to catch Akbar's eye, when he entered the harem, could be the lucky one. He'd go to her private chamber, spend an evening with songs and stories, but then he might leave with her slave girl! The next morning, the begums would call for the whip; each stroke to the slave's back would lash the emperor Akbar! The whole harem would be suspicious. What if the wretched carried the next emperor, their future guardian, in her wretched belly?' (K. Basu, *The Miniaturist* 37).

The harem was tremendously guarded making the inmates look like prisoners within its walls. The inmate's fancies were fulfilled within the bounds of the harem regulations, a strategy religiously maintained in order to protect the devoutness of the place. Their needs were fulfilled by female mercenaries for the inmates were denied the freedom to buy things for themselves. This secrecy was maintained since they were not permitted to be exposed to the sight of any other man, but him. Akbar was the master of his harem, and all his wives, concubines and the slave girls were only vassals to his desire. In the confined lonely world of the harem the sole desire of the inmates is to be their master's favorite aiming to draw his attention. Akbar was their god, and their motto was to serve him in the best of their abilities.

Glossing over the pages of the microcosmic personal history, the reader may gather idea about the history of harem and the eunuchs during the regime of Akbar. Referring to the plentiful and abounding harem of Akbar, Bamber Gascoigne observed:

The screens of purity were already bursting at the seams – Akbar finally had more than three hundred wives- but the political advantages of this stream of presentation princesses, one of whom later came from as far away as Tibet, were incalculable... The actual number of women in the harem was nearer to five thousand. Many of these were older women, but there were also young servant girls, or Amazon from Russia or Abyssinia as armed guards, all with the status only of slaves. It was these who, if so required, were the emperor's concubines. The three hundred were technically wives, even though the Koran limits the number to four' (Gascoigne 73).

Basu thus constructs a supplementary history, not a new one, but complementing, rethinking the past, only to provide a clearer picture of the time. As Alex Rutherford would say, "Also because the chronicles cannot tell us everything – their writers would never have dared reveal certain things – I have used the novelist's freedom to imagine some incidents and of course to attribute motivation" (Rutherford 395). Thus Basu's *The Miniaturist* can rightly be considered as a chronotope.

Transnationalism involves almost an inharmonious, multiferous, and skeptical mode of interpreting history as opposed to the obedient & superficial approach of the traditional historicism. It has a spirit to critically examine the array of cultural and transnational linkups where from these artistic representations emerge. This hermeneutical aggression, wherein

culture is deliberately included as an important text – a prerequisite for the understanding of an artistic representation have led to the expansion of the range of objects to be read, interpreted or considered (Banerjee 12). Many a thing that has been lost in the alleys of metahistory on the basis of the fact that they were too minor to fascinate or hold the interest of the powerful, are now being incorporated. As Catherine Gallagher would say:

There has been in effect a social rebellion in the study of culture, so that figures hitherto kept outside the proper circles of interest – a rabble of half crazed religious visionaries, semiliterate political agitators, coarse faced peasants in hobnailed boots, dandies whose writings has been discarded as ephemera, imperial bureaucrats, freed slaves, women novelist dismissed as impudent scribblers, learned women excluded from easy access to the materials of scholarship, scandalmongers, provincial politicians, charlatans and forgotten academics – have now forced their way in, or rather have been invited in by our generation of cities (Gallagher and Greenblatt 9).

Thus we observe an incorporation of the marginal, the subaltern, the micro narratives and the fragmented memories with a definite objective. Ghosh and Basu's Transnational writings thus enables to reframe a significant part of history, which has been neglected and deliberately kept outside the mainstream discourse.

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**THE PROBLEMATICS OF LOSS AND LONGING IN
DIVAKARUNI'S *GROWING UP IN DARJEELING***

DEBARATI GHOSH

The concept of diaspora embodies a subtext of “home”. The exile or displacement from it is mainly based on three types of phenomena, namely forced, half forced or half willed and willed consequences. To be in diaspora means to be in a space charged with the possibility of multiple challenges. Avtar Brah argues that “The diaspora communities are forged out of multiple imaginative journeys between the old country and the new. These spaces are both physical and emotional, yet at the heart of the diasporic experience there is always the image of journey.” (3) Diaspora fiction lingers over alienation, loneliness, homelessness, existential rootlessness, nostalgia, protest, quest and identity.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni was an acclaimed poet before she began her career in fiction-writing. She has written poems encompassing a wide variety of themes, and directs much attention to the immigrant experience and to South Asian women. The wealth of her poetic work includes four poetry collections “ *Dark Like a River* (1987), *The Reason for Nasturtiums* (1990), *Black Candle: Poems about Women from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh* (1991/2000), and *Leaving Yuba City* (1997). Divakaruni’s collection, *Leaving Yuba City*, is a deeply affecting collection that explores images about India and the Indian experience in America - from the adventures of going to a convent school in India run by Irish nuns to the history of the earliest Indian immigrants in the United States. As with all of her writing, these poems deal with the experiences of women and their struggle to find identities for themselves. The changing designation of home and accompanying nervousness about homelessness and unfeasibility of going back are recurrent themes in Divakaruni’s poems.

This paper shall deal with the section *Growing up in Darjeeling* from Divakaruni’s collection of interlinked poems *Leaving Yuba City*. The trials and tribulations of young girls away from their homes poignantly underline their fractured identity and foreground the experiences of this “Trishanku”¹ community belonging to nowhere. The poem, “The Walk”, highlights the irony of Sunday evening walks of the convent students in “patent-leather shoes” (Divakaruni 9) through the hillsides of Darjeeling town. The girls are forbidden to talk to the local people or even to wave back at the “runny-nosed kids” for they were considered dirty and carriers of “who-

knew-what diseases” (Divakaruni 9). Instead, the girls were taught to “cut buttered bread into polite squares”, to eat “bland stews and pudding” (Divakaruni 9) and to sing songs about the Emerald Isle in Ireland. In reality, they are suspended between the culture and traditions of their Indian heritage and those of the Irish nuns. The poem deals with the inner conflict of these adolescent girls in the context of cultural displacement as they are made to feel like strangers in their own land. This, however does, not mean that these individuals do not belong anywhere or they do not feel anchored in the new space, for those who experience homelessness cherish a sense of location through memory and nostalgia. Nostalgia, loss, betrayal are their companions as they painstakingly adjust to new situations and negotiate the misbalance of their hyphenated identities. Memory and nostalgia are used as the tools by which these displaced individuals conquer their alienation as well as keep the contours of the original home alive. The memories evoked are of the past, places and people as they were when the individual had experienced them. These memories are colored by imagination and nostalgia in the new land. The separating lines are thin and faint; the two worlds merge and fuse as the perspectives keep shifting. The wish to return ‘home’ remains a haunting presence in the background. The longing for home is suggested in “The Walk” by the admiration of cottages with honeysuckles over the gates and lanterns. There is the obvious longing for their mother and easy domesticity when they gaze at “a woman in a blue sari” who “holds a baby, his fuzzy backlit head against the curve of her shoulder” (Divakaruni 10). That they suffer from the pain of being far off from their home and the anguish of leaving everything familiar behind is easy to see. William Safran asserts that “they continue to relate personally or vicariously, to the homeland in a way or another.” (Safran 23) For instance, they miss the taste of their familiar food items; hence, they hunger for “real food, onion pakoras, like our mothers once made” (Divakaruni 10) as opposed to “bland stews and puddings” (Divakaruni 9). The shock of other religious and cultural affiliations is suggested by the “sharp metallic thrust” of the church spire and the “painting of Jesus that hung above our heads/ with his chest open.” (Divakaruni 9).

The immigrants, whether their reason for migration is financial, social or political, forced or willing, have some shared experiences. They carry on the search for continuity and the search for roots, as settlement in an alien atmosphere initiates a dislocation. This dislocation is but a break with the old identity. They attempt to assimilate, adapt and acclimatize themselves with the norms of the new situation. Yet, these attempts are not without the anxiousness to maintain the unique cultural identity which

reflects the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes and provides one with “stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning” (Hall 435).

“The Geography Lesson” presents Ratna as a rebellious spirit resisting the onslaught of the new codes of conduct. She does not cry even after getting “weal-streaked palms” (Divakaruni 12) as a result of being punished for having damaged school property by unmindfully knocking off the globe in the classroom. She is further persecuted by having a placard with the word ‘Wicked’ written in large black letters, pinned to her chest. In addition, she is ostracized till she repented for her act. This alienation and the reciprocal protest to resist entrapment and the subsequent mutilation arising from the hegemonic and oppressive forces of patriarchy are at the very core of diaspora literature. Later, in the night, Ratna cries in her sleep for her pet dog. It is but a desperate cry for the love and comfort of a familiar homestead, not to be compensated by the kindness of the night nun offering water to the distraught child. In fact, it is rejected by being knocked away, and the diasporic individual tries to find shelter and solace by internalizing nostalgia. However, according to Uma Parameswaran, nostalgia “as the only sustenance can become quite toxic, vitiating the living stream into a stagnant cesspool” (32). As such, Ratna is rejected as being incapable of adaptation to the changed mores of the new situation.

The students of the convent seem to remain in what may be called a state of animated suspension, anxious about their new surroundings, unsure of their affiliations and roots. Away from their respective families, they fluctuate between crisis and development. For instance, a passive resistance is shown by them in “The Walk” when they refuse to drink their tea after being exposed to the poverty and the miserable life of the inhabitants of the Darjeeling hills during their Sunday walk. The local children with “tattered pants and swollen chiblained fingers” (Divakaruni 9) and the women having “branch-scarred arms” (Divakaruni 9) bent under the weight of huge baskets, tear at their heart strings. The cruel blows of the refectory ruler on their knuckles fail to subjugate them. The poem foregrounds a powerful force of resistance by virtue of which the girls attempt to resolve their trauma of displacement and alienation, and consolidate their power in a new space.

The immigrants’ sense of emptiness and loneliness is a feeling born out of being detached or disconnected from the known land. They remain on the edge of the adopted culture and are treated as the ‘other’.

While remaining on the margin, they undergo complex experiences of anxiety, confusion and yearnings. This is wonderfully depicted in the poem, “The Infirmary”. The infirmary is described as a “low brown building crouched among *jhau* trees” (Divakaruni 15), as if it is a predatory animal waiting to pounce on its victims. In fact, the girls at the convent were taken to the Infirmary for medication once every month. However, the rigours and regimentation of school life is compensated by the kindness of sisters during sickness. The poet persona describes nights of feverish sleep when she recalls “cool fingers like rain” (Divakaruni 16) on her fevered forehead and fingers stroking her back until she slept. Sometimes, she remembers the sisters lovingly lying down with her like her mother long ago. Every kindness reminds her of home and her mother who is again the embodiment of every memory associated with ‘home’. The dedication and loving care of the sisters is counterbalanced by the reference to Father Malhern who came to exorcise ghosts from the school after a spate of sickness. Perhaps it is also the “ghost” of the “lost home” with its indigenous traditions, religion and language, that came to haunt the young girls and filled them with nostalgia. The foolhardiness of going sweaterless in the Darjeeling damp to make her sick again is but a desperate attempt to recapture the remembered warmth of the desired home. It highlights the notion that “home” is both a geographical place as well as an emotional centre. It is constructed within a matrix of psychic and geographic spaces. It might be asserted here that “the sense of being located is the sense of being home and at home” (Raina 16).

Displacement is thus, at the heart of all complex tensions regarding cultural oppression, hybridism and quest for identity. In spite of being situated in a cozy corner of India, the convent students go through the whole gamut of emotions emerging from migration to an unfamiliar space, alienation and rootlessness. The subjects feel confused as they belong neither to their motherland nor to the adopted community. Their feeling of rootlessness, alienation, confusion and nostalgia gets multiplied due to the differences based on culture, religion and language. *Growing up in Darjeeling* deftly captures this trauma of dislocation, separation and homelessness. “In such discourses,” says Swaraj Raj, “the desire for the Real, the realm of the impossible- there is no place like home- the mother, the originary home, the homeland haunts the diasporic consciousness” (55). This desire for home is indeed the defining feature of diaspora. However, this “home” may be multi-placed; as Avtar Brah opines, the concept of diaspora “signals the processes of multi-locationality across geographical, cultural and psychic boundaries” (Brah 194). Thus, Brah believes in the fluidity of the homescape.

Home is seen both as a place and as an emotional centre to their “racial” or “national” identity. They are lived through diverse locations. As Gilroy suggests, it is simultaneously about roots and routes. This observation leads us to the problematic of homelessness and belongingness. According to Martin Heidegger, “Homelessness is coming to be the destiny of the world.” (qtd. in Sharma 61) He may perhaps be called the first philosopher of the diasporic condition because it was he who first understood and addressed the modern man’s “homelessness” in the world we live in today.

Notes

1. Trishanku is a character in Hindu mythology. He was compelled to remain suspended in his own heaven as a compromise between the earth that he belonged to and the heaven that he sought. Thus, the term suggests a state of suspension. It describes a middle ground or a compromise between an individual’s aims and desires and one’s current state and possessions.

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“WISE ENOUGH TO PLAY THE FOOL”: RUSHDIE’S VISION
OF KASHMIR IN *SHALIMAR THE CLOWN*

SAYAN AICH BHOWMICK

“ We shall meet again in Srinagar,
By the gates of the villa of peace,
Our hands blossoming into fists
Till the soldiers return the keys
And disappear. Again we’ll enter,
Our last world, the first that vanished
In our absence from the broken city.”
(*The Country Without A Post Office*, 30)

Kashmir, since the Independence in 1947, has been a bone of contention for two neighbouring states in the Indian sub continent and that struggle has keeps continuing even as I write this and as you read this. Clamour for self-determination, a fair election and basic protection of human rights have been silenced by a long and bloody separatist movement, the Indian Army’s occupation of the state and Pakistan’s constant meddling into internal affairs. The once paradise on earth has fallen, with efforts to bring back Kashmiris into the mainstream and healing psychological scars also hitting a roadblock.

Salman Rushdie in *Shalimar the Clown* presents us with a slice of history before the insurgency begun in the late 1980s. This history is of course Rushdie’s version, and much like Saleem Sinai’s fragmented physique, history too is like looking into kaleidoscope, constantly changing with every turn of the device. What Rushdie laments is the destruction of the pluralist fabric of the Kashmir Valley, which received the final nail in its coffin when the Kashmiri Pandits/Hindus were forced to leave the state under the diktats of the Islamic Militant Groups.

My paper would like to analyse the importance of what Rushdie hailed as “Kashmiriyat”, or the plurality of the language/culture and literature thriving in the valley. In this sense, Kashmir becomes a metaphor for the nation at large, which as we are all aware now, is under the threat of being homogenised by various Hindu Right Wing Groups who are equally interested in destroying the diversity that India has boasted of for so many centuries. The article would also like to problematise whether at all “kashmiriyat” had been a concrete reality in the state or was it construed/

constructed to give Kashmir a history of plurality and diversity.

Looking at the history, both political and cultural of the land we know as India, it is safe to say that it has been greatly influenced and inspired by two fundamental traditions: the Indo-Aryan cultural stream which provided Vedic philosophy, and the Indo-Muslim strand of culture based on the intertwining of 'bhaktimarg' and Islamic Sufism. "It is not surprising, therefore, to realise that the composite culture in India originated in an environment of reconciliation, rather than refutation, co-operation rather than confrontation, coexistence rather than mutual annihilation of the politically dominant Islamic strands". (*Hindu-Muslim Syncretism in India*, 2). The Sufi and Bhakti movements had erased any differences based on communal and religious lines, coalescing into almost a composite whole. As has been observed, "It was very common till very recently to have a *sadguru* or a *pir* having a common following of Hindu and Muslims. And no *pir* or *sadguru* ever forced a Hindu or a Muslim to give his religion for any other." (*Hindu-Muslim Syncretism in India*, 2).

It is this syncretic tradition that India once boasted of and that which has been under constant threat in the last few decades. With separatist movements and clamour for self-determination, violence has been on the rise, with friends turning foes and the concept of 'home' becoming an elusive and fleeting notion at best. In *Shalimar the Clown*, Rushdie deals with all this and more as "persons become nations; nations are forever changing; and identities are constantly fluctuating. His images stand as evidence of a unique form of memory, an imagined past made all the more real because of its consequences." (*Review on Shalimar the Clown*, 472). It is true that *Shalimar the Clown* does have the sprawling scale, the cinematic aspects, the Bollywood-style filmi sequences and the fabulistic characters that readers have come to expect from Rushdie. Sections of the book are in fact set in Los Angeles, that other great movie-making metropolis. One protagonist, the philandering United States ambassador to India, whose extramarital affair with a beautiful Kashmiri girl sets the plot in motion, even has the name of a famous film mogul: Max Ophuls. This, in a Rushdie novel, is surely not accidental. Talking of the syncretic tradition in Kashmir, Rushdie remarks, "Abdullah then mentioned *Kashmiriyat*, Kashmiriness, the belief that at the heart of the Kashmiri culture there was a common bond that transcended all other differences. Most bhand villages were Muslim but Pachigam was a mixture with families of Pandit background, the Kauls, the Misris... and even one family of dancing Jews." (*Shalimar the Clown*, 110)

Of all the separatist movements that have emerged over the years

since the Independence, none have been as violent and psychologically scarring as the Kashmiri people's fight for what they call "*Azadi*". There are factions who want self determination, some want to remain with India and amidst all this, the desire to identify themselves with Pakistan politically too have smudged the air of the valley. It cannot be denied that religion has played a significant role in the building up of the unrest and its subsequent expression. Pakistan. "The former American President Bill Clinton described the problem of Jammu and Kashmir as a problem of Hindu-Muslim relations; Indian nationalists describe it as a symbol of Indian secularism; Pakistan describes it as an 'unfinished agenda of the Partition', as it presumes that partition occurred on the basis of religion. The people of the state, therefore, are under constant pressure to change their self-image in terms of religious identity." (*Major Identities of Jammu and Kashmir State*, 70). As Rushdie remarks in the novel, "Pakistan has right on its side, said one rumour, "because here in Kashmir a Muslim is being prevented by a Hindu ruler from joining their coreligionists in a new Muslim state." (*Shalimar the Clown*, 86)

Conflicts in culturally plural societies may appear to be acute, particularly in situations beset with economic scarcity and exposed to exploitation by a political elite in quest of a support structure in a democratic polity. But, in fact, these conflicts may basically be only aspects of bargaining pressure politics, working toward a reasonable politico-economic deal rather than secession from the national mainstream. Kashmir has always been the site of a violent struggle for power, between India and Pakistan and parties with vested interest have at most times stoked the fire and kept the agitation going. It is too complicated an issue to have clear good/bad, white/black binaries, and it has only led to the fabric of the state being destroyed forever. Maybe the situation would have been different if the state of Kashmir would have had a homogenised religio/cultural sense of identity and belonging. But before the Hindu Pandits were forced to flee from the valley, there was a multiplicity of cultures and identities existing side by side, which Rushdie alludes to in the novel.

Amartya Sen has shrewdly observed, "Being born as Indians, we find ourselves in a culture that has had thousands of years of flourishing diversity, in a community that is proud of its many major languages and literatures, in a polity that tolerates dissent and a substantial heterogeneity of political ideas, and in a country that has persistently tried to make room for different religious and- what is also important to emphasise- diverse non-religious beliefs. We do not deserve credit for landing on such a splendidly plural society. What does, however depend on us is practising

an adequate pluralism- preserving and building on what we have received.” (*Indian Pluralism*, 38). It is tempting to see Rushdie’s portrayal of Kashmir as a stand-in for the multicultural Bombay of his past, the loss of which, he mourns. This comparison, while relevant, is less salient than the “notion that Rushdie’s Kashmir is a proxy for the now-partitioned subcontinent itself—a subcontinent with communities often viciously portioned off into violently sectarian camps.” (*Salman Rushdie Loses His Cheerfulness: Geopolitics, Terrorism and Adultery*, 258). In his effort to give voice to that loss, he touches upon what has been described as “Kashmiriyat”- a way of life and culture, accommodating, inclusive and welcoming. The two central characters in the novel, Boonyi and Noman, are children of a Kashmiri Pandit and a Muslim village chieftain, and there seems to be no communal/ religious/ cultural tension simmering at the prospect of their marital union. As Patricia Kelly points out succinctly, “It is an in- between place where everyone must accommodate other people’s self- definitions. There, Muslims and Hindus coexist raucously but peaceably- every day an opportunity for conflict but also for re-invention. Humour maintains boundaries while deflating tensions. Kashmiriyat- the belief in a common bond that transcends all the other differences- guides daily interactions and gives the region a distinctive identity.” (*Review on Shalimar the Clown*, 472).

In *Shalimar the Clown*, Rushdie’s prime focus is the depiction of a modern day loss of Eden. Kashmir is presented almost as a prelapsarian landscape, arrested in time, away from the hullabaloo of the Pre-Independence chaos and excitement of impending freedom. He talks about the harmonious and “tolerant society of pre-partition Kashmir, in which Hindu, Muslim, Jewish and Sikh families lived together, ate together and intermarried, evoking this harmony through a host of literary and cultural allusions, descriptions of food, art and history. These images of peaceful co-existence give Rushdie’s description of the bloody and brutal obliteration of this society and its individual members over the decades that follow particular force.” (*Salman Rushdie Loses His Cheerfulness: Geopolitics, Terrorism and Adultery*, 258) Rushdie’s evocation of the destruction of Kashmiriyat, the uniquely tolerant and independent cultural style of Kashmir, is most powerful and most moving when it is most specific. Allegory, irony, fable, joke and metaphor all serve to enhance our feeling for Kashmiri society and the quirks and odd ball relationships it allowed to flourish among its members. When Rushdie depicts Kashmir’s transformation from the poly-vocal and diverse community that orients itself around Kashmiriyat to a ruin of wasted lives, he shows us the fragility of social bonds and culture in the face of wilful ignorance and violence. In these moments, specificity

and allegory work hand in hand to convey to us both the value of what has been lost and the terror that such losses will continue as long as the forces of hatred, revenge, ideology and fanaticism are rampant. “No solution or specific form of hope is offered.” (*Salman Rushdie Loses His Cheerfulness: Geopolitics, Terrorism and Adultery*, 262)

And yet, the celebration / glorification of this past, and the nostalgia for a lost culture may seem to be presenting only one part of the narrative. Questions have been raised regarding how much of this “Kashmiriyat” is a perceived reality of the masses and the state and how much of it has been a construction, a narrative foisted upon the troubled land to conceal uncomfortable realities. There is also the widely believed idea regarding the naiveté of “kashmiriyat” as an idea / faith. But Suvir Kaul points out, “While *Kashmiriyat* as idea and as description of shared lives and cultural assumptions across religious communities has been belittled as a utopian, retrospective back formation that attempts to paper over age-old sectarian and social divides, there is no question that the melding of Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim ideals provided Kashmiris with a vast reservoir of spiritual ideas at odds with more doctrinaire and prescriptive forms of religious belief. (*Of Gardens and Graves*, 137). The second sense in which the ideal of *Kashmiriyat* might be a difficult one to use and implement to find a solution to the problems of the state is that the logic of advantage and opportunity in the modern world depends upon mobility and osmosis. The strongest claims for integrating larger and larger areas, through trade and movement of people, is precisely that, aspirationally, regions begin to define themselves in cosmopolitan terms. As a political ideal too, it is debilitating because it makes the same mistake of supposing that the appeal to a shared cultural ideal can solve the challenge of political differences.

After India achieved its independence, there was the issue of the princely states choosing to retain their sovereignty or integrating themselves to the Indian republic. That merger posed a problem of a different kind, “in the merger of relatively small identities into new and bigger identities. The new states thus came to develop for the time being split personalities with the loyalties of their citizens (and even of their political elites and the civil servants) torn between old territorial boundaries and new territorial structures. The split in state personalities would have one of its significant manifestations in the regional sentiment which would develop around loyalties to old territorial units. This is the primary factor explaining the success of princes in elections.” (*Cultural Pluralism, National Integration and Democracy in India*, 905). Politically, the question of belonging for the Kashmiris has always been one embroiled in controversy. It was an area

trapped between the incompatible logics of three different nationalisms- India, Pakistan and Kashmir itself- that pulled at it enough to tear it apart.

For almost half a century, Kashmir has not seen a fair and unrigged electoral process. After the imposition of Article 370, granting the state special status and giving draconian rights to the Indian Army, there has been little done by the central government with its fountainhead in New Delhi to change the ways things have been run. IN 1953, Sheikh Abdullah wanted to explore the possibilities of a more independent politics or even the possibilities were available in Article 370, but he was incarcerated for 20 years. The following decades were no different. Elections were rigged and no one with any iota of sympathy/ affiliation or Pro- Pakistan Links were allowed to contest the elections. The turnig point was the 1987 State Elections which is now looked at as the last straw on the camel's back. The frustrations now grew to snowball into a vortex of violence, resulting in the forced displacement of thousands of Kashmiri Pandits from the valley.

To see the displacement and exodus of the Hindus from the valley as only a direct fallout of the 1987 elections would be to only see half a picture. I would like to argue that this was the eruption of decades long simmering anger against the injustice and exploitation that had been handed down to the Muslim majority residing in the state. Even though the majority population of Kashmir is Muslim, it is the Hindu Dogra Kings who had been ruling them over the years. Education and opportunity to jobs and other amenities were unequally distributed, resulting in a social and economic chasm developing between the two communities. As Zutshi points out, “The vast majority of Muslim peasants and indeed city based artisans saw none of the benefits of the centralised administration; they continued to live at subsistence levels while being forced to yield both unpaid labour virtually on demand as well as crippling taxes on their produce. This was not the case with Kashmiri Hindus; no more than 5% of the population, they wielded disproportionate power as revenue gatherers, accountants, civic administrators and landholders. Pandits had developed levels of literacy which made them indispensable to the lower rungs of the administration... Pandits were the Kashmiri speaking face of State Power.” (*Of Gardens and Graves*, 94).

In its identified its objective as self-determination nationalist identity; the most influential of the conflict, the Jammu and Kashmir position in terms of regional independence. however, throughout the early 1990s, as organizations with different agend as and goals became involved in the conflict. As the ethno-nationalist movement quickly dissipated into a contest

for domination among these various organizations, the conflict took on an explicitly religious tone, with pro-Pakistan groups, such as the moderate Islamist Hizbul Mujahideen and the more extremist Islamist Harkat-Ul-Ansar rising to ascendancy and marginalizing the JKLF. (*India Displacing Indians for the Sake of India*, 92)

In a sense, *Shalimar the Clown* is a sort of war bulletin, an account of the wasteful and despoiling struggle over the valley of Kashmir, combined with an impressionistic depiction of Islamist jihadi terrorism. Although there is a second plotline—a lovestory, a generational drama and tale of passion, adultery and revenge—woven in with the larger story of Kashmir, it seems as though that narrative is a secondary concern. Rushdie's real interest, his own passion, is reserved in this book for the descent of Kashmir into intercommunal and state-sponsored violence—a descent for which he blames the leadership and military of both India and Pakistan—although he reserves particularly blistering condemnation for the Indian Government and its military policies in the valley. without violence. As Rushdie draws out the contrast between the tolerant society that Kashmiris lost and the violently polarized society that emerged to take its place, the scenes of murder, rape and cruelty he describes convey something like despair. One gets the sense that Rushdie is almost overwhelmed by the capacity of human beings to do dreadful things to one another, and to destroy the human worlds that they themselves have created. The bloody disruption of civic and political order in Kashmir and the massive Indian Security apparatus has meant that for long stretches of time in the last two decades, large sections of the state have been turned into armed camps. The number of people who have disappeared without a trace, or have been imprisoned without any formal charges against them are beyond mathematical measure.

A testimony to Rushdie's sense of empathy is that, toward the end of the novel, he has Shalimar the Clown suspended in mid air between two buildings as he escapes prison, in defiance of tight security measures. It is a deeply moving and poetic image— a trapeze artist making the whole world into a stage, his greatest performance one last proof of his fading humanity. And as Suvir Kaul remarks, “ And Kashmir is now a churning sea of stories, stories which move and mobilise and irrigate suffering and struggle.” (*Of Gardens and Graves*, 49).

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***TOBA TEK SINGH: A STUDY OF THE REPRESENTATIONS
OF PARTITION TRUTHS IN SOUTH ASIA***

SUTANUKA GHOSH ROY

The World War II has brought in a significant change in the way we look at the nation states and the democracies in the world. In today's world the nation states and the democracies increasingly share a commonality in the patterns of their behaviour towards communities that they purport to serve. Ideas of nation and democracy have started creating their own critiques by themselves. The Western model showed signs of self-reflexive absurdity when it tried adapting itself to South Asian polity as a consequence of Western colonial intervention.

The subsequent events in the Indian subcontinent, of Partition, its annulment and re-Partition are the most substantial illustrations of the deficiency of the Western model, the most abysmal harvest of which was reaped by the West when Great Britain and Ireland came to blows and saw fractures that turned truths of nationhood and democracy on their heads. An Urdu writer like Sadat Hasan Manto reviewing the partition of 1947, serves to collapse the borders between imaginary spaces at a time when two distant places were trying ironically to construct borders in much the same way. In his short story "Toba Tek Singh", first published in an Urdu magazine *Savera*, Manto creates what can be called an extended "Imagined Community", whose psychological bearings evince an underlying pattern that tends to defy civilizational constructs of nation and democracy. This paper is an attempt to read "Toba Tek Singh" in the context of the South Asian upheaval, further it tries to show how the diffusion of barriers in literature is affiliated with the psychic dissolution of the big "Other."

Manto locates his story 'Toba Tek Singh' in a lunatic asylum and thus takes the theme of Partition to the world of the insane giving prominence to the political absurdity of the Partition itself and at the same time lodges a reminder of disapproval against the powers that be, who take such crucial decisions as splitting a country into two, without ever thinking of the penalty. Partition of the subcontinent into two separate geographical entities was that devastating event in its history that changed not only its physical boundaries forever but also distorted the lives of its people in an irrevocable manner. The horror, the madness, the bestiality, the violence, arson, looting and rape that followed in the wake of the

political decision was unprecedented. Suddenly, overnight, all those secure walls of a shared tradition, shared culture, shared history collapsed. People of different communities, who till then had led a harmonious and peaceful co-existence, now turned into foes. Reason was the first casualty and fear and then rage were its first outcome. Neighbours who till yesterday would have died for each other now thirsted for one another's blood simply because they belonged to different communities. Scenes of senseless carnage were witnessed everywhere. A communal frenzy, a hypnotic obsession with violence overtook the people on both sides of the dividing line.

The story begins in the manner of a historical narration and the opening line itself places it in its historical context: 'Two or three years after Partition it strikes the government of Pakistan and Hindustan that even as they had exchanged ordinary prisoners, so they should also have an exchange of madmen as well' ('Toba Tek Singh'**). The style is that of newspaper reportage but the tone is mock-serious, dispassionate and somewhere along the line a hint has been placed about the absurdity of it all when Manto takes the theme of Partition to the lunatic asylum. Whether it was right to exchange madmen or not, no one knew, but the decision made by 'those who know best,' ('Toba Tek Singh'**) after some high level meetings had been held on both sides. No one thought of asking the madmen what they wanted. Probably because lunatics cannot make out what is right for them. Only madmen who still had their families living in Hindustan were allowed to stay and the rest had their fate sealed. As for Hindus and Sikh madmen, the question of staying did not arise as there were no Hindu families living in Pakistan so all would have to be dispatched.

Thus in two short paragraphs, Manto sets the tone of the story and displays the scene of action with a strong suggestion that the madhouse we are about to enter is in fact going to emulate the world outside. The omniscient narrator remains distanced from the scene and records objectively the events subsequent to the proclamation of the decision. Though grounded in a particular historical context and begun in a deceptive style of reportage, we must notice the difference that will gradually emerge between the rendering of history through a chronicling of facts and through a fictionalization of the same. The irony and satire at play become effective devices for exposing the atrocious reality of the historical situation.

In 'Toba Tek Singh' the lunatic asylum becomes a microcosm of the world outside and Manto focuses on the anguish of one man to bring out the trauma and tragedy of dislocation and exile faced by those countless

others who were forced out of their hearths and homes. Even in the world of these madmen the realization of a division of their country has gradually percolated through. This small world is peopled by men belonging to the various communities of the subcontinent and the narrator gives us short, though vivid, descriptions of the same. Thus, there is a Muslim madman who has been religiously reading the Urdu daily *Zamidar*, there is the Sikh madman who wants to know why they are being sent to Hindustan when they cannot even speak their language and there is again that Muslim madman who is overtaken by a nationalist fervor while bathing and shouts 'Pakistan zindabad' only to slip and fall and pass out. The madman who climbs a tree to deliver a two-hour lecture on 'the most ticklish matter of Pakistan and Hindustan' lends poignancy to the plight of those who were now forced to make a choice. Thus he declares 'I want to live neither in Hindustan nor in Pakistan. I had rather live on this tree.' The fact that he is a Muslim is revealed only when he is persuaded to come down and hugs his Hindu and Sikh friends because they would soon be going away. This implies that he must be a Muslim for he will stay back.

Two things are happening here simultaneously. On the one hand there is a note of protest in this madman's declaration that he would rather live on a tree than be forced to make a choice between two parts of the same country. This dissent simmered in the hearts of most common people who were driven out from their homes when sudden political decisions were thrust on them. Thus gradually we see the madhouse becoming a microcosm of the exterior world. We have a similar situation here as that in the world outside. A political decision has been made without consulting the people concerned and it has been thrust upon them leaving them with no choice but to submit. This note of disapproval appears again when the young Hindu lawyer from Lahore 'heartily abused all the Hindu and Muslim leaders who had got together to have Hindustan divided'

The second noteworthy fact which emerges from the protest of the madman who prefers to live on the tree, is located in the manner in which he embraces his Hindu and Sikh friends and begins to cry. At this point Manto writes: 'his heart grew heavy at the very thought that they would leave him and go away to Hindustan.' For him they are still his friends and it does not matter that they are not Muslims. We might well ask ourselves who in fact is mad here — the madmen in the asylum or the sane men outside the madhouse? Humanity seems to be still intact in this madhouse, in these madmen. Ironically the mad seem to be saner than the so called sane predators prowling the streets in the world beyond the confines of the asylum. The 'madmen' in the madhouse still value friendship

despite differences of religion or community. It is the apparently sane people who have gone berserk and are killing their friends and neighbours. It is the sane who are saying that the place that has been your home since birth is no longer your home.

Confusion about their status is now widespread in the madhouse. The suddenness of the change is underlined because even those madmen who were not completely mad were at a loss as to where they actually were at that moment. They knew that a person called Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who was known as Qaide Azam, the great leader, had created a separate nation for Muslims and had named it Pakistan. But where it was and what is its geographical dimensions, no one was sure. Manto is highlighting here a very important aspect about the gap between decision makers and the affected people. For the political leaders it was easy to run a dividing line through the country and have clear cut physical boundaries drawn between Hindustan and Pakistan. But for the common people the words remained mere territorial abstractions. For them home was where they had been born, lived and would have died had history not played such a cruel trick. A travesty of the political struggle in the outside world occurs when a Muslim madman from Chiniot declares himself to be the Qaid e Azam only to have a Sikh madman promptly turn into Master Tara Singh and challenge him. Both, writes the narrator, are removed to solitary cells as bloodshed seemed imminent. If only it were possible to have done the same in the real world, a lot of bloodshed could have been avoided which resulted from real life political confrontation. This seems to be the implied observation.

Manto next gives us some information from Bishan Singh's past and informs us how he came to be there in the mental asylum. This ferocious looking though mild mannered and harmless Sikh had been a wealthy landlord in Toba Tek Singh, a small town in Pakistan about hundred fifty kilometers South-West of Lahore. We are told that his wits had tripped suddenly and his family had brought him to the asylum, all tied up in chains and had him locked up in the madhouse. Now he listens attentively whenever there is a discussion about the formation of Hindustan and Pakistan and about 'their imminent transfer from one to the other.' When asked for his opinion he replies in the same meaningless gibberish but gradually 'the green lentils of the lantern' get replaced at first by 'the green lentils of the government of Pakistan and subsequently by 'of the government of Toba Tek Singh.' It is at that moment that the other madmen start asking him where this Toba Tek Singh was. How could one be certain where it was now for such were the times that one moment Sialkot was in Pakistan and

the next instant it was in Hindustan? How could anyone tell where a place was when the next instant it could be transferred like a plastic block. The chaos and confusion evident in the actions of these madmen is merely a reflection of what was actually happening in the larger world outside.

The omniscient narrator then proceeds to give us a short glimpse into the past telling us about the only times when Bishan Singh would almost as if wake up from his general trance to prepare for his 'visitors' i.e. his family members and friends who would come once a month to inquire about his well being, bringing him sweets and fruits from home. This was the only time when this 'frightful looking' Sikh would clean and scrub himself, oil and comb his hair nicely and would wait for his visitors all dressed up. If at any time of the year he was asked what day it was he would have been unable to tell. But 'he always knew unprompted and exactly when it was time for his family to come and visit.' With the Partition of the country, however, their visits had come to an end and the narrator tells us that 'now it was as if the voice of his heart which had earlier signaled their visits to him had fallen silent.' From the general, the focus has now shifted to the particular and individual. Manto is now going to work towards highlighting the trauma of dislocation and exile through the anguish of this one man and he moves towards it step by step. He begins by first creating a basic desire to know which side of the dividing line one's place of origin now existed. So the need to know where Toba Tek Singh was intensifies in the heart and mind of the mad Bishan Singh. He now waits for his visitors especially because he is certain that they would be able to tell him where Toba Tek Singh was for he was sure they themselves hailed from that place.

Gradually this need to know drives Bishan Singh to a madman in the madhouse who calls himself 'Khuda' or 'God.' Bishan Singh's question only makes the 'Khuda' laugh with a loud guffaw and say that Toba Tek Singh is neither in Pakistan nor in Hindustan, 'for we haven't passed our orders yet! From the general, the focus has now shifted to the particular and individual. Manto is now going to work towards highlighting the trauma of dislocation and exile through the anguish of this one man and he moves towards it step by step. When Bishan Singh is not answered by this 'khuda' about where Toba Tek Singh was he immediately launches into his gibberish which interestingly includes few new words in it. This time he says 'Opar di rumble tumble di annexe of the thoughtless of the green lentils of Wahe Guruji da khalsa and Wahe Guruji di Fateh and God Bless him who says Sat Sri Akal!' The narrator tells us that what he probably meant to say was that 'this God was the God of the Musalmans and would surely have

heeded him had he been the God of the Sikhs instead.' The significance of this apparent nonsense lies in the fact that even in the madman's perception the comprehension of new margins is filtering in. The God who refuses to answer must be from the rival camp of the Musalmans according to Bishan Singh. In the paragraph that follows, about a Musalman friend of Bishan Singh, who now comes to meet him and bring him favourable news of his family having safely, crossed the border. This man is Fazaldin, who also lives in Toba Tek Singh and had been Bishan Singh's friend for years. He now tells the latter how he had done whatever he could to help his family to escape. All had crossed over but the slight hesitation before taking the name of Roop Kaur, Bishan Singh's daughter, speaks volumes for what the girl might have endured. It is in suggestive strokes like these that Manto avoids definitiveness and limitation and also the perverse indulgence in violence so evident in writings about the Partition. This device opens the floodgates as it were for the readers to imagine the horrors that the innocent girl might have faced. When Fazaldin haltingly adds '... she too... is very well' the words ring hollow for they are immediately followed by the information that 'she too had gone with them.' Speaking of her in past tense can only mean one thing that the girl is probably lost to her family now either through abduction or death or both combined.

What we see emerging from this short exchange is different perceptions about the same place. For Fazaldin, Toba Tek Singh is right where it always was because being a Muslim he will not be thrown out of his home. He will continue to live in Toba Tek Singh where he always has. Thus the question whether it is in Pakistan or Hindustan has probably not occurred to him. The situation however, changes drastically for the person who will be driven out of his home on the basis of his different faith, different religion. Therefore it is crucial for Bishan Singh to know which side of the dividing line is Toba Tek Singh now, for if it is in Pakistan then he will lose his home for ever, to be thrown into the oblivion of uncertain and unknownenvirom. Fazaldin is incapable to answer his friend and calls upon him the latter's wrath who leaves muttering, 'Opar di rumble-tumble di annexe of the thoughtless of the green lentils of Pakistan and Hindustan and shame on the lot of you.' Bishan Singh's apparent nonsense seems to be getting increasingly politically conscious. Not only have the two difficult boundaries of Hindustan and Pakistan interjected into his perception but he is holding both equally accountable for the fate of people like him. Thus his angry mutterings about 'shame on the lot of you' are almost analogous to an authorial intervention where Manto seems to be speaking through this crazy character that is much wiser than the sane.

The last section of the story is a logical evolution of the plot. Having tailored us with the situation Manto is now going to work towards a climax and then a decision. In the preceding sections Manto has been able to bring out the passion of feelings that a man can have towards the place where he belongs and comes from. Even though Bishan Singh has been locked up in the asylum for the past fifteen years, yet it is crucial for him to know where Toba Tek Singh lies now; here or there, in Pakistan or Hindustan and he asks the same question to the concerned official when the Hindu and Sikh madmen are taken to Wagah, the border between the two countries for an exchange with those Muslim madmen who wait on the other side to be transferred to Pakistan. This time, however, Bishan Singh gets a definite answer and the official laughs and says that Toba Tek Singh is in Pakistan. The description that follows is almost heart rending even though the narrative tone remains dispassionate and detached. Like a ensnared animal Bishan Singh refuses to go to the other side and runs back to where his friends were. When the Pakistani policeman catches hold of him and tries to lead him back to the other side he starts yelling at the top of his voice, 'Opar di rumble-tumble di annexe of the thoughtless of the green lentils of Toba Tek Singh and Pakistan.' As Alok Bhalla rightly observes: 'in this last incantation are encoded all the slogans which were used to beguile and befool a people into believing that they had religious identities which were also national identities.' (186). The two however are divided here because though Toba Tek Singh is in Pakistan yet Bishan Singh cannot be a Pakistani since he is a Sikh, notwithstanding the fact that all his life he has lived in Toba Tek Singh. This is the very crucial question being implicitly asked in the apparent gibberish of the mad Bishan Singh.

Bishan Singh refuses to be coaxed into believing that Toba Tek Singh will be moved where he wants it to be moved. He runs and stands steadfastly at a spot in the middle of the two countries refusing to be stirred. The narrator observes that since he was a harmless enough fellow, the officials let him remain where he was and carry on with the rest of the measures. It is just before daybreak that everyone hears a piercing cry coming out of Bishan Singh. The man, who had stood on his legs day and night for all of fifteen years spent in the asylum, now lies face down on the ground. On one side of him lay Hindustan and on the other lay Pakistan. 'In the middle on a strip of no man's land lay Toba Tek Singh.'

South Asia has been particularly prone to mass displacement and relocations, owing to its varied geographical settings as well as socio-political factors. The partition exodus of India, has left a deep void in the human psyche. In his death Bishan Singh succeeds in avoiding the exile that stares

him in the face. In his death too he is able to determine where Toba Tek Singh lay for him. The individual and the place unite into one.

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**CONSCIOUSLY OF A MULTIPLE OUTSIDER: EXPLORING
THE INDIAN DIASPORIC IDENTITY IN JHUMPA LAHIRI'S
INTERPRETER OF MALADIES WITH REFERENCE TO TWO
SHORT STORIES**

MANISHA BHATTACHARYA

According to Amitava Ghosh, “the Indian Diaspora is one of the most important demographic dislocations of modern times and each day is growing and assuming the form of representative, significant force in global culture” (Ghosh 243). Diaspora is a form of hybridity which is subversive, it resists the cultural authoritarianism. Ahmad Aziz (*In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*) said: “one of the most important aspects of Diaspora writing is that it forces, interrogates and challenges authoritative voice of history. The writers of Diaspora have a global paradigm shift, since the challenges of Postmodernism address the narratives of power relations that silence the voices of dispossessed” (Aziz 54). Diaspora shows us how these marginalized voices have gained ascendancy. To quote Bhabha: “That it is from those who have suffered the sentence of history, subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement- that we learn our most enduring lessons for living and thinking” (Bhabha 100). V.S Naipaul depicts the search of roots in his *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961): “Mohan Biswas’s peregrination over the next 35 years, he was to be wanderer with no place to call his own” (Naipaul 160). They are national, not nationalistic; inclusive, not parochial; representing the both the local and global (thus making it ‘glocal’); celebrating the plurality of India as vital ‘worldliness’.

Jhumpa Lahiri, another diasporic writer clearly speaks from a position of “in-betweenness”. She describes the failure of belongingness: “No country is my motherland. I always find myself in exile whichever country I travel to, that’s why I was tempted to write something about those living their lives in exile” (Lahiri 29). In “Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche and the Colonial Condition”, Homi Bhabha states, “It is not the Colonialist Self or the Colonizing Other, but the disturbing distance in between that constitutes the figure of colonial otherness- the White man’s artifice inscribed on the Black man’s body. It is in relation to this impossible object that emerges the liminal problem of colonial identity and its vicissitudes” (Bhabha 106). If from the above quote we focus on certain key phrases like “the disturbing distance in between” and the “problem of colonial identity and its vicissitudes” that we will enter into certain key areas

of experience in Jhumpa Lahiri's short fiction. Instead of "colonial identity and its vicissitudes" we would have to read diasporic identity and its vicissitudes, since Jhumpa Lahiri writing in English belongs to a diasporic Indian/Bengali community that had to recast itself according to the cultural parameters of the new imperialism of America in the post Second World War world. Her characters are caught between their roots and the "New World".

If colonization started this great interface of nations, the process of the intermingling of races has continued with migrations and Diasporas of various sorts. One kind of diaspora from India took place in the late nineteenth century, that of indentured labourers who went to work its sugarcane and cotton plantations of the West Indies and in parts of South Africa. For instance, Naipaul's grandparents traveled to the West Indies in the late 19th century to escape what Pankaj Mishra in his introduction to *V.S. Naipaul: The Writer and the World*, calls "the dereliction of late - nineteenth-century North India." Another kind of Diaspora was the mass migration of professionals and middle class Indians to America during the 70's in the wake of the Vietnam War which had created a need for professional labourers in America. In Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), we get from a sensitive and feeling point of view, the many minor tragedies, failures, disappointments, clashes, crises, confrontations that this interface of cultures, Bengali and American, could have caused. What Lahiri's often understated yet subtle narrative technique does, is to point out and firmly establish the reality of this Diaspora, of this specific kind of Bengali postcolonial experience. Often the experience is filtered through women, and the stories thus become a poignant testament to the many kinds of alienation that migration of cultures denoted. In *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008), it is often the next generation that Lahiri looks at, pointing out in certain heart rendering cases, the difficulty and tragic fallout of being the children of first generation immigrants and sometimes going too far to adapt to the mores of a new culture.

In *The Interpreter of Maladies*, Jhumpa Lahiri's work traces alienation of various kinds. In the story "Mrs. Sen's", one of the most relevant in the collection, we are brought face to face with a Bengali woman, recently married and immigrated to America, not sharing a very intimate relationship with her husband, who fails to learn the ropes of crucial adjustment to the new environment. Although, the importance of the Lahiri's stories hinges on portraying a very specific kind of Bengali experience abroad, they sometimes contain Chekhov like, a more universal sorrow and sadness over the irreconcilable nature of human reality, especially relationships. The

distance in Mr. and Mrs. Sen's relationship becomes apparent from the narrator's comment: "Mr. Sen teaches mathematics at the university, Mrs. Sen had said by way of introduction, as if they were only distantly acquainted." (Lahiri 112)

In order to institute some values to her otherwise housewifely existence in an American neighborhood, where her only real occupation is cooking for two people, Mrs. Sen advertises to be a babysitter: "Professor's wife, responsible and kind, I will care for your child in my home." (Lahiri 111) The story partly focalized through the child character Eliot, who becomes Mrs. Sen's babysitting responsibility, while reinforcing the oddness and the newness of this babysitter from a different culture, also adds to the story's poignancy as we sense the child's inarticulate sympathy for this woman who was traumatized by certain aspects of her job, like a needed proficiency in driving, an activity for which she felt a singular disinclination and fear. This fear is culturally conditioned, because in India, at the time that Mrs. Sen immigrated which was in the 70's, few women unless belonging to radically progressive families, drove. The story demonstrates Mrs. Sen's acute fear of driving, a fear that causes a minor tragedy in her life and limits whatever expansion or integration into the host community that she had sought, through babysitting.

At the interview between Eliot's mother and Mrs. Sen, driving becomes an issue of some importance. As the impersonal narrator narrates the interview between Mrs. Sen and Eliot's mother, the importance of driving in American society comes through: "Most of all she (Eliot's mother) was concerned that Mrs. Sen did not know how to drive. Eliot's mother worked in an office fifty miles north, and his father, the last she had heard, lived two thousand miles west." (Lahiri 113)

It is at this point that the husband of Mrs. Sen, silent so long during this interview, intervenes, "I have been giving her lessons, actually, Mr. Sen said setting his mug on the coffee table. It was the first time had spoken" (Lahiri 113). From indications that the text has set up from the very beginning, and the infrequency of the interactions between Mr. and Mrs. Sen, the reader surmises that theirs is not exactly a warm relationship. The alienation of Mrs. Sen in a new country and overwhelmingly different cultural context, and even within her own family situation is not hard to assess. In response to Mr. Sen's pronouncement, Mrs. Sen talks about home and its different ways: "Yes. I am learning... But I am a slow student. At home, you know, we have a driver" (Lahiri 113).

When Eliot's mother responds to this statement with, "and that's

all...in India?" the narrator implies Mrs. Sen's emotional reaction to this word of home or India:

The mention of the word seemed to release something in her...She, too, looked around there room, as if she noticed in the lampshades, in the teapot, in the shadow frozen on the carpet, something the rest of them could not. "Everything is there." (Lahiri 113)

Eliot liked coming to Mrs. Sen, because in winter her apartment was much warmer than the one he lived in with his mother. He also loved watching Mrs. Sen chop vegetables everyday with a giant blade that he had never seen anybody use in America:

He especially enjoyed watching Mrs. S. as she cupped things, seated on newspapers ...Instead of a knife she used a blade that curved like the prow of a Viking ship, sailing to battle in distant seas. Each afternoon Mrs. Sen lifted the blade and locked it into place, so that it met the base at an angle. Facing the sharp edge without ever touching it, she took whole vegetables between hands and hacked them apart: cauliflower, cabbage, and butternut squash. She split things in half, and then quarters, speedily producing florets, cubes, slices and shreds, she could peel a potato in seconds. At times she sat cross-legged; at times with legs splayed...she refused to let Eliot walk around when she was chopping (Lahiri 114-115).

Thus she tells Eliot the stories of her life lived in Calcutta, helping to shape her identity. Mrs. Sen reflects Lahiri's familial experiences as she recalls that for her mother, "cooking was her jurisdiction. It was also her secret". It focuses on Home that is equally communal, yet highly personal. The importance of the other's gaze becomes an important aesthetic in this story as it is so in her other stories in this same collection. Through the gaze of the innocent child, we see how Eliot constructed an image of Mrs. Sen which in spite of his sympathy for her, was predicated on his sense of her strangeness.

As she plied her ritual everyday, a little bit of conversation would reinforce the fact of her loneliness. She told Eliot one day, "Here in this place where Mr. Sen has brought me, I cannot sometimes sleep in so much silence." (Lahiri 115) Another day she asks Eliot, "Eliot, if I began to scream right now at the top of my lungs, would someone come?" (Lahiri 116) And again, "Mr. Sen says that once I receive my license, everything will improve. What do you think, Eliot? Will things improve?" (Lahiri 119)

A poignant relationship between the baby sitter and the child develops as the adult, lost and estranged in a new culture and in an uncongenial relationship, looks to the child for succour and comfort. It is a measure of Lahiri's clear sighted art that the story shows Eliot to listen, but hardly offer any comfort, as the adult reveals herself in all her vulnerability and yearning for security. However, Eliot does respond to Mrs. Sen's frenzied efforts to learn driving, by answering all the questions she asked him at the tune:

“Impossible, Eliot, How can I go there?”

“You need to wait until no one's coming”

“Why will not anybody slow down?”

“No one's coming now” (Lahiri 120).

However, when he sat with Mrs. Sen, under an autumn sun that glittered without warmth through the trees, he saw how the same pile of cars made her knuckles faint and dim, her wrists shiver and her English falter:

“Everyone, this people, too much in their world” (Lahiri 121).

Eliot noticed that there were two things that made Mrs. Sen happy. One was as the arrival of a letter from home and the other was the obtaining of Irish whole fish from the seaside. On the first occasion that the man from the seaside shop telephoned her about fresh fish, Mr. Sen has to grudgingly take them. In the meantime, Mrs. Sen's driving lessons or attempts at driving don't go well: “In November came a series of days when Mrs. Sen refused to practice driving.” (Lahiri 127) That it was an area of acute marital discord becomes obvious to the reader when we learn that sometimes for days Mrs. Sen did not cook or did not order fish from the seaside. However, things become smooth between husband and wife and Mr. Sen once again, takes them to the seaside. Mrs. Sen appears happy too and dresses up in a red sari for the occasion. On the way back, Mr. Sen insists that she drives and she is extremely reluctant to do so. Eventually, giving in to her husband's cold insistence, she does and says, “I hate it. I hate driving. I won't go on” (Lahiri 131).

The story soon moves towards its tragic and poignant end. One day when the fish-seller from the beach calls her to say that he has fresh fish for her, she takes Eliot and goes out in the car and has an accident. The damage is minor-Mrs. Sen made a small cut on her lip; Eliot raised an objection briefly about a pain in his ribs. Mr. Sen apologized to Eliot's mother, wrote out a check reimbursing her for the previous month's

payment and Eliot who had heard Mrs. Sen crying in the bathroom, does not get to see Mrs. Sen anymore. On their way back home, Eliot's mother confessed that she was relieved. The story ends on the following note:

It was the last afternoon Eliot spent with Mrs. Sen, or with any baby-sitter. From then on his mother gave him a key, which he wore on a string around his neck. He was to call the neighbors in case of an emergency and to let himself into the beach house afterschool (Lahiri 135).

No longer was Eliot picked up from his bus stop, no longer was he peanut butter on crackers, no longer was his opinion solicited on driving; his mother called him from work and said:

You're a big boy now, Eliot." she told him. "You okay?" Eliot looked out the kitchen window at gray waves receding from the shore and said that he was fine (Lahiri 135).

Laura Anh Williams noted, "Lahiri's stories brought into focus the quite obliterated female diasporic subjects" (Williams). Let us take for example the eponymous story that gives its name to the volume, "Interpreter of Maladies". Mr. Kapasi is a tour guide and he has taken the Das family out on sightseeing in India, on a tour of the Konarak Temple in Orissa. The Das's are a young Indian-American couple like Lahiri herself and have children named Bobby, Ronny and Tina. Mr. Das teaches in a middle school in New Brunswick, New Jersey. The story depicts a conflict between cultures.

All through the trip, Mrs. Das seems bored and irritated. She feels a kind of diasporic anxiety coming back to the place where she was born; coming back to her roots. She asks how long the trip is, whether the car is air conditioned or not, and recriminates her husband for it not being so: "I told you to get a car with air – conditioning". Mrs. Das continued. "Why do you do this, Raj, just to save a few stupid rupees? What are you saving us, fifty cents?" (Lahiri 49) On the way to the temple, Mr. Kapasi explains his work that he does for living. Apart from being a tour guide he works as an interpreter in a doctor's office, interpreting for the doctor who does not know Gujarati, what the patients are saying in that particular language. Hence we see the possibilities of an ironic implication of the title "Interpreter of Maladies."

Mrs. Das seems very intrigued by Mr. Kapasi's other occupation and calls it "romantic" (Lahiri 50) and also asks him to describe a typical encounter with a patient. Mr. Kapasi narrates how a patient had recently

complained of feeling as though he had straws stuck in his throat, and how after Mr. Kapasi explained it to the doctor, the man's ailment had been fixed with medicine. Mrs. Das seems enthralled by the account and says that Mr. Kapasi has a "big responsibility" because he could easily say something wrong and neither party would know about it:

Well, for example, you could tell the doctor that the pain felt like a burning, not straw. The patient would never know what you had told the doctor, and the doctor wouldn't know that you had told the wrong thing. It's a big responsibility (Lahiri 51).

The story moving in a typical Maupassant manner with hints and shades and nuances of character and feeling, comes to a crisis as Mrs. Das suddenly reveals her past to him, hoping that he would be able to "interpret" her malady for her. At a moment when her husband and children have got off to see the monastic dwellings at Udaygiri and Khandagiri, Mrs. Das told Mr. Kapasi that Bobby was not her husband's son.

All this while, Mr. Kapasi had been feeling flattered over Mrs. Das's attention towards him and put it down to own attractiveness. Her revelation startles him profoundly and she asks him to say something as an "interpreter of maladies":

Don't you see? For eight years I haven't been able to express this to anybody, not to friends, certainly not to Raj. He doesn't even suspect it. He thinks I'm still in love with him. Well, don't you have anything to say? (Lahiri 64)

This is the moment of crisis or "moment of truth" as Mrs. Das or Memo goes on:

...my secret, and about how terrible it makes me feel I feel terrible looking at my children and at Raj, always terrible. I have terrible urges, Mr. Kapasi, to throw things away. One day I had the urge to throw everything I own out the window, the television, the children, everything. Don't you think it's unhealthy? (Lahiri 65)

She begs him to suggest some "remedy." (Lahiri 65) Mr. Kapasi is inadequate to the moment. He asks Mrs. Das an obvious question to which he gets no answer: "Is it really pain you feel, Mrs. Das, or is it guilt?" (Lahiri 66)

The moment of crisis passes without a resolution. Mrs. Das goes back to the family and Mr. Kapasi gives up any hope of continued contact with the family that had seemed possible through Mrs. Das's sudden attention towards him; though Mr. Kapasi imagines a future correspondence with

Mrs. Das, visualizing them building a relationship to translate the transcontinental gap between them. At this juncture, we can understand how the ancestral country of their heritage is proved disappointing to Mrs. Sen who is more anglicized than Indian.

The story aids on the note of ‘vertiginous possibilities’ that the open-ended short story is supposed to offer, and which makes it a modernist genre. In spite of the symmetry of design and unity of impression that the story contains, there is no Aristotelian closure or resolution. Although, Lahiri’s story does not fit the Chekovian prescription of his stories being just “middle” (22), her stories have a degree of progression that allows us to think, that even if there is no “end”, there is a “beginning” and “middle”. In his book *The Modernist Short Story* Dominic Head posits that form and context are fitted together in the modernist short story and the use of ellipsis, ambiguity and resonance which are often characteristics of a short story, but with an ultimately unifying effect, works differently for a modernist story. Jhumpa Lahiri’s short stories, which while lacking the kind of formal experimentation or symbolic manner that one associates either with Joyce or Mansfield, and often told in a straightforward, realistic manner more reminiscent of Maupassant than anyone else, do put us through a “reality warp.” There is objectivity, observation, sympathy, but no sentimentality. Whether these stories are “Unaccustomed Earth,” “Only Goodness” or “Nobody’s Business” of *Unaccustomed Earth* or “A Real Durwan” “Sexy”, “The treatment of Bibi Haldar,” “A Temporary Matter,” or “This Blessed House” of *Interpreter of Maladies*, Lahiri lays testament to compassion and a wide canvass of human types, which is moving and impressive.

As Ronny Noor asserts, “The value of these stories- although some of them are loosely constructed- lies into fact that they transcend confined borders of immigrant experience to embrace larger age-old issues that are in the world of Ralph Waldo Emerson “cast into the mould of these new times redefining America.”” (Noor 45) And Ketu H. Katrak commented: “The *Interpreter of Maladies* reflects the trauma of self transformation through immigration, which can result in a series of broken identities, that from multiple anchorages.” (Katrak 111) Diasporic novelist of subcontinent origin like Jhumpa Lahiri often articulates through her works a transnational paradigm of identity formation marked by flows of cultural mobility. In the process, the essentialised structures of race, religion or language through which we often seek to construct static, singular moulds of identity are recurrently subverted to yield place to a fluid hybridity that fashions itself through the networking of rhizomic nodes of history, heritage and habitat. The short stories of Jhumpa Lahiri, an Indian –American writer, follow a

similar trajectory as she locates herself in a ‘double city’ that combines her present with her inherited past as she recognizes how inside her “is the essence/of another continent.” Lahiri talks about trauma that we witness in diasporic writings, trauma which is deeply tied to our own historical realities which are hardly space oriented. Her perspective is echoed beautifully by Bhikhu Parekh: “The Diasporic Indian is like the banyan tree, like the traditional symbol of the Indian way of life. He spreads out his roots in several soils, drawing nourishment from one when the rest dry up. Far from being homeless, he has several homes and that is the only way he increasingly comes to feel at home in the world” (Parekh 605).

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**‘ACT LIKE STRAIGHT’: REFASHIONING MASCULINITY IN
THE GAY NETWORKING SITES OF KOLKATA**

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If you're a guy why don't you just act like a guy? You're not a female, don't act like one. That's a fairly strong point. And leather and all this other jazz, I just don't understand it I suppose. That's all there is to it. I am a very straight gay. (Connell 156)

Such was the preference of Mark Richards, a closeted homosexual from Sydney followed by a self-approximation as collected from an interview recorded by R.W. Connell in his discourse on masculinity, *Masculinities*. The interviews taken in late 80s and early 90s of the last century renders a curious case of construction of an identity within the urban space of the sophisticated queer community. The space, as Connell has observed, consists of bars, shops, nightclubs (144), which served as social assemblies, cultural symposiums and cruising spots. Such spaces initially pose a resistance to the culture of male dominance in a society, as Gregg Blachford has argued (Connell 144), but fail to provide a challenge to the patriarchal society as a whole. As a result, these spaces have been appropriated by the patriarchal society by exerting, as Connell defines it, hegemonic masculinity (56). A study of the urban queer community in Kolkata in the last decade renders a similar case of appropriation. In this paper, I will explore the issue of appropriation of queer space by hegemonic masculinity and the consequential refashioning of the image of gay by studying the gay networking sites and dating apps, especially *Planet Romeo*, *Grindr* and *Blued*.

The cultural paradigm of Kolkata has undergone a shift with regard to its perception of queer in the last decade. With the emergence of various social movements concerning demands of the decriminalization of homosexuality as well as the amendment of IPC 377, legal as well as social recognition of the rights of sexual minorities, rights of the third gender, growing threat of HIV epidemic, elimination of violence against women and sexual minorities etc. led by various NGOs and social organizations, an awareness has been created among the sophisticated urban middle class about the existence of sexuality beyond the heteronormative paradigm. Such movements operate at two levels: organization of various rallies, most notably the Pride March, cultural events, seminars and academic conferences, gender sensitization programmes in academic institutions at

one level, and formation of various communities and groups in virtual spaces for propagation of the rights of the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) communities on the other. The movements for the rights of LGBT are complemented by the growing social discontent against the violence on women and the cognizance of tabooed issues such as sexual harassment, menstruation, marital rape, paedophilia etc. These movements act as catalysts in the process of 'sexualisation' or 'sensitization' of the educated, affluent, sophisticated urban society that has begun to acknowledge, often reluctantly, the existence of people with non-normative sexual choices and a section of that has expressed solidarity to the cause.

The socio-cultural movements for the social as well as legal sanction of LGBT rights have expanded the homonormative space constructed by their predecessors within the dominant heteronormative space of Kolkata. The inception of LGBT activism in Kolkata in the mid-eighties have constructed a space for queer networking with the operation of NGOs such as *Sappho*, an organization for the rights of lesbians based in Jadavpur University, *Manas Bangla*, an organization of the male homosexuals near Ruby hospital and *Amitie Trust*, an NGO for the gay rights based in Chandannagar and Srirampur. These organizations, by virtue of their ties with NACO (National AIDS control organization), and Prevention, and Control of AIDS Programme of the Government of West Bengal got a chance to negotiate with people with alternative sexual orientation primarily in Kolkata and in its suburban areas. However, activism had given a chance to the homosexuals to come out of the closet partially and create a restricted and secret space for interactions. Such space consists primarily of the cruising spots for blind sexdates and a few gay bars in Kolkata. Those cruising spots such as Minto Park, College Square, *Nandan* premise, *Rabindra Sarovar Park* and *Dhakuria Lake* and 'allegedly' 'gay bars' such as *Floriano* in Park Street and *Ginger* in Hazra More often provided the closeted homosexuals easy access to get partners for random sexual encounters. However, *Rabindra Sadan* and *Nandan* were infamous for the open gay assemblies on Saturday evenings. The homosexuals in closet were careful enough to avoid the open assemblies even in the beginning of the last decade.

The verdict of the Delhi High Court in favour of the plea of the *Naaz Foundation* by decriminalizing homosexuality in 2009 appeared to be the turning point to bring the issue on the frontline of gender activism in Kolkata as well as the other metropolis in India. Instead of the following revocation of the previously mentioned verdict by the Apex Court of India, the thrust was powerful enough to pose a viable resistance to the predominant heteronormative paradigm in Kolkata. The participants of

the Pride March flaunt their sexuality through colourful apparels, extravagant jewellerys, gaudy make-ups and androgynous gestures. The Pride March as well as various cultural programmes (one of such programmes has been organized in Triangular Park in February 2018 at Triangular Park, Gariahat) known as Rainbow Festivals posed a challenge to the constructed masculinity in the heteronormative paradigm. The transgressive space constructed by them to celebrate queer subculture (such as *Amra Adbhut Café* at Jadavpur) has grown simultaneously with the traditional cruising spots in Kolkata, although in a different manner and with an altered orientation. Such places are often meant to celebrate the ‘coming out’ of closet. They act as transgressors of what Michel Foucault defines as ‘the cycle of prohibitions’ (Foucault 84). As he elaborates:

To deal with sex, power employs nothing more than a law of prohibition. Its objective: that sex renounce itself. Its instrument: the threat of a punishment that is nothing other than the suppression of sex. Renounce yourself for suffer the penalty of being suppressed; do not appear if you do not want to disappear. Your existence will be maintained only at the cost of your nullification. Power constrains sex only through a taboo that plays on the alternative between two nonexistences. (84)

The act of ‘coming out’ therefore, appears to be an emancipation from the oppressive closet. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has observed:

The image of coming out regularly interfaces the image of the closet, and its seemingly unambivalent public siting can be counterposed as a salvational epistemologic certainty against the very equivocal privacy afforded by the closet. (71)

Sedgwick implies that such transgressive acts, apart from its liberating as well as libertine functions, further problematizes the queer space by unsettling its structure. Instead of opening up, they often fortifies the closet for their enthusiastic failure to comprehend the nuanced implications of their transgression. The closet, in fact appears to be an ambivalent space to contain agitation as well as satisfaction.

As Sedgwick has warned:

Gay thinkers of this century have... never been blind to the damaging contradictions of this compromised metaphor of *in* and *out* of the closet of privacy. But its origins in European culture are, as the writings of Foucault have shown, so ramified —and its relation to the “larger,” i.e., ostensibly nongay-related, topologies

of privacy in the culture is, as the figure of Foucault dramatized, so critical, so enfolding, so representational — that the simple vesting of some alternative metaphor has never, either, been a true possibility. (72)

Sedgwick has charted the multiplicity of sexual orientations even within a homogeneous sexual matrix. Such multiplicity further problematizes the categorization as well as determination of sexualities such as heterosexuality, homosexuality and bisexuality within single locuses. Some of such problematics deserve mention:

- For some people, it is important that sex be embedded in contexts resonant with meaning, narrative, and connectedness with other aspects of their life; for other people, it is important that they not be; to others it doesn't occur that they might be....
- For some people, sexuality provides a needed space of heightened discovery and cognitive hyper stimulation. For others, sexuality provides a needed space of routinized habituation and cognitive hiatus....
- Some people, homo-, hetero-, and bisexual, experience their sexuality as deeply embedded in a matrix of gender meanings and gender differentials. Others of each sexuality do not. (Sedgwick 25-26)

According to her, such multiplicity of responses towards sex and sexuality gets manifested within the homosexual matrix as well. Hence, while the flaunting sexual gestures and gaudy celebration of sexual rights of the 'out' gays pose a resistance to the heterosexual culture of the patriarchal society, the 'closeted' ones have attempted to appropriate their sexuality by dissociating themselves from activism and narrowing down their sexualities within a few stipulated forms practised in a restricted space. Initially, the cruising spots provide them the scope to satisfy their need in private without being identified with the 'notorious out gang' distinctly visible in the heterosexual space. However, the growing awareness of the queer sexualities in the heterosexual space has made the cruising spots more vulnerable to hazardous social and legal consequences than before. It became naturally obligatory for the closeted gays to construct an alternative space for execution of their desired sexual acts, which would be less vulnerable to legal and social threats. Gay dating apps provide them the space that promises security, accessibility, mobility and anonymity in execution of their phantasmal sexual adventures. Among them, *Planet Romeo*, *Grindr* and *Blued* deserve exploration in terms of their utility and the resultant popularity.

In spite of the frequent intrusion of the socially visible gays, these sites and apps are predominantly occupied and utilized by the closeted homosexuals to satisfy their libidinal desires.

Planet Romeo (formerly known as *guysformen*) is the oldest international dating website that provides access to various profiles in different areas across the world. The updated version of the site comprises sections such as GUYCANDY, HUNQZ etc. It seems to be significant to check the sub-categories under GUYCANDY. They are picture galleries under the following sub-categories:

- Twinks
- Jocks
- Gents
- Muscles
- Bears
- Bananas

Each section contains innumerable images of men who demonstrate the respective categories displaying gestures and male bodies that undoubtedly conform to what Connell has called 'hegemonic masculinity'. The categories mentioned above render the desired performances of the heterosexual male and the fantastic male body constructed in the discourses of 'hegemonic masculinity'. I would like to refer to an advertisement posted by a male escort over there:

Hi my self manpreet, I M 26y/ 180 cm tall, 80 kg weight, ...more about me here: sexy, hot, bold total escort, full of SEXUL boom, have 7 inches cock, chocolate eyes and sexy body (fit and good looking), nice chest with a beautiful ass... I have soft and smooth tanned skin (CHOCOLATE COLOURS). I have long legs with a nice figure for a GENTLEMAN who dreamed being with a VICTORIA SECRETS escort... From ****ballygunge *** HOT ESCORT** boy 100% real look so manly and gorgeous, prefer face to face, (let my picture described my personalities). I offer luxury companionship for gentleman, who has no time for relationships as well as for those who likes to enjoy the company of a hot an young, boy ...> BOYFRIEND EXPERIENCE ...> CURIOUS GUY ...> LONELY GUY ...> BUSINESS TRAVELLER ...> FIRST TIMER ...> TOMBOY LOVER ...> DOMINATION what are you waiting for?? No worries about me... I am sure you will love it... U CAN DO WHATEVER U LIKE with my soft sexy body I provide video call sex or audio

call sex also charge only paytm or Airtel Money. (Planet Romeo)

The above-mentioned advertisement presents an ideal male body cherished in the queer space to lure the prospective customers. Such constructions embody the aspirations of a queer male for an ideal heterosexual male body. The abhorrence and reluctance to communicate with a feminine male expressed by majority of profiles in the site therefore, renders the anxiety of isolation of and identification with the image of stereotypical gay constructed and recurred in heterosexual paradigm. Eve Sedgwick has referred to Christopher Craft to trace the psychosocial root of this anxiety of the queer male:

Enduringly since at least the turn of the century, there have presided two contradictory *tropes of gender* through which same-sex desire could be understood. On the onehand there was, and there persists, differently coded (in the homophobic folklore and science surrounding those “sissy boys” and their mannish sisters, but also in the heart and guts of much living gay and lesbian culture), the trope of inversion, *anima muliebris in corpore virili inclusa* — “a woman’s soul trapped in a man’s body” —and vice versa. As such writers as Christopher Craft have made clear, one vital impulse of this trope is the preservation of an essential *heterosexuality* within desire itself, through a particular reading of the homosexuality of persons... (87)

Grindr and *Blued* are the latest additions to the list of gay networking sites, which have gained immense popularity in Kolkata and the suburban circles of the gay community. The former offers a scope for instant hook-ups by virtue of its GPS enabled software. One can readily locate the other persons nearby by browsing profiles serialized according to distance and make instant arrangements for meeting primarily for sex. A survey of the profiles renders recurrence of preferences enumerated in most of them like ‘A man looking for a man’, ‘A straight acting bottom guy’, ‘Hard-core top looking for manly bottom’, ‘No sissy (feminine male), CD (Cross dressers), TG (Transgender), Fatty and Uncles’, ‘Preferably gym-toned guy’, ‘No drama queens please’ ‘Looking like girls, daddy, grandpa please excuse’ etc. Moreover, most of the profiles contain display pictures of gym activities, strong biceps, erected phallus, even fake pictures of masculine models and male porn actors. *Blued*, on the other hand, offers opportunity for socializing such as arrangement of travels, trekking, parties as well as demonstration of various activities of the participants by enabling live video performances. Significantly, the activities conducted therein typically

belong to the boy zone of the heterosexual paradigm. In fact, the participants and subscribers of these apps seem to be conscious and often desperate to project themselves as 'Straight-acting gays' by performing the heterosexual roles even in the queer space. What is the mystery behind that? A social motivation? Anxiety of being gay? A long-cherished desire to be a masculine gay? In order to find answers to these riddles, we need to explore the interrelation between the sexual identities in the queer space and the constructed image in the larger heterosexual space dominated by hegemonic masculinity.

In *Masculinities*, R. W. Connell has recorded the process of the engagement of all males, regardless of their sexualities, with hegemonic masculinity in the social, Vis a Vis heterosexual space through which their gender is negotiated. In her study of Australia in 1950s and 1960s, she has observed:

Nor was there much gender nonconformity for the boys. These conventional family settings were the sites of masculinizing practices exactly parallel to those in the heterosexual life histories. Their mothers put them in pants rather than skirts, their fathers taught them football, they learned sexual difference. Moving out of the family they were inducted into the usual sex-typed peer groups, received the usual sexist informal sex education, and were subjected to the gender dichotomies that pervade school life.... Moving into workforce, most remained socially masculinized.... There is, then, a moment of engagement with hegemonic masculinity in these lives.... That is, after all, to be expected from the hegemony of the dominant pattern: it impacts on all others. (146)

The process of engagement with hegemonic masculinity in Australia parallels the same in Bengal. There is an added disadvantage of extreme homophobia and the resultant marginalization. Hence, there remains an anxiety regarding the sexual identity in the heterosexual space. Such anxiety seems to be extended to the gay networking sites and dating apps, wider queer spaces than the restricted cruising spots. The anxiety originates in the social space itself, by virtue of engagement with hegemonic masculinity. As Connell has concluded:

The moment of engagement... has its complexities. Some engagement with hegemonic masculinity is found in each of these lives. It ranges from heavy commitment to wistful fantasy, but it is always there. In no sense is their homosexuality built on a lack, a gender vacuum. Yet the construction of masculinity occurs through

relationships that are far from monolithic. The gender dynamic is both powerful and sufficiently complex and contradictory to be inflected in different ways. In these men's lives, the decisive inflection generally followed from a sexual experience- the discovery of sexuality, or a discovery in sexuality. (147)

The engagement of the homosexual men with hegemonic masculinity in the predominantly heterosexual social spaces results in many-sided negotiations in multiple arenas. Hence, homosexuality in Kolkata manifests itself in multiple forms varying from gaudy transgender to very straight gays. The emergence of 'masculine gay' is indeed the result of the appropriation of the closeted queer space by hegemonic masculinity. While such phenomenon appears to be a departure from the queer radicalism, yet, paradoxically, it subverts the conventional equation of homosexuality with effeminacy in the patriarchal discourses in the last two centuries.

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