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**Strategic Transgressions and Agency in Postcolonial Indian Literature in  
English: Rohinton Mistry, Arundhati Roy, and Salman Rushdie**

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## ABSTRACT

Transgression as a mode of resistance and transformation is significant yet largely untheorized in postcolonial literature. This dissertation is concerned with theoretical and textual practices by which transgression can be studied as a locus of agency and difference toward the possibility of fostering moments and spaces of transformation. To that end, it explores various enabling counter-hegemonic modes of strategy and tactic with a focus on the body in the texts of Rohinton Mistry, Arundhati Roy, and Salman Rushdie.

Transgression does not simply give rise to the capacity of resistance to transform the dominant structure. Rather than dwelling on a mere sequence or repeat of events, this dissertation focuses on critical points of grounding for a new beginning as well as powerful metaphorical effects of practice, which defy essentialist discourses and raise possibilities of an alternative discursive space. Drawing upon a range of textual examples, the study critically examines not only the workings of prevailing norms but also the ways in which transgressive desire and practice enable marginalized characters to become ‘bodies that matter’ rather than being banished to the ‘abject zone.’

This dissertation reflects a complex intertwining of postcolonial, sexuality and gender, feminist, and cultural studies vis-à-vis transgression and agency. Therefore, the arguments made in this study represent an array of ideas drawn from various disciplines and discourses, especially from theorists such as Michel Foucault, Homi Bhabha, Judith Butler, Gayatri Spivak, Edward Said, Bill Ashcroft, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Jacques Lacan. This hybrid approach puts essentialist discourses—mediated by colonial history and postcolonial reality—under scrutiny to rethink the question of power and agency in exploring the possibility of subaltern others’ transformation into subjects of their own history and experience in specific contexts.

By arguing the importance of the strategic use of essentialism based on everyday practice, I also emphasize the need to problematize the hegemonic concept of history so as to trace reterritorialization and repossession on the part of the silenced or invisible who live on borrowed time in minimal space. The highlight of this research is to explore how the established boundaries are expanded, redefined and redrawn in the circulatory, recursive structure of transgression and protest, opening the way for transforming oppression or abjection into agency. With this critical lens in mind, I heed the dynamics of similarity and difference in the narrative as a framework of postcolonial critique to provide a new reading of postcolonial texts.

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## Introduction

The practices of postcolonial writing are believed to challenge false notions of the universal or dangerous illusions of globalism and serve as a source of creative energy by offering strategies of resistance and transformation. In this regard, postcolonial oppositionality and resistance suggest many possibilities of countervailing the centre's assumed superiority over the periphery. As Anne McClintock (1992: 92) notes, however, the promise of postcolonialism has been "a history of hopes postponed" with regard to women and other minorities in a postcolonial society. The constitution of these groups as subjects shows how they are still disempowered, disadvantaged, marginalized or downtrodden, demonstrating that there are a host of problems which need to be addressed for a better structure in which to live. Since "a history of discrimination and misrepresentation is common among, say, women, blacks, homosexuals and Third World migrants" (Bhabha 2004: 252), keen attention has been paid to the political strategy<sup>1</sup> of helping subaltern<sup>2</sup> others speak for themselves or speaking for them. Given that there is still discrimination against, and oppression of, minorities or subalterns in postcolonial contexts, it is necessary to explore the ways in which they are othered or made abject but still empowered to counter constraints and transform the given structure into a better arrangement.

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<sup>1</sup> Ashcroft (2001: 53) quotes Michel de Certeau's argument that the practices of daily life are largely tactical transgressions of the rules and structures as he distinguishes 'tactics' from 'strategy.' Usually, tactics are everyday events, general moves within an already ordered strategy. Although I distinguish the two if necessary, I would like to pay heed to Ashcroft's contention that the concepts of strategy and tactics overlap, creating an ambivalent space. The distinction between strategy and tactics is other than one of simple opposition. Ian Buchanan (1997: 188) argues, "The most persistent and damaging distortion of de Certeau's theory has been the enshrining of the idea that strategy and tactics are oppositions in the dialectical sense."

<sup>2</sup> The term 'subaltern' which originally means noncommissioned officers is drawn from Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*. I basically agree with Jenny Sharpe's argument (1989: 138) for the collective's use of "subaltern" as a category of difference in opposition to elite or ruling classes, so that the concept is not restricted to woman as in the case of Spivak's theory, or a unified, homogeneous social group like the Western Marxist category of the proletariat. In this dissertation, I expand the Spivakian conception of subaltern to refer to a position of disadvantage in terms of culture, gender, sexuality, class, race, etc. Therefore, individual characters who are subjected to oppression or discrimination because of their subordinate position can be defined as subalterns. But I also tackle the problem of doubly or triply marginalized subalterns, well aware of the fact that there exists a different level of marginalization.

A significant amount of research focuses on class, race, gender, and sexuality in postcolonial literature to address the dynamics of constitutive, pervasive, and persistent forces that shape subjects in postcolonial contexts. However, articles on particular authors or works give only snippets of how Indian writers belonging to the ‘midnight’s children generation’<sup>3</sup> have been thought, assessed, and theorized on such related issues as transgression and transformative agency with a focus on the body. There has not been the kind of extensive research proposed here, which investigates the ways in which transgression transforms abject human experiences into agency in Indian English writing produced since the publication of Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* in 1980. With regard to the scope of research, the texts which I have chosen for primary analysis are by three writers associated with different religious and cultural backgrounds in Hindu majority India: Rohinton Mistry, the Indian-born Canadian author, Arundhati Roy, the South Indian author, and Rushdie, the Indian-born British author. Mistry and Rushdie are diasporic Indian writers while Roy remains in India. Mistry, a Parsi<sup>4</sup> immigrant to Canada, deals with his ethnic Zoroastrian community in Bombay<sup>5</sup>; Roy, a member of the Syrian

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<sup>3</sup> The meaning of ‘midnight’s children generation’ writers is dual. It refers to Indian English writers who were born after India’s independence from Britain at the stroke of midnight on August 15 in 1947. It also refers to a new generation of Indian English writers who were influenced by and benefited from the enormous success of Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* after its publication in 1980.

<sup>4</sup> Parsis are an ethno-religious minority in India. Believers in Zoroastrianism, they escaped Islam-conquered Persia and settled in western India around the 10<sup>th</sup> century AD. There is an estimated 130,000 Parsis worldwide, and less than 70,000 Parsis live in India. As their number is likely to drop down to some 20,000 in the next few decades, they may be reduced to the status of a tribe (Dodiya 2006: 4). Rohinton Mistry, a Parsi himself, immigrated to Canada in 1975. For Mistry himself, the act of writing means preserving the Parsi religion and culture at a time when the Parsis face the risk of extinction because of rapidly dwindling birth and marriage rates. “Parsi writers today are trying to record for posterity the story of the Parsi race and their ancient Zoroastrian faith” (Bharucha 1995: 59).

<sup>5</sup> The name of the city, India’s commercial hub, was changed from Bombay to Mumbai in 1996 after the Hindu fundamentalist Shiv Sena party came to power in the state of Maharashtra in alliance with the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The name of Mumbai is derived after the Koli goddess, Mumbadevi. The Shiv Sena party, which positions itself as the protector of local Marathi-speaking Hindus against migrants, ruled the state for five years from 1994.



Christian<sup>6</sup> community in south India, addresses caste and other issues surrounding a Syrian Christian family in a small town in Kerala; and Rushdie, born into a Muslim<sup>7</sup> family of Kashmiri descent in Bombay, usually takes Muslim women and men as his subjects. So I apply the term postcolonial to address the Indian context “affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day” (Ashcroft et al. 1989: 2).<sup>8</sup>

In spite of differences, the three writers have a few things in common. Rushdie left India at the age of 14, and Mistry emigrated to Canada at 23. So the two can be considered as outsiders of India, but they still offer insiders’ views of India from a critical perspective along with Roy. The main reason for my choice of authors is that they—being among the most widely read and prominent prize-winning authors from minority groups in the Subcontinent—deserve considered discussion in the postcolonial Indian context on the basis of their use of transgression as a mode of resistance and agency for transformation. They are explicitly political and transgressive writers whose works caused a stir in India or elsewhere, ironically enjoying a boost in sales due to threats and protests. The court case against Roy’s *The God of Small Things* shone the spotlight

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<sup>6</sup> There are about 17 million Catholics in India. Among them, some 7 million are Saint Thomas Christians also known as Syrian Christians, most of whom live in the state of Kerala.

<sup>7</sup> According to the 2001 census, India is home to about 138 million Muslims, the world's third-largest Muslim population after Indonesia (210 million) and Pakistan (166 million). They compose 13.4 percent of India’s 1.2 billion population while the Hindu majority makes up about 80 percent of the population.

<sup>8</sup> Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin’s use of the term “post-colonial” to cover “all the culture” is too broad to apply in this research although I agree with their diagnosis of “a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression.” Besides, I choose not to use a hyphen in ‘postcolonial’ or ‘postcolonialism’ because the term emphasizes not only “the discursive and material effects of the historical ‘fact’ of colonialism” but also “attention to cultural difference and marginality” (Ashcroft 2001: 10). Ania Loomba (1998: 12) points out that the prefix ‘post’ complicates matters because it implies an aftermath in two senses—temporal, as in coming after, and ideological, as in supplanting. The implication makes it debatable whether once colonized countries are properly ‘postcolonial’ because the ‘post’ might be an illusion that covers up neocolonialism or the ongoing presence of the colonial past in the present. Well aware of the commingling of both the continuities and discontinuities of colonial power, Bhabha (2004: 6) dismisses the binary use of the prefix, arguing that if the jargon of our times has any meaning at all, it does not lie in the popular use of ‘post’ to indicate sequentiality for *after-*, or polarity for *anti-*.

on the perception of the Indian legal authorities about art and obscenity.<sup>9</sup> The novelist-turned-activist caused a series of controversies by opposing nuclear test blasts and construction of dams, and her support of Kashmir's independence sparked a debate about sedition charges against her in 2010. The withdrawal of Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* from the college syllabus in the state of Maharashtra illustrates growing fundamentalism in Indian society.<sup>10</sup> The well-known "Rushdie Affair," following the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, reignited a debate over freedom of speech. Rushdie's character Baal sums up his transgressive view of art:

‘A poet's work,’ he answers. ‘To name the unnamable, to point at frauds, to take sides, start arguments, shape the world and stop it from going to sleep.’ And if rivers of blood flow from the cuts his verses inflict, then they will nourish him. (Rushdie 2008: 100)

Since the subject of this study is not the authors but their texts and themes, however, I am not going to discuss their biography or social activities unless they are directly related to the texts. This thematic approach puts into focus the ways in which different types of subaltern characters on the margins engage and negotiate the mores or norms of family, society, or nation in the Indian postcolonial context. When necessary, I offer a comparative study of the three writers' characters and themes. Although they all seem to follow the tradition of Indian English writing they occupy a kind of oppositional position from which they can create new energies and values. So the boundaries between 'Indian' and 'English' are imprecise and overlapping in their writings. In terms of theme, for instance, the midnight children's generation writers tackle "sexual love

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<sup>9</sup> Aside from the symbolic violation of law in the text, a court case was filed against Roy in real life under section 292 of the Indian Penal Code for charges of obscenity, especially with regard to her 'pornographic' description of the love-making between Ammu and Velutha (Dhawan 1999: 20). The court case that ran for a decade was dismissed in 2007.

<sup>10</sup> In October 2010, copies of *Such a Long Journey* were burned by a mob of students led by Aditya Thackeray, the grandson of Bal Thackeray, a highly controversial political leader who founded the Shiv Sena party in 1967, a Hindu hard-line party. Aditya, who was handpicked by his grandfather to head Shiv Sena's youth wing, was miffed by Mistry's unflattering descriptions of his grandfather. Bal Thackeray, a former political cartoonist who is accused of inciting ethnic and religious violence against minority Muslims during riots in 1992-1993, died on November 17, 2012.

and personal happiness” head-on,<sup>11</sup> which are traditionally what Meenakshi Mukherjee (1971: 29) calls “two prime concerns of the Western novelist.”

Rather than construct a definitive theory of transgression in postcolonial literature, a central goal of this dissertation is to explore different modes of transgression in which marginalized characters can be enabled to transform oppression or abjection into agency, thereby becoming the makers of their own history and experience rather than being reduced to what Althusser calls interpellated subjects or what Foucault calls docile bodies. This study—which seeks to advance much-needed research on the strategies and practices of downtrodden characters in postcolonial literature to restore their voices—is an effort to illustrate how transgression<sup>12</sup>, a defining feature of postcolonial texts, can serve as a vital tool of postcolonial critique without valorizing every transgression as an essential ethical value. Going a step further, it aims to show that the politics of agency and resistance operates in a transgressive but relational manner, transforming the dominant structure. Similar things happen, but the results can be different. The repetition and difference of transgression in history means that the postcolonial world is by no means a chaotic disorder of deep-seated divisions. So I try to demonstrate that the vicissitudes of transgression can serve as a locus of difference to create a virtuous cycle of

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<sup>11</sup> Khushwant Singh (2009: 66-67) credits Rushdie and Roy with playing a vital role in “liberating Indian writing from traditional straitjackets” in terms of content of writing. Singh argues that explicit references to sex as an art form went through four distinct periods of India’s history: ancient, Islamic, British and post-independent. Censorship by the state or society began after the Muslim occupation of northern India. This prudery during the Mughal period was reinforced when the British introduced Victorian morals to the colonized Indians. Against this historical backdrop, the process of liberation regarding the use of sexual vocabulary and imagination in Indian English fiction could not help but be slow.

<sup>12</sup> Transgression has undergone several changes in meaning before it acquires multiple meanings in the English lexicon. Tracing the English-language word back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Anthony Julius (2003: 19) observes that whereas “transgression” means primarily an offense against God for theologians, “four essential meanings emerge, then: the denying of doctrinal truths; rule-breaking, including the violation of principles, conventions, pieties or taboos; the giving of serious offense; and the exceeding, erasing or disordering of physical or conceptual boundaries.” However, as Vartan Messier (2005: 125-126) argues, these categorizations are not mutually exclusive given that it is possible to transgress in more than one aspect. He notes that the defining feature of transgression is taboo-breaking which exceeds established boundaries of the permissible and the tolerable within society.

agency and transformation, bringing about critical moments of opportunity for the marginalized and downtrodden. To that end, I use a range of theoretical, critical, and textual means to explore how transgression creates a new point of beginning and powerful metaphoric effects of practice, which resist essentialist discourses and open up a possibility of wider horizons as well as freedom from oppression and dominance. Well aware that every transgression cannot bring about a meaningful change or a viable solution, I also look at the value and use of transgression with a certain suspicion so that it is possible to recognize the possibilities and limits of transgression in the Indian postcolonial context.

Language plays a vital role in characterizing and defining human experience. It is part of a well-known triad of structures along with ideology and discourse that construct subject—a poststructuralist term of self—so “the corollary is that any action performed by that subject must also be to some extent a consequence of those things” (Ashcroft et al. 2007: 6-7). Their argument sounds true given that a composite of Indian and English literary and linguistic values contributes to the establishment of a hybrid tradition of Indian English literature. However, the three writers’ unconventional use of language demonstrates that just because the subject is formed by such a structure does not mean that it determines the subject and its agency. They would surely agree with Chinua Achebe’s argument that postcolonial writers should not write *like a native speaker* as they are supposed to have “something new, something different to say” (1975: 61): “[They] should aim at fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry [their] peculiar experience.” Especially, the three authors ignore, alter, and rewrite the ground rules of the English language and literature without being absorbed by them. Such appropriation provides creative energies to use one literary tradition and canon to enrich and

renew another, holding out the prospect of resistance and transformation.<sup>13</sup> Since Indian English literature is such a complex concept because of its colonial and postcolonial history, its contradictory nature must be taken into account against this historical background.<sup>14</sup> Among many other issues, Meenakshi Mukherjee (1971: 5) describes Indian English literature as “twice born” to suggest its double parentage: “I find it the product of two parent traditions, and suggest that a recognition of this fact is the first step towards granting the Indo-Anglian<sup>15</sup> novel its proper place in modern Indian literature.”

In spite of the appropriation of traditional forms of writing in postcolonial contexts, however, critics such as Aijaz Ahmad and Timothy Brennan cast doubts about the capacity for self-reflexivity and resistance, arguing that writing within the ruling discourse of the English language and literature makes their work complicit with colonialism or neocolonialism.<sup>16</sup> They cite their nationality, class, or privileged social position as evidence that they comply with dominant European power structures, not in opposition to them.<sup>17</sup> Ahmad (1992: 138) finds fault with the class bias in Rushdie’s writing whose spotlight usually falls on members of the elite

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<sup>13</sup> Rushdie (2003: 165) argues that Indian English writing should be seen as evidence that “the East is imposing itself on the West” rather than a canon being foisted on them from outside. Its creative energy is believed to transgress and enrich the hegemonic literature.

<sup>14</sup> “India, as a modern nation state, was marked out with precise geographical boundaries, in their precise geographical way, by a British Act of Parliament in 1899” (Roy 1998). But it was divided into India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka after India’s independence from Britain. This history shows that as the modern nation is an artificial concept, the notion of Indian English literature may have to change by reflecting the shifting borders.

<sup>15</sup> Sujit Mukherjee (1994: 3-4) explains how creative writing in English by Indians has struggled long and hard to obtain a separate identity, especially in terms of terminology from “Anglo-Indian,” “Indo-Anglian” (by K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar) to “Indian English” (by C. D. Narasimhaiah).

<sup>16</sup> Ahmad (1992: 126) argues that Rushdie is “a writer of Western fictions who uses the veneer of Indian storytelling to reinforce the appeal of his fictions to Western readers.” Brennan (1989: 69) argues that Rushdie reinforces Western attitudes in spite of his attempts to countervail them: “[His] discourse, instead of telling a story reviling Europeans for their dishonourable past, stylistically alludes to that past and appropriates it for [his] own use.”

<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, Rushdie himself (1997: xiii) sums up criticisms of postcolonial Indian English writers as follows: 1) for being too upper-middle-class 2) for lacking diversity in their choice of themes and techniques 3) for being less popular in India than outside India 4) for possessing inflated reputations on account of the international power of the English language 5) for living, in many cases, outside India 6) for being deracinated 7) for being insufficiently grounded in the ancient literary traditions of India 8) for being the literary equivalent of MTV culture, of globalising Coca-Colonisation, etc.

class. As for Roy, Ahmad (2006: 35-36) goes so far as to suggest that since her novel inherits the tradition of sexual Euro-American fiction, sexual transgression which forms the core of her novel is dismissible as either a non-politics or as a zone of erotic utopia. Such criticism shows that although postcolonial critics and writers are anxious to break free from Eurocentric discourses, it is not an easy job. Much of the reason is that the modes of writing taught and produced are deeply Eurocentric. As Gyan Prakash (1994: 1476) notes, postcolonialism “inhabits the structures of Western domination that it seeks to undo.” The impossibility of eliminating colonial or neocolonial presence shows that postcolonialism, which is riddled with contradictions and qualifications, has to navigate the structure of power relations vis-a-vis the West that it seeks to emulate but needs to interrogate and subvert, especially at a time when an ex-British colony like India shows increasing signs of rapidly becoming a cultural province of the United States.

The controversy over place names is an apt example to show that everyday postcolonial reality is a composite of colonial and indigenous cultures. The decolonizing effort to restore ‘original’ names opens up a discussion on ways of recovering indigenous culture. The resulting ambivalence suggests that the retreat of the British Empire does not guarantee a satisfactory solution to the inner problems of postcolonial society. In *Such a Long Journey*, Dinshawji’s bemoaning of the loss of names raises a fundamental question about cultural identity as the government changes the Anglicized names of the city and streets back to presumed indigenous ones:

“I grew up on Lamington<sup>18</sup> Road... My school was on Carnac<sup>19</sup> Road... And one fine day the name changes. So what happens to the life I have lived? Was I living the wrong life, with all the wrong names? Will I get a second chance to live it all again, with these new names? Tell me what happens to my life. Rubbed out, just like that? Tell me!” (Mistry 1992: 74).

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<sup>18</sup> Charles Cochrane-Baillie Lamington was a British politician and colonial administrator who was the governor of Bombay from 1903 to 1907. He was also the governor of Queensland in Australia from 1896 to 1901.

<sup>19</sup> James Rivette Carnac was the governor of Bombay from 1839 to 1842.

For Mistry, the restoration of native names is a symbolic act of cultural essentialism, which not only neglects the continued presence of coloniality and its integration into the indigenous culture, but also repeats the rhetoric of the colonial discourse only to form a Manichean bifurcation that suppresses alternatives or pluralities.<sup>20</sup> The political rhetoric of “Maharashtra for Maharashtrians” (Mistry 1992: 73) illustrates how in an imbricative process of syncretization the former victims and colonized rise as the new dominant power in the course of decolonization while the dominant colonial culture may become minorities.<sup>21</sup> To borrow words from Rushdie (2008: 363), the persecuted subject might be an “oppressed person whose permanent dream is to become the persecutor.” Such a metaphor is well reflected in Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* and *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, both of which lament the dying of a secular Bombay at the hands of fundamentalists. These examples show that the writers’ search for origin or identity is not meant to explore origin itself but new possibilities in terms of representation.

Such a critical quest for identity suggests that rule-breaking plays a vital role in the reconstruction of postcolonial subject. As Ashcroft (2001: 46) contends, one of postcolonial literature’s crucial features is “the appropriation and transformation of dominant forms of representation.” Therefore, what matters is to explore how they negotiate the interstices of disciplines of power and knowledge and adapt, rework, or subvert them for their own purposes. It is no wonder that a striking feature of postcolonial literature is emphasizing creativity over originality by interrogating the received notion of canonized originality. One of the powerful

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<sup>20</sup> Mistry also addresses this issue in *Family Matters* in which Yezad Chenoy insists on Hughes Road, not Sitaram Patkar Marg: “It’ll always be Hughes Road for me” (2003: 193). Mistry himself uses old Anglicized names throughout the novel in an apparent effort to take issue with the name change policy in postcolonial society.

<sup>21</sup> After widespread riots and killings, the government agreed in May 1960 to divide the Bombay state into two linguistic states of Maharashtra and Gujarat, with Bombay city being included in Maharashtra because of the continued demand from Maharashtrians (Chandra et al. 2000: 129). Parsis were key players in local business and politics during the British colonial rule, but they are relegated to the minority status in a Hindu fundamentalists-dominated postcolonial society in the state of Maharashtra.

metaphors for transgressing and repossessing signs and representations is the cannibalistic consumption of the dominant culture. Chapter II addresses how the figuration of eating human flesh can be deployed to challenge and subvert the dominant Western cultural practices. Such a radical metaphor is appropriated within the framework of an intercultural discourse which is open to revision.

The process of appropriation and transformation shows that language is a symbolic stage of struggle where the formerly colonized violate, remake, and reinscribe the dominant language. Rushdie (1992: 17) argues:

Those of us who do use English do so in spite of our ambiguity towards it, or perhaps because of that, perhaps because we can find in that linguistic struggle a reflection of other struggles taking place in the real world, struggles between the cultures within ourselves and the influences at work upon our societies. To conquer English may be to complete the process of making ourselves free.

The interpolation of 'proper English' is an apt example of transgression and agency in terms of language variance and cultural difference. Specifically, the interspersion of the dominant language with untranslated words shows how they write back to the centre from the postcolonial standpoint, impugning the ideology of ruling power, Western racial superiority, and neocolonialism. Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* contains many untranslated Gujarati, Hindi, and Parsi words and sentences, so foreign readers find it difficult to comprehend the text as it does not carry any footnote or glossary purposely. The following passage signals his intention to resist and transform the dominant system:

The early morning news on government-controlled All-India Radio emerged... The clear melliflence of its Hindi vocables tested the morning air, and presently offered a confident counterpoint to the BBC World Service that brashly cut in...bristling with short-wave crackle and hiss. (Mistry 1992: 5)

Roy and Rushdie are also famous for violating the ground rules and grammar of the English language by peppering their texts with capitalization, vernacular vocabulary, and syntax. This



sense of the strangeness of English, or the installation of a “metonymic gap,”<sup>22</sup> is a metaphor for resistance and transformation, which makes speakers of ‘standard English’ resort to cultural contexts in order to understand the texts. Such appropriation of language serves to mock and question cultural hegemony even as their mode of writing is English.

In this regard, I show in Chapter III how Baby Kochamma’s boastful mimicry of authentic English is set against the little twins’ fascination with the palindromes of the native language. The children use the vernacular language to transgress and counter the norms of cultural imperialism. Their counter-hegemonic linguistic agency undermines the constructed idea of a unitary colonial identity represented by Baby Kochamma, so they do not remain powerless victims of her self-styled colonial pedagogy and surveillance. I draw attention to the fact that linguistic practices relate to not only the double-sided process of subject formation but also contribute to fostering the agency of participants. Althusser’s notion of the interpellation of the subject is reworked to suggest the possibility of resistance and transformation in postcolonial contexts. Interpellation, the injurious name-hailing, originally intends to deny an agency but, as Butler (1993: 122) extends the possibility of “bad subjects,” the linguistic environment provides a stage in which subjects are able to perform and disobey without being determined by the power structure. Chapter III shows that interpellation, allegedly a “unilateral act,” is not a simple, mechanical process because it draws a response and leads to subversion in practice. The point is that although we are linguistically constituted in some sense, it does not mean that we are linguistically determined. Those who are addressed are not purely passive ciphers, but can become agents in their dialogic engagement with the world. The little twins’ interpolation of the dominant English language with native vocabulary and backward reading suggests that they are

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<sup>22</sup> As Ashcroft (2001: 75) argues, the inserted language, which causes a sense of distance, ‘stands for’ the colonized culture in a metonymic way, and its resistance to interpretation constructs a ‘gap’ between the writer’s culture and the colonial culture. This gap or fissure raises possibilities of agency for resistance and transformation.

able to resist and subvert the call designed to shape them as dark-skinned others, and refuse to accept the power structures implicit in language and human relations as natural.

This process of appropriating and transforming the imperfect and ambivalent language applies to other postcolonial characters. In *Midnight's Children*, Saleem's act of narrating empowers him to overcome the abject state of his castration by writing back or speaking back to the hegemonic centre of discourse. Unreliable memory and jumbled narration helps him weave his own imagination and interpretations into an alternative history of family and modern India. In *The Moor's Last Sigh*, language rushes forth for Moraes before the imminence of death, and his Scheherazadean narration is a narrative desire that transgresses the confines of human life in the act of narrating. However, the celebration of the power of language is not sustainable in other contexts. The limits of counter-hegemonic discourse are apparent in the case of the silenced or silent as if to suggest that cynical critics of postcolonial writers are right. Linguistic agency does not arise for subaltern others who cannot have their voice heard, like the disabled idiot Tehmul in *Such a Long Journey*, the mute Sufiya in *Shame*, and Estha in *The God of Small Things* who embraces silence and invisibility as daily practice of the self. But I explore in Chapter I and III how transgressive practice empowers them to counteract discursive or ideological control in a way to suggest that they are not constrained by hegemonic discourse. Their counter-hegemonic 'body's language' like silence, violence, theft, and sexual perversion undermine Butler's argument (1993: 68): "What is material never fully escapes from the process by which it is signified."

My emphasis on alternative modes of representation for the silenced aims to show that subaltern characters who are perceived to be abnormal, unfit, deviant, or insane can never be completely eliminated. As Elizabeth Grosz (1990: 87) notes in line with Kristeva's position, "it

is impossible to exclude the threatening or anti-social elements with any finality.” Sufiya and Tehmul, who are othered as sexual outlaws or monsters as opposed to the normative, make efforts to win social recognition and the right to exist. Instead of being relegated to the margins of normative society, they are enabled to create an alternative space and time of their own. Going a step further, I investigate the ways in which such threatening elements become “uncontainable” and break down “the symmetry and duality of self/other, inside/outside” (Bhabha 2004: 165). My first chapter is devoted to such an inquiry and illustrates how these elements hover on the margin or border, ready to return at a better time to challenge and transform the dominant system. Quoting Rushdie (2000: 73 italics mine) illustrates my point:

Those who value stability, who fear transience, uncertainty, change, have erected *a powerful system of stigmas and taboos* against rootlessness, that disruptive, anti-social force, so that we mostly conform, we *pretend* to be motivated by loyalties and solidarities we do not really feel, we *hide* our secret identities beneath the false skins of those identities which bear the belongers’ seal of approval... And *in the waking dreams our societies permit*, in our myths, our arts, our songs, we *celebrate the non-belongers, the different ones, the outlaws, the freaks*.

Rushdie’s argument is that social oppression or abjection cannot remove the possibility of interrogating and subverting the dominant structure because the marginalized inhabit it, awaiting the appropriate time to challenge and reverse it. In other words, the hegemonic construction of discourse not only threatens the existence of the abject, but also sustains it. As Butler (1998: 281) notes, “[I]t is not as if the unthinkable, the unlivable, the unintelligible has no discursive life: it *does* have one. It just lives within discourse as the radically uninterrogated and as the shadowy contentless figure for something that is not yet made real.” Chapter I and III show how Tehmul, Sufiya, and Estha—all of whom are ostracized, excluded, or silenced—explore the possibility of agency in their oppression or abjection. Transgressive desire and practice enable them to interrogate, subvert, or reinscribe cultural norms or hegemonic discourses that deny them

subjecthood and livable life, so that they can redefine “what qualifies as bodies that matter, ways of living that count as ‘life’” rather than being expelled or banished to an abject zone (Butler 1993: 16). Such resistance and transgression testify to the failure of the hegemonic system—in spite of its powerful rules of inclusion and exclusion—to fully discipline or regulate abject subjects or subalterns who are never completely excluded or removed in postcolonial contexts.

Spivak’s concept of enabling violation (1999: 371)—“a rape that produces a healthy child whose existence cannot be advanced as a justification for the rape”—represents a conundrum which characterizes the relationship between the colonizer and colonized, the oppressor and victim from a postcolonial feminist perspective. Taking a critical approach to Western feminism, Chapter II counterintuitively examines how female characters use such a paradoxical situation to their advantage, so that they can repossess their body in an inviolate manner in spite of structural constraints. Even in the inevitable situation, they manage to make choices and plans rather than simply hope for the best. In *Shalimar the Clown*, patriarchy is metaphorically associated with India’s political and military alliance with America. Boonyi appropriates hegemonic discourses of patriarchy and imperialism to transform her oppression into agency, demonstrating that she is not a passive or mere lieutenant to her male counterparts as she is perceived to be. Boonyi’s speaking back to Max in English and her rule-breaking pregnancy counteract the symbolic occupation of her body by patriarchy and neocolonialism. The appropriation of the well-known Lacanian idea of gaze<sup>23</sup> shows how Boonyi’s discursive and corporeal resistance—symbolized by the reinterpretation of the *Ramayana*—enables her to challenge the symbolic order and

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<sup>23</sup> My appropriation of the Lacanian idea is a critical inquiry into ocularcentrism in Western thought, “a key paradigm in both epistemology and ontology, a dominant trope of knowledge and being which has tended to promote specular cognition as the natural goal of any serious activity” (Ashcroft 2001: 126-127). Like Lacan, Foucault (1980: 155) also explains how individuals submit to practices of surveillance and discipline, even willingly: “There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorizing to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself.”

demand ‘See me for what I am’ rather than ask the probing and nervous question, *Che vuoi?*: ‘What do you want from me?’ *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* also shows how the potpourri of Vina’s crossbred hybrid cultural background and the hodgepodge of her eclectic activities disavow the homogenous gaze of woman as a victim and India as a formerly colonized other. She transforms into an international pop artist from the daughter of Indian homosexual biological father and the wife-abusing American stepfather. Armed with complex cultural, racial background and transgressive desire, she successfully achieves an exhilarating sense of freedom by crossing over the boundaries of language, religion, culture, race, gender, and sex. In Chapter III, I apply the classical Lacanian concept to explore the possibility of agency in children’s relationship with parents or authorities.

The above examples show that neither oppressor/colonizer nor victim/colonized is independent of the other, given that subjectivities are never formed in isolation and are always interconnected. The rhizomic structure of power explains how even helpless victims can have the means to negotiate and counter aggression, inverting the roles of victims and oppressors. Rather than in simple opposition to each other, the two positions work in the interstices of each other. This inseparable intermixing or intertwining illustrates that a binary framework of self and other, or the separation of self from other, does not function sufficiently although binarism can be utilized as a counter-hegemonic strategy for questioning the dominant discourse. Building on the Lacanian idea that colonial discourse is forged in a relational manner, Bhabha (2004: 123, 265) argues that colonial subjects have the capacity to negotiate the cracks and fissures of dominant discourses in a subversive manner since the colonizer and colonized are caught up in a complex reciprocity. His slippery concept of ambivalence is subject to criticism because of perceived complicity with the hegemonic discourse. Nevertheless, I appropriate Bhabha’s ideas of

hybridity and mimicry to demonstrate how some characters take advantage of them in concrete fictional events to interrogate and transform hegemonic power relations without sanctifying or glorifying the dominant values in spite of doubling or splitting.<sup>24</sup>

In connection with the appropriation of hybridity and mimicry, the comprehension of agency is essential to understand how the three writers portray their characters as agents capable of engaging and countervailing the governing structures, rather than fragmented subjects determined by the ways in which their identities or subjectivities have been constructed. As Ashcroft (2001: 45) notes, the capacity of postcolonials is “the key to the transformative energy of post-colonial discourse” because it refers to the ability to engage, negotiate, resist, or transform continuing colonial power. Such dynamics of human experience and practice hold the key to examining the ways in which marginalized characters are enabled or empowered to challenge and transform the centre, so that they can become subjects of their history and experience. Indeed, Mistry, Roy, and Rushdie do not represent the minority situation as entirely one of victimization, but see it as a challenge one is forced to face. However, the concept of agency is challenged in much poststructuralist thought. While some accounts of subject formation seem to occlude the possibility of agency by reducing individuals to docile or passive ones, I heed the fact that many others give a more generative account of subject formation and agency, placing emphasis on action and meaning than on a discursive result. A useful approach that I derive from the aporia of subject formation is to rethink agency beyond a simplifying and domination-resistance model of power by avoiding the binarization of individual characters as

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<sup>24</sup> Although he does not endorse the traditional Hegelian dialectic through disavowal or sublation, Bhabha (2004: 159) argues that his much-criticized concept of hybridity is “the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal.” With such resistance and agency in mind, I draw attention to Bhabha’s idea of a “difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (2004: 122). Such semblance eluding resemblance—perhaps due to the failure to mimic precisely—can be appropriated to explain the possibility of resistance and transformation. What is unique or singular on an equal footing without becoming the same or identical can be used as a postcolonial strategy for agency.

either free agents or innocent victims. Furthermore, I pay attention to Ashcroft's argument (2001: 47): "While ideology, discourse or language constrain[s] subjects, they do not imprison them, nor are subjects immobilized by power." The very fact that such structural forces can be recognized suggests that they can also be countermanded and subverted. Therefore, the dissertation views those governing structures as the condition of possibility or a point of departure rather than a fixed end or completion.

Chapter III shows how the four protagonists with different backgrounds in *A Fine Balance* come together and establish a new structure of intersubjectivity or felt experience as 'accidental family.' Such a hybrid process of subject formation is central to the production of capacity to transcend differences even as they suffer a host of problems such as eviction, sterilization, mutilation, and migration forced by the authorities. Transgressive or counter-discursive practices enable them to negotiate and engage the order of things or normality, challenging the hegemonic idea of 'imagined community' and creating a minimal space of togetherness from one place to another. In this regard, the materialization of agency is seen as a process of negotiation which explores ways of going beyond the structural constraints. As Bhabha (1996: 8) argues, "Negotiation (*neg* [not]+*otium*[ease, quiet]) is a discourse of *self*-disclosure of the agents, and agency of negotiation is the essence of human action and utterance." This process interrogates what appears natural or inevitable, before it attempts to seek an assertion of genuine identity or a recovery of authentic experience.

However, this dissertation goes further to address the following question: How does agency return to effect transformation with the help of transgression? One set of arguments I make space for is an alternative to the hegemonic concept of progress in history. As McClintock (1992: 96) notes, progress is "both a journey forward and the beginning of a return." The

condition of possibility for agency's return and attendant transformation—even after the subject's demise—is a key theme that I scrutinize in order to explain how subalterns continue to emerge from the margins in a different manner to bring about a meaningful change. The dominant structure represented by the triad of language, discourse, and ideology is not foolproof or perfect. Ironically, the possibility of failure or discontinuity means the chance of the return of agency. As Butler (1993: 10) argues, the process of repetition and return opens up a possibility of agency for transformation and subversion because of gaps and fissures which are produced in the process of reiteration. To appropriate her idea in postcolonial contexts, I modify her argument to make it clear that this repetition is not to be a continuous, endless slippage or displacement. My argument is that to understand how agency emerges and returns in postcolonial contexts, it is necessary to see the dynamics of negotiation and engagement as a dialogic process of similarity and difference which accompanies the possibility of resistance and transformation. As Bhabha (2004: 274) suggests, this return of the subject entails an “agency which seeks revision and reinscription” to renegotiate the intersubjective realm for the marginalized and downtrodden. In this vein, the dissertation views the process of repetition and return differently from the pessimistic interpretation of the Nietzschean concept of the eternal return<sup>25</sup> of the same, which might degenerate into the endless Sisyphean repetition.

The process of repetition and difference over generations in *The God of Small Things* is instrumental in explaining that rather than being “already determined by advanced capital in the aftermath of colonialism” (Ahmad 1995: 17), the subject formation is a process that is never fully or perfectly achieved, open to negotiation in the production of agency. The doubleness of similarity and difference over such a long period of time demonstrates that a cultural history of

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<sup>25</sup> The eternal return is a vexed thought. I highly appreciate Deleuze's interpretation (2005: 370-375) of the Nietzschean concept of the eternal return, which affirms unique and irreducible difference as the driving force for creative possibilities rather than continuous, unified, uninterrupted one.



colonial or postcolonial encounter is not merely abortive. A series of transformations in the recurrent structure of sexual transgression demonstrates that it is necessary to explore what efforts individual characters make to appropriate mimicry or ambivalence as a tool of eluding control and power. Kari Saipu's transformation from a European armed with colonial desire into a sexual deviant illustrates the abortive nature of the imitative process. He mimics natives and goes native, but fails to become subject of his reality, like subservient postcolonials who merely mimic Westerners. In contrast, the twins' appropriation of history lesson is an apt example for an enabling way of using mimicry. The resistance and agency of the twins, which come after their mother and her lover's miserable deaths, show how they are able to create different results and regenerative possibilities insofar as they try hard not to conform to hegemonic values although they mimic them. Chapter I and II explore how the politics of personal desire has to do with cultural histories and with the ways in which sexuality has been perceived through generations in a postcolonial society that enforces the laws "with a total disregard for possible anomalies" (Bose 1998: 68).

Chapter I also examines how and why Kari Saipu is subjugated and removed in the postcolonial setting. Roy's *The God of Small Things* invokes Kurtz in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* in an intertextual manner to deconstruct the history of 'mimic man'<sup>26</sup> through the characters of Father Mulligan and Kari Saipu in the local setting called the Heart of Darkness. As part of efforts to uncover what Foucault (1977: 142) calls "other" meanings rather than "inviolable identity" of origin, I focus on the way in which the English pederast is demonized as a sexual, racial other because of postcolonials' essentialist appropriation of the rhetoric of colonial discourse to exclude cultural others. Such a Foucaultian genealogical exploration

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<sup>26</sup> Bhabha (2004: 125) traces the line of descent of the mimic man which he argues begins in T. B. Macaulay's "Minute" through the works of Kipling, Forster, Orwell, and Naipaul.

interrogates the mistake of reproducing the hegemonic discourse that the formerly oppressed or colonized had sought to undo. In a similar vein, I also explore the possibility of a way out of the capitalistic imperial structure, so that it can yield the promise of an alternative viewpoint of history. The History House's transformation from the pederast-owned colonial bungalow into a global capital structure suggests the prevalence of comprador hybridity in which capitalism and cultural imperialism mock and even run roughshod over local history. The colonial house used to be a liminal, minimal place where social boundaries or norms were challenged and transgressed over generations. It seems that such dynamic power of hybridity is endangered after the bungalow's transformation into a key part of luxury heritage hotel for rich tourists who are treated to the truncated native Kathakali dancing performances. However, cracks or fissures in the solid structure signify ambivalence at the heart of overwhelming neocolonial power, raising the possibility of a counter-hegemonic mode of agency. Even the stench of the polluted river due to the failed World Bank aid policy serves as a valuable counterintuitive trope to suggest that the porous border makes it possible to problematize widespread environmental destruction in postcolonial India.

These examples are aimed at demonstrating the possibility of agency even in the impossibly formidable challenge. To back up my claims, I raise the need to adopt the strategic—albeit provisional or temporary—use of essence or foundations in order to explore the dynamics of transgressive practice and agency. In response to negative readings of her historical position on subaltern agency, Spivak (1984: 184) also acknowledges the need to adopt the strategic, pragmatic use of irreducibility in an effort to reassert the political force allegedly resident in her theory: “Since the moment of essentialising, universalizing...is irreducible, let us at least situate it at the moment...and use it as much as we can rather than make the totally counter-productive

gesture of repudiating it.” The point is that whether it is substance or discourse, there are materializing effects that refuse to go away in spite of the pressure of constant change, and such irreducibility can be appropriated as a point of resistance or enabling power which facilitates the emergence or return of agency in transgressive practice. The strategic use of essence is instrumental in bringing about change or transformation to the status quo, and, furthermore, it can help prevent the endless return or repetition of the very conditions that they are trying to escape, resist, or subvert in postcolonial contexts. In an analogy, it also means that the three writers do not simply translate the Indian cultural signs for the Western audience, refusing to become what Spivak describes as “native informants for first world intellectuals interested in the voice of the Other” (1988: 284).

To develop the metaphor of translation further, my task is how to negotiate and translate the idea of the eternal return into a possibility of dialogic and transformative agency based on alterity in postcolonial contexts. Here, I draw attention to what Walter Benjamin describes as “the irresolution, or liminality, of ‘translation,’ the *element of resistance* in the process of transformation...which does not lend itself to translation” (Bhabha 2004: 321). As Bhabha notes, the cutting edge of translation, or living in the interstices of Lucretius and Ovid<sup>27</sup>, carries the burden of the meaning of culture. In other words, there might be no resolution to difference despite the process of negotiation and change. This untranslatability<sup>28</sup> is an important trope in my

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<sup>27</sup> Bhabha appropriates the classical contrast between Ovid and Lucretius to explain the existential conundrum of postcolonial migrants as well as tackle the problem of reconciling the old and the new. The question is whether liminal or limit experience in a postcolonial context translates into creating a new identity, erasing an old identity completely. As Bhabha explains, Ovid is a metaphor for the immutability of the migrant soul as “migration only changes the surface of the soul, preserving identity under its protean forms,” while Lucretius is a metaphor for the soul’s “freedom from the essence of the self” which the crossing of cultural frontiers permits. This contrast illustrates a vexed debate on the liminality of identity, i.e., how much one carries one’s roots within oneself when they are uprooted and very far away.

<sup>28</sup> Rushdie’s narrator (1995: 29) makes it clear that he is a translated man, clinging to the notion that “...having been borne across...not only something is always lost but something can also be gained in translation.” Other than

research because even the liminality or irreducibility of hybrid cultural identity can be appropriated to prove the strategic utility of essentialism in the specific context. This is why I put emphasis on scrutinizing how praxis can transform the repetition of similar events into a decisive and unique experience in terms of resistance and agency.

By emphasizing the necessity of negotiating between essentialist and poststructuralist ideas of identity to remain sensitive to specific locations and moments, Stuart Hall also argues for “a strategic essentialism that has served a crucial role in anti-colonial struggles of the past and continues to do so today” (Mongia 2000: 11). Textual examples show that the postcolonial interpolation and transformation of history is often to answer the urgent call for action in an irreversible manner. Maneck’s suicide, discussed in Chapter III, and the twins’ incest, analysed in Chapter I, are not simply deferred or predetermined action within the recursive structure of transgression. Such critical moments of transgression are radical responses to the master narrative of history. Survival through deaths sounds like an oxymoron, but such irreducible experiences bring about a new political consciousness regarding the question of power in postcolonial contexts. In a similar vein, Dipesh Chakrabarty’s recommendation of an intervention that provincializes Europe<sup>29</sup> illustrates the possibility of the strategic use of essentialism in order to overcome the problem of what he calls “asymmetric ignorance,” as well as reinscribe the symbolic order. Chapter III explores the possibility of returning the gaze, one of Chakrabarty’s strategies of decentering the centre, citing the failure of the U.S.-educated Baby

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the simple concept of gain and loss in translation, Rushdie (1995: 104) argues that it is necessary to look at its untranslatable words in order to understand the nature of a society.

<sup>29</sup> Both provincializing Europe and returning the gaze are part of efforts to counter the enormous weight of Eurocentric institutional structures. Chakrabarty (2000: 22) stresses that it is necessary to redefine a home against the world because of the problems of representation. To overcome the asymmetry, he argues that those problems should be interrogated within situated, grounded coordinates, and the project of provincializing Europe must realize within itself its own impossibility or contradiction because the formation of academic history is inevitably bound with Eurocentricism.

Kochamma's panoptical surveillance of the young Estha and Rahel. To borrow Bhabha's words (2004: 160), it is a strategy of subversion which "turns the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power." Besides, the chapter shows that the strategy of vernacularizing suggested by Makarand Paranjape is a viable way of correcting the imbalance of power between English and local languages.

Although I agree on the strategic use of essentialism to restore voice or agency to the marginalized, I take a critical position against the unqualified appropriation of essentialism. It is a topic of vigorous debate how much essentialism is possible or even desirable. Ashcroft et al. (2007: 143) agree on the usefulness of strategic essentialism, arguing that it can empower "[postcolonial] societies to better resist the onslaught of global culture that threatens to negate cultural difference or consign it to an apolitical and exotic discourse of cultural diversity." However, they (2007: 75) warn that the application of such an essentialist discourse might be useful only when the colonized achieve a renewed sense of the value and dignity of their pre-colonial cultures. Here, Benita Parry's defence of an essentialist nativist position is problematic because of its overemphasis on the power and appeal of anti-colonial nationalism. As Ania Loomba (1998: 235) argues, such an inflexible theory can be detrimental to research on postcolonial studies because it closes off options even before they are explored. Strategic essentialism is basically the negotiation of essentialist and poststructuralist discursive formations in order to find viable answers to the possibility of agency. As Bhabha (2004: xvii) argues, "a 'right to difference'...does not require the restoration of an original [or essentialist] cultural or group identity." Nor does it succumb to "a nostalgia for lost origins" (Spivak 1988: 291). In this regard, I discuss in Chapter I and II how Kari Saipu and Baby Kochamma become both victims and exploiters of essentialist discourse, which reifies others from a self-righteous perspective.

Whether by appropriating the very rhetoric of colonial discourse or reinforcing patriarchy and misogyny, an essentialist position only risks the danger of repeating the same mistake of excluding cultural others.

To be more specific, I apply the idea of strategic essentialism at the level of individual characters in order to explore how everyday practice enables them to negotiate and challenge power structures in a strategic manner. In an effort to complement the strategic use of essentialism, I take a cue from Michel de Certeau's notion of tactics based on the significance of mundane everyday practice.<sup>30</sup> Since Mistry, Roy, and Rushdie portray the daily struggle of fictional characters mired in the coercive forces of history and politics, the study focuses on the ways in which transgressive practice in everyday life interpolates and transforms the dominant structure or the hegemonic order. To explore possibilities of political agency, I try to search for what Slavoj Žižek (2003: 76-77) and Lois McNay (2000: 35) describe as voluntary or anticipatory elements inherent in praxis. Chapter III addresses how transgression grounded in everyday reality galvanizes critical moments of dialogic and transformative agency, which turns out to be not only individual but also intersubjective, accessible to others. Estha's everyday practices of silence and invisibility help him escape hegemonic totalizations by Baby Kochamma's panoptical gaze and linguistic control in anticipation of a union with his twin sister. The everyday carnivalesque gathering of Dina, Om, and Ishvar—coupled with Maneck's suicide—suggests the possibility of solidarity in spite of their differences within the Nusswan-governed family house. The moment of unity—albeit temporary or transient—highlights how their shared experience can materialize in everyday practice.

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<sup>30</sup> Michel de Certeau (1984: 108-9) suggests the value of considering spatial practices against the strategic order, which opens the way for exploring the possibility of agency and resistance in quotidian reality.

However, such transgressive practice within the governing structure raises a question about the possibilities and limits of subaltern agency in postcolonial contexts: Is transgression on the part of the marginalized only a form of protest permitted by the given order, that is, the outcome of sanctioned deviation? In *A Fine Balance*, carnivalesque transgression takes place on the streets within the purview of the police and later in Dina's kitchen within the governing space of her chauvinist brother. It seems that transgression can only happen within a hierarchically ordered structure. However, Chapter I and III illustrate that humorous gatherings are not simple everyday events, but a dialogic mode of resistance and transformation. I appropriate the Bakhtinian idea of carnival as an analytical tool to illuminate a subversive challenge to the political status quo in postcolonial society. Such hilarious transgression produces powerful metaphoric effects of liberation and renewal, especially after Shankar's accidental death and Maneck's suicide. Their counter-hegemonic spatial practices show that the carnival is not merely a licensed affair but a vehicle for political dissimulation and social protest, symbolically transforming the dominant space of postcolonial society. I explore in Chapter I and III how transgression and solidarity are forged in the Bakhtinian dialogics of difference<sup>31</sup> rather than the Hegelian dialectics of identity or totality. The critical moments of the twins' incest and Maneck's suicide achieve the symbolic effects of crossing the limits of self and other, so that self can be extended into other toward a higher unity across alterity or difference without being subsumed or sublated. To that end, I try to listen to what is already said or they do not say in the open-ended texts by appropriating the Spivakian idea of making visible the unseen, and vocal the muted:

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<sup>31</sup> According to H. Jung (1998: 99-100), there is the difference between Hegel's dialectics of identity and Bakhtin's dialogics of difference: Dialogics privileges difference while dialectics advantages identity. The open-ended dialogics of difference foster the idea that a multiplicity of differences finds no ending, while Hegel's 'theoretism' and Marx's 'ideologism' are equally dogmatic. H. Jung argues that a dialogic relationship enables "the recognition of the other as a self and the self as an other," which would not lead to a form of colonialism in human relations.

“When we come to the concomitant question of the consciousness of the subaltern, the notion of what the work *cannot* say becomes important” (Spivak 1988: 287).

When it comes to hearing a minimal or inaudible voice in the texts, there are ethical and political issues involved. Chapter III shows that Baby Kochamma has no qualms whatsoever about the cause of Estha’s silence. Instead of helping him emerge from the wall of silence that he had built around his life, she just acts like a “game warden” in charge of animals, taking pride in “her superior knowledge of Estha’s habits and predilections” (Roy 1997: 90). She is a sharp contrast to the Untouchable Velutha who does not ignore children’s voices and treats them like adults in a children’s game of make-believe. A comparative study of Tehmul and Sufiya in Chapter I illustrates how the selective and careful use of norms or ethics on the part of the authorities can help transform subaltern others into subjects with a voice. Gustad tries to listen to Tehmul’s marginalized voice from the position of patriarch whereas Omar never attempts to comprehend Sufiya who is silenced and imprisoned in the attic. Because of differences in the level of abjection in terms of gender and sexuality, the two subalterns respond differently to structural constraints. Tehmul’s deviant sexual practice derives from his desire to emulate an ideal masculine figure like Gustad, so his agalmatophilia is justified when Gustad recognizes the idiot as a fellow sexual human being. In other words, Tehmul’s mimicry’s success depends on Gustad’s acknowledgement although it might be said that the former succeeds in earning recognition from the latter after all. In contrast, Sufiya chooses to become an insane promiscuous monster in a desperate attempt to destroy the hegemonic institutions of patriarchy and marriage. An ethical focus on authority figures helps explain why the scathing criticism of Sufiya’s brutal killings of oppressors as mere nihilistic destruction is overstated. I show how she strategically refuses to be a domesticated sexual reproducer, a helpless victim of patriarchy, and an



investment in collective identity such as family and society. Sufiya's destructive power delivers more than a moral warning to the male-dominated system. She is an exemplified figure to suggest that when the authorities exercise political power, basic guidelines or ethics are necessary especially for "a safeguard against the abuse of power and the domination of weaker individuals" (McNay 1992: 8).

A central goal of this research is to demonstrate that the postcolonial world does not remain in the untrodden sanctity of space and time dominated by the hegemonic discourse. As Foucault (1977: 33) argues, transgression is an action which involves the limit, whether within, beyond, or around it. Although I admit such limit involving transgression, I focus on crucial moments and spaces in which marginalized postcolonials are enabled to shift the terrain and broaden the horizon by crossing boundaries, thereby generating another logic or space for their existence. Textual examples show that transgressive practice challenges the prevailing idea of time as linear progress and space as territorial expansion, affirming Ashcroft's postcolonial view (2001: 97): "...time is simply a different time when experienced in a different place." Major consequences of transgression are restructuring and transformation of normative space and time, which leads the way for agency's emergence and return. As it turns out, subaltern characters emerge from the margins to articulate cultural differences within a society by inhabiting minimal space and time, so they can "elaborate strategies of selfhood—singular or communal" (Bhabha 2004: 2). The boundaries between the past and the present are transgressed and transformed while space is inhabited in a different way or reterritorialized, so that they don't have to live on borrowed time or space. Such spatial and temporal practices challenge the binary opposition of colonizer/colonized, self/other, centre/margin, and master/slavery to establish new centres of discourse, new subject positions, and new loci of power and freedom.

As Ashcroft (2001: 172) argues, “To transform one’s place is to engage the ‘boundaries’ of power.” The interpolation or transgression of spatial boundaries impugns a simple spatial concept of location or being territorial, bringing about symbolic spatial inversion. Chapter II shows that the kitchen is not simply the woman’s place. Dilnavaz’s use of the recesses of her kitchen to hide slush funds symbolizes the disruption of the boundary between the outside world and the domestic sphere. The borders between home and world become blurred, and such an interstitial intimacy between the private and the public questions “binary divisions through which such spheres of social experience are often spatially opposed” (Bhabha 2004: 19). Furthermore, Miss Kutpitia and Dilnavaz’s empowering partnership in black magic dismantles the myth of patriarchal power, eventually expanding the boundary of a walled Parsi community. The transformative process shows how female bonding produces the metaphoric effects of usurping the power position of Gustad and reshaping a male-dominated world. The transgressive inhabitation of family house in both Chapter I and III suggests possibilities of reterritorializing the place of oppression and violence, thereby reformulating power relations. So I construe the twins’ incest in their mother’s old room as leading to the transformation of the traditional family house occupied by their grotesque grandaunt into an alternative discursive space. Such an intimacy through the limit experience is believed to empower the sexual outlaws to tackle the ugly reality of the present as well as recover the past without being locked in it. Everyday carnivalesque transgression in Dina’s kitchen raises the prospect that the family house controlled by her brother can be transformed into a space of possibilities for those living on the cusp. Significantly, the spatial transition from Dina’s flat to the kitchen, with the flat’s verandah serving as an interstice, illustrates the dynamics of resistance and transformation in spite of eviction and relegation to a minimal space.

Chapter I and III also address how the temporal transgression of boundaries between the past and the present, childhood and adulthood contributes to interrogating and transforming naturalized and homogenized time. Om expresses hope that if time were a bolt of cloth he would cut out all the bad parts, snip out the scary nights and stitch together the good parts to make time bearable (Mistry 1997: 310). One of Rahel's ambitions is to "own a watch on which she could change the time whenever she wanted to (which according to her was what Time was meant for in the first place)" (Roy 1997: 37). The process of transformation does not occur in a straight, unbroken chronological line, and it is not a simple teleological or dialectical progress in the narrative. This is why I use a method of Foucaultian genealogical analysis in order to "cultivate the details and accidents that accompany every beginning" (Foucault 1984: 80) rather than a mere quest for lost origins. To explore the significance of the vicissitudes of transgression, I investigate the ways in which the dynamics of repetition and difference raise the possibility of resistance and agency in spite of fissures or gaps in chronological developments.

Aside from the process of the production of agency mentioned above, I aim to demonstrate in Chapter I how a succession of sexual transgressions—Kari Saipu's pederasty, Ammu's cross-caste sex, and the twins' incest—open the way for rewriting the past and subverting ugly postcolonial reality. As *The God of Small Things*'s epigraph<sup>32</sup> borrowed from John Berger suggests, reiteration does not mean a meaningless repeat of events. The return of the twins as adults and Kari Saipu's return as a ghost produce the metaphoric effects of debunking the teleological and centripetal progress of history. Kari Saipu's return as a ghost operates as a metaphor for not only continued colonialism, but also 'history lesson' for precarious and peripheral postcolonials. The narrative structure of similarity and difference shows that the twins'

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<sup>32</sup> "Never again will a single story be told as though it's the only one." The epigraph is from John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* published by Penguin in New York in 1990 (Roy 2006: 13).

incestuous lovemaking represents more than the coupling of social outcasts. Estha and Rahel draw on the lesson to transform their own abjection into a mode of agency. Their sexual transgression illustrates how the caesura of time symbolized by Rahel's stopped wristwatch is counter-discursivized to pave the way for postcolonial history to be reinscribed with a new meaning.<sup>33</sup> Their incest works metaphorically to rewrite the past and reinstate the cross-caste love affairs of their mother and Velutha which return at the end of the novel. Such possibility of an alternative history can project into a better future, rather than being locked in the past or clinging to the present. Such efforts to interpolate and transform the present into a new point of departure by intervening into the past could have the effect of subverting the brutality of official history which imposes regulatory norms, making the unthinkable thinkable and the impossible possible.

A reiterative occurrence of transgression also challenges the mimic reality and produces different results. Chapter III focuses on how the return of death on the railway in nine years in *A Fine Balance* creates the metaphoric effects of opening up an alternative discursive space for subaltern characters. A sense of belatedness for Maneck's suicide does not matter because the postponed action leads the way for revalorizing Avinash's death, rather than vindicating its inevitability. Such transgression of the linear progression of history is made possible by the subversion of historical transparency, which enables a "counter-memory—a transformation of history into a totally different form of time" (Foucault 1977: 160). Avinash's chess set keeps returning to serve as a tool of agency for awakening Maneck's political consciousness. The transformative process debunks Maneck's thinking in adolescence: "So what was the point of possessing memory? It didn't help anything. In the end it was all hopeless" (Mistry 1997: 336).

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<sup>33</sup> The possibility of progress through the counter-discursive use of stopped time is reminiscent of what Bhabha (2004: 353) describes as "a catachrestic gesture of reinscribing modernity's 'caesura' and using it to transform the locus of thought and writing in [subalterns and ex-slaves'] postcolonial critique."

In fact, the act of remembering produces the effect of changing a lot of things about misery and suffering, providing a new sense of self. Maneck's counter-memory empowers him to sacrifice his life for his friends as a radical response to the authorities' brutal ruling. Committing suicide turns out to be anything but "no more remembering, no more suffering." Like the return of Ammu and Velutha's lovemaking, the return of the community of Dina, Om, and Ishvar raises the prospect of the advent of a new future, albeit with pitfalls ahead.

Another recurring metaphor of transgression is a palimpsest, which refers to the erasure or partial erasure through alteration or overlapping of a text to provide room for a new print. Using the palimpsestic vision as a metaphor, the writers give the texts a powerful aesthetic of transgression and regeneration. Laying an alternative story over disjunctive reality opens up a possibility of overcoming the confines of religion, tradition, culture, race, and class. In *A Fine Balance*, Dina's patchwork quilt symbolizes a palimpsestic vision of cultural hybridity, providing a counterpoint to essentialist discourse. The quilt stitched together from leftover bits and pieces of different fabric is a crucial trope of a pluralistic, kaleidoscopic composite of diverse social groups and their experiences. From a negative perspective, slippages in the fabric only suggest "... the pattern is impossible to see, the squares and diamonds and triangles don't fit well together..." (Mistry 1997: 340). However, the multi-layered, interwoven patchwork quilt is appropriated as a metaphor for challenging the hegemonic construction of social ties to suggest the possibility of unity in diversity or difference. A carnivalesque moment when marginalized characters secretly get together in the wake of Maneck's suicide makes us realize Ishvar's theorem: "So, that's the rule to remember, the whole quilt is much more important than any single square" (Mistry 1997: 490). Taking a cue from the palimpsestic vision of the patchwork quilt, I examine in Chapter III why Maneck's suicide is not pointless or final but should instead

be interpreted as conscious behaviour and a saving death which redeems the human wreck. The movement of the quilt from one person to another along with the chess set helps them to inhabit and reconstruct the memories of the tumultuous events which they had experienced together.

In contrast, Rushdie's palimpsestic vision seems utopian, an ideal based upon Jawaharlal Nehru's vision of a secular democratic India<sup>34</sup>. It fails to create as much political metaphoric effects in the face of such essentializing discourses as nationalism, patriarchy, and neocolonialism. In *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Aurora's painting is used as a metaphor for conceptualizing Palimpstine, but this ideal place fictionally created by Rushdie does not materialize into a re-imagined history of India or the Subcontinent. In *Midnight's Children*, a re-imagined India appears in the visual space of the bioscope—the Dilli Dekho machine that shows children the collage of a unified India. However, the voyeuristic peepshow which helps people to dream of Indian unity proves to be futile, as shown by an ensuing clash between Hindus and Muslims. Rani Harappa's embroidered shawls in *Shame* symbolize the possibility of making erasures and reinscriptions by challenging the master narrative of history dominated by men. Although the metaphor does not translate into a transgressive act of resistance and transformation, it offers an alternative interpretation of history. Ironically, a veil-like perforated sheet in *Midnight's Children* serves to highlight the political possibility of reversing the ocularcentric power of men and male-dominated modernity. Chapter II explores how the perforated sheet in *Midnight's Children* is appropriated as a metaphor to suggest that women can become subjects of their own realities, not signifiers for the male gaze or vision.

In Introduction, I have explained the goal of research and its scope and delineated the structure and themes of the dissertation. I have also used it to address the key concepts and

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<sup>34</sup> "My' India has always been based on ideas of multiplicity, pluralism, hybridity: ideas to which the ideologies of the communalists are diametrically opposed" (Rushdie 1992: 32).

methods that I am appropriating and developing in chapters. In terms of methodology Foucault offers a range of analytical entry points in this study. The Foucaultian concept of power and subjectivation is a crucial framework for understanding the complex process of postcolonial subject formation. Foucault subjects a simplistic notion of power to critique: “Where there is power, there is resistance” as “there is no ‘escaping’ it” (1998: 95). From this Foucaultian perspective, postcolonial subjects are not to be posited as essential beings, either innocent victims or evil oppressors in power relations. This anti-foundational method is useful as it is important to avoid the dangers of a universalist or essentialist interpretation. The double meaning of subjectivation or *assujettissement*<sup>35</sup> suggests the paradoxical simultaneity of submission and mastery with regard to power. As Bhabha (2004: 278) aptly points out, however, Foucault’s critical genealogy of power has limited uses in the Third World where the operations of oppressive law or naked power are often apparent. The postcolonial texts show that the so-called ancient regime of power remains vigorous in a modern era. Foucault’s idea of power is limiting and comes under doubt in view of the miserable deaths of Avinash, Ammu, and Velutha all of which stem from systemic oppression and discrimination in postcolonial society. In this situation, Foucault’s ambivalent concept of power does not offer a satisfactory account of a politically significant practice of opposition.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Going through the double-edged, paradoxical process of subject formation, they become both subjects and objects in and through power. According to Foucault (1991: 138), the body, the site of disciplinary regime or subjugated knowledge, is subject to an objectifying disciplinary power, but he also leaves open the possibility of the body’s becoming a subject of power. Butler (1993: 15) elaborates: “The paradox of subjectivation (*assujettissement*) is precisely that the subject who would resist such norms is itself enabled, if not produced, by such norms,” becoming a subject and subjected alike from both senses of the word ‘subject.’ In other words, they are subjectivated by the very institutions and discourses they struggle to emulate or subvert, becoming a subject of power and also subject to power.

<sup>36</sup> As Eagleton (2004: 14) notes, Foucault thinks that the world is made entirely out of differences, so it is necessary to fashion identities in order to get by mainly because he is reluctant to lay down ground rules for fear of a normalizing effect on individuals’ freedom to act. Then, identities might be only the surface effects of a game of difference and repetition. In this regard, Eagleton (1987: 48) argues that there are as yet no theories of the subject “which are not vacuously apocalyptic.”

Therefore, I focus on how Foucault's philosophy can be appropriated and expanded to raise the possibility of agency for resistance and change as well as uncover the subjugated histories of the marginalized and downtrodden. Following up on McNay's argument (1992: 4), I pay keen attention to the later Foucault's emphasis on the practice of the self to explore the ways in which individual characters are able to negotiate and transform the strictures of domination rather than becoming docile in the grip of a disciplinary power. What Foucault calls the ethics of the self is ultimately the process of becoming a subject or self who is capable of choosing which desirable or better structure to be subjected to. Despite the concern about political debility or pessimism stemming from his rejection of identity politics, this approach—especially complemented by the aforementioned strategic use of some grounding or essence—is useful to reformulate agency and explore viable alternatives to existing systems in postcolonial contexts.

Along with sexuality, crime, madness, and violence, the list of transgressive practices that I explore as the source of agency includes suicide, carnival, black magic, silence, invisibility, speaking/writing back, return of the gaze, interpolation, mimicry, and unveiling. Since the body is a recurrent theme of this dissertation I appropriate Foucault's well-known idea of sexuality with a focus on the material and discursive process of subject formation.<sup>37</sup> Discourse and corporeality closely influence and act on each other. Textual examples show that discourse is translated into the corporeal body while at the same time physical experience transforms the hegemonic structure of discourse or ideology. The body, the product of both biological and socio-political factors, serves as a conduit of agency which enables subjects to challenge and subvert the dominant structure. The metaphors of disembodiment in *Midnight's Children* and *A*

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<sup>37</sup> As Butler (1993: 33) argues, Foucault does not completely dismiss the irreducibility of the body. For Foucault, the body has a materiality that is ontologically distinct from the power relations that take that body as a site of investments. Taking a cue from Foucault (1991: 26), I conceive the power exercised on the body "not as a property, but as a strategy." This strategy-wise approach helps ease concern about putative political pessimism owing to Foucault's rejection of the 'juridico-discursive' concept of power and identity politics.



*Fine Balance* illustrate that discursive power is not just inscribed upon the body, but the body can counter and reinscribe power or its control. The castration of Saleem and Om, both victims of the forced sterilization campaign in the mid-1970s in India, does not automatically lead to despair or defeat but a renewal of a bond and community at the intersubjective realm. Chapter I and Chapter III explore how the mutilated abject bodies of Om, Ishvar, and beggars function as politically subversive in a carnivalesque manner.

The polarization or Manichean binarism between pre-given essence and discursive effect is not a method for this study. This is why I stated my position earlier on the controversial issue of the body to the effect that I do not completely dismiss the essentialist claim that gender is caused by sex or the (de)constructionist argument that discourses of gender produce sex as a causal category. Biology matters as much as sociology because both are the areas of human life that should not be ignored, and they often work together in practice. To borrow words from Angelides (2004: 166), therefore, a viable approach is to emphasize “not the hierarchical but the relational construction and mutual imbrication” as in the case of interdisciplinary fields. Given that there is no single truth which determines everything, such an approach helps explore something of an ongoing process of creating an alternative discourse. On this ground I explore the interstices of cause and effect as an interpretive tool, which are embodied and concretized in various modes and links of human experience. In Chapter II, Boonyi’s recovery from the symbolic modes of neocolonization such as drugs, tobacco, gluttony, pills, etc. illustrates that corporeality and discursivity are inextricably imbricated, not mutually exclusive because her body is not simply a fact of anatomy or a fact created by discourse. Likewise, Saleem’s incestuous desire operates as a test of not only biological but social ties as the changeling’s consciousness of the lack of ‘purity’ spurs him to harbour incestuous desire for his sister. In

Chapter II, I also explore the way in which transgression is used as a gendered way of postcolonial narrative. Rushdie and Mistry's portrayal of female characters is problematic when they are described as either angelic or demonic just because of their violation of social norms. Nevertheless, I try to demonstrate that such binarization, feared to border on Manichean division, can be strategically useful to criticize the way things are in a postcolonial society, empowering women to challenge the male-dominated system.

Even though I am interested to utilize an aporia which opens up new possibilities of methodology regarding the body, I make my position clear that I take matter as a point of departure for this study in terms of methodology. My argument is that the body is grounded in 'matter as substance' as much as 'matter as signification,' on the grounds that it does not pre-exist substance or discourse and it undergoes constant change in the material world. Taking Butler's proposal (1993: 32), however, I do not take "irreducible materiality" of the body as a point of departure. Nor do I endorse the overdetermined nature of the concept of discourse that Butler advances in terms of matter as signification. Rather, I take textual examples to discuss the materializing or grounding effects of transgressive practice in order to explore the process of transformation, which entails agency's emergence and return over a period of time in a similar but different manner. This kind of non-foundational approach is in line with my argument for the strategic, pragmatic use of essentialism or irreducibility in specific contexts. As Bhabha (2004: 265) points out, agency and resistance require a basis or "grounding," but this does not mean a "totalization" of these grounds like teleology or holism. This is why I try to prove how the arrival of critical moments of transgression serves as direction or contingent closure to produce points of grounding to act on for a new departure toward yet another open-ended solidarity.

Postcolonial theorists like Spivak, Bhabha, Ashcroft, Mohanty, and Chakrabarty offer alternative concepts and ideas for this dissertation, pushing the limits of Eurocentric theories and broadening the horizons of boundaries. Such an alternate approach to the Eurocentric discourse opens the way for extending and even complementing the methods of influential Western theorists like Foucault, Butler, Bakhtin, and Lacan cited in the study. My appropriation might be opportunistic, partial, and even catachrestic, daring to derive force from what Prakash (1994: 1490) calls “a catachrestic<sup>38</sup> combination” of diverse theories. However, I take every possible care not to ignore specific locations and systems, taking into account the agonistic relations of domination and engagement that are necessary to uncover and discuss in specific contexts. The failure would make postcoloniality a vague condition of people anywhere and everywhere, so it would not be possible to properly investigate postcoloniality—which I argue is marked by not only resistance, transgression and agency but also difference open to dialogic relations and solidarity. I hope that the contextualized use of different theories and perspectives will contribute to suggesting new, alternative ways of looking at and comprehending the chosen and other postcolonial texts.

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<sup>38</sup> As Loomba (1998: 253) says, Prakash borrows the term ‘catacrhesis’ from Spivak who uses it to suggest the possibility of transforming the locus of thought and writing in the postcolonial critique.

## Chapter I – Perverts and Perversions

A discourse of sexual perversion often materializes in the works of Mistry, Roy, and Rushdie. Some characters are othered as ‘perverts,’ sexual outlaws or monsters and dismissed as abnormal because they are believed to harbour socially unacceptable, immoral desires. However, the definition of pervert is problematic as it is subjected to the discourse of power and knowledge which promotes normative sexuality for an intended social and political purpose. Textual examples show that the constitution of ‘pervert’ as opposed to the norm is a cultural, social construct articulated and sustained in the workings of discourse or ideology. In spite of nuanced differences in their position, many theorists suggest that perversion is the product of hegemonic discourse which dictates normative sexuality. Butler (2004: 159) goes so far as to argue that psychoanalysis can make perverts and fetishists of us all. Psychiatrists or psychoanalysts have the power to draw on a normative discourse to define transgressive sexual practices as perversions, deviations, or paraphilias.

According to Robert Stoller (1991: 31), perversion is no longer a well-received word because of its perceived pejorativeness, and many professionals, alert to the name calling, have looked for a kinder, more objective terminology: aberration, deviation, variant, paraphilia (the latest neologism for ‘perversion’). The main reason is because sexual perversion is closely associated with the double standards of moral opprobrium or monstrosity. ‘Moral’ whose Latin root *moralis* means “manner, custom, or habit” is concerned with establishing the standards of right and wrong in human behaviour. Marginal, deviant, or perverse minorities are subjected to a hegemonic moral discourse and regarded as important concerns in need of cure or exclusion. Such a departure from the norm stigmatizes them as a sexual irregularity and even makes them banished in the sense that “[W]hat is constituted as the thinkable realm is predicated on the

exclusion (repression or foreclosure) of what remains difficult or impossible to think” (Butler 2004: 156). Therefore, those who are labeled ‘perverts’ are marginalized and suffer abjection.

Although sexuality is the focus of perversion, perversion is not exclusively sexual. In this chapter, I demonstrate how perceived deviant sexuality works together with other forms of transgression like violence, crime, and madness to produce modes of agency for those closeted, interrupted, and silenced. In order to comprehend how such transgressive practice or ethics produces modes of agency, it is necessary to explore what makes these characters ‘perverts’ in the first place while also focusing on the practices of the self, i.e. how they put into practice their experiences and histories. This approach helps explore the ways in which transgressive practice enables them to transform the abjection into agency, so that they can challenge and transform the dominant discourse to create a better structure in which to live.

### **Abject Body**

As Butler (1998: 281) argues, the abject relates to all kinds of bodies whose lives are not considered to be “lives” and whose bodily materiality is understood not to “matter.” If subjects fail to conform to societal norms, they suffer social exclusion or stigmatization. If they dare to transgress them, they risk being relegated or banished to the realm of the unspeakable or unnamable. This precarious positioning is what Kristeva calls the experience of the *abject*, “defining the word—from the Latin *abjicere*, ‘to cast away’—as that which toes the line between life and death, self and not-self, threatening the subject with dissolution” (Amin 2009: 11-12). As fringe existences, Tehmul in Mistry’s *Such a Long Journey* and Sufiya in Rushdie’s *Shame* inhabit what Butler (1993: 243) calls “certain abject zones within sociality.” Both of them are physically, intellectually challenged characters who have little control over their shamed bodies.

Sufiya is a brain-damaged mute imbecile while Tehmul is a cripple who stammers “as if some internal adjustment had been made to make up for the slowness of his legs with the velocity of his tongue” (Mistry 1992: 31). Because of mental and physical disabilities, their bodies do not conform to the regulatory norms of society, so they hover around on the margins. Since her birth as a daughter, an inherent sin in a male-dominated society, Sufiya is condemned to what Jenny Sharpe (1997: 3) calls “the status of a castrated boy.” Tehmul cannot walk or speak properly because of the injury he had suffered as a boy after falling from a high tree. Unable to represent themselves, mainly because of their speech disabilities, they both are othered as ‘freaks’ and shunned as social outcasts. Their bodies seem to be the site of domesticity and docility since linguistic and physical disabilities prevent them from discursively constructing their own identity. They are denied voice and recognition and forced to endure unbearable lives teetering on the edge. These inarticulate subalterns are examples to suggest that the epistemic nature of language<sup>39</sup> is an ineluctable, unavoidable ‘obstacle’ to the attempt to articulate.

Aside from the stigma of unintelligibility, both Tehmul and Sufiya are subjected to disciplinary power whose main aim is to interpellate or regulate them rather than eliminate them. The regimes of power and intimate systems of regulation operate to promote normative desirable sexuality so as to maintain the hegemonic order. This process of establishing the hegemonic construction of sexuality objectifies and subjugates them and denies a legitimate discursive space for sexual alterity where interhuman or intersubjective relations are possible. Sufiya, born to a Muslim family, is supposed to envy her beautiful sister Good News, their parents’ chosen child,

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<sup>39</sup> According to Angelides (2007: 347), Hayden White insists on a distinction between language and discourse, arguing that discourse “is a highly sophisticated, self-conscious use of language at a level more general than the sentence.” Although such distinction might be necessary, discourse and language are not mutually exclusive. Ashcroft (2001: 40) says: “[Language]’s system of values, representations and discriminations becomes the system upon which social, economic and political discourse is grounded.” In my dissertation, I try to explore the issue of language in relation to linguistic practice and agency as it is one of the triad of structure along with discourse and ideology.

who marries and becomes fecund. Tehmul admires Gustad as a role model. Given the pressure to prove femininity or masculinity, Tehmul and Sufiya are to be internalized outsiders within the hegemonic system. As Grosz (1990: 89) argues, however, “abjection is the underside of the symbolic.” So the ambivalent and double-edged nature of the normalizing process does not completely exclude the possibility that abject subalterns like Tehmul and Sufiya can utilize incommensurability and difference as opposed to—or in complicity with—their ideals such as Gustad and Good News, respectively. Unequal and incommensurable power relations which “reject, cover over and contain” the abject become, therefore, the condition of possibility for recognition and transformation.

In this context, it is important to note how they make the most of their stigmatized bodies as a potent mode of agency to challenge the symbolic or discursive realm. In spite of their failure to be duly accepted, these subaltern others “*persist* in living, in feeling, in constituting their own socialities, and in circulating alternative modes of recognition” (Amin 2009: 12). To that end, they engage in various transgressive practices, interrogating and subverting the hegemonic norms of sexuality. Mimicry is an important strategy for them. Tehmul, in his mid 30s with “a child’s mind and a man’s [sexual] urges” (Mistry 1992: 303), cannot identify with signifiers of language. His simulated masculine act of sex with Roshan’s doll is a way of identifying with his role model Gustad and exploring possibilities of achieving human recognition. With no prospect of marriage initially and then denied conjugal relations after marriage, Sufiya has to helplessly watch her nanny usurp the position of wife by having sex with her husband. But her muteness does not prevent her from interrogating or challenging the dominant system. She chooses to become a terrorizing power like violent male rulers after escaping from the attic where she is drugged and chained. Freed from the constraints of patriarchy and marriage, she runs amok and commits more

heinous crimes than any other cruel man. This way she is able to pass beyond all her internalized cultural constraints. Their lived experiences in the texts show that language is not a prison house for them after all. They use the body's language or minimal voice as a form of social practice to question and reinscribe the hegemonic discourse of language. These silenced subalterns commit the unmentionable or unthinkable in defiance of the limits of representation so as to 'speak for themselves' after all.

For Sufiya and Tehmul, negotiating and engaging sexuality is a crucial way of having their worth as humans recognized. Butler (1992: 352) argues that as human beings are marked by sex and thereby become intelligible, they must be coherently sexed to qualify as legitimately human.<sup>40</sup> However, what marks off Tehmul and Sufiya as the abject and dehumanized is the fact that they are denied sex. Even prostitutes, who are sexually objectified and approved by Dr Paymaster's imaginary rubber stamp as *Safe for Human Habitation* (Mistry 1992: 162), refuse to recognize Tehmul as worthy of their services despite his intention to pay. For Tehmul and Sufiya, sex seems worth dying for to qualify and pass as human. Tehmul risks his life for paraphilia despite a possible air raid during the India-Pakistan war in 1971. Sufiya transforms herself into a beast and finally returns for the consummation of marriage on her own terms. Tehmul's agalmatophilia—a paraphilia concerned with the sexual attraction to a doll—and Sufiya's violent wanton sexual killings are counter-discursive efforts to impugn hegemony and overcome social exclusion. The apparent motive for their rebellion is to gain approval and recognition from the symbolic 'habitable zone.' The transgressive practices enable them to carve out alternative discursive spaces, so that they can not only be recognized as bodies that matter but also transform themselves into 'normal' subjects on their own terms.

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<sup>40</sup> Butler's position is in line with that of Foucault (1998: 155): it is "through sex—in fact, an imaginary point determined by the deployment of sexuality—that each individual has to pass in order to have access to his own intelligibility."



Indeed, Tehmul and Sufiya take advantage of the abject body to rearticulate—to appropriate Butler’s words (1993: 22-23)—“what qualifies as bodies that matter” and “the symbolic horizon in which bodies come to matter at all.” In particular, they challenge the category of sex as a regulatory regime to reinscribe a principle of ‘intelligibility’ for human beings. The examples demonstrate that abjection can be strategically useful because it goes “beyond the control of the symbolic” (Bowers 2005: 10). Denied access to ‘proper’ subjecthood, Tehmul and Sufiya call into question the norms of asymmetry, domination, and disconnection and manage to find an alternative mode of expressing unmentionable alterity or articulating the unspeakable. Although they try to reclaim individual personhood through sexual transgression, however, their strategies and practices are different because of what Butler (2004: 2) describes as “yet another order of unlivable life.” There exists a hierarchy even in unlivable life. Their strategies and tactics have to differ because the permitted scope of social and economic activities is different. Although both of them exist on the periphery of life, there are differences in terms of gender and class. In other words, they are not equally subjugated or controlled, so they need to respond in different ways to counteract the impact of discrimination or oppression.

It is interesting to explore how much Mistry and Rushdie are willing to empower their ‘idiotic’ characters. Such transgressive modes of practice as deviant sex, violence, crime, and insanity help them survive abjection and ‘speak back’ to the authorities which deny them recognition, subjecthood, and a livable life. The transformation of abjection into capacity shows how transgressive practice refigures the conditions of possibility for subaltern others, opening up a discursive space rather than exacerbating abjection or self-contempt. As I compare Tehmul and Sufiya in terms of the extent and limitation of transformative agency, I develop the Foucaultian concept of subjectivation in a two-pronged manner: *resubjectivation within* the structure and

*desubjectivation from* the structure. This differentiation of the term aims to examine how much risk individual characters are willing to take in order to challenge and transform the existing power structure from the minoritarian position although they often live in the interstices of these two modes of subjectification. The process can also serve as an analogy to the limits and possibilities of postcolonialism which is both complicit with and oppositional to Eurocentric hegemony. Tehmul is allowed to participate in a measure of social and economic activities within or beyond the apartment complex while Sufiya is closeted in her attic room as a dangerous madwoman. A degree of freedom in social abjection might determine the condition of possibility for human relationality and reciprocity. Ironically, Tehmul's eventual death shows that interhuman activities undermine the radicality of transgression while Sufiya's survival in the apocalyptic ending illustrates that the more abject and abandoned she is, the more freedom she longs for.

The task of handing over ensnared rats<sup>41</sup> to municipal authorities enables Tehmul to accumulate money to purchase sex from prostitutes. His will to economic power is demonstrated in a coin box he displays to reluctant prostitutes and the money hidden in his shoe. He takes sadistic pleasure in torturing and killing rats instead of simply taking them to the authorities. After he is found committing the despicable act his neighbours stop giving him rats. The torture of rats does not simply represent the suffering or abjection of subaltern others within society. The dynamic also offers clues to how we can comprehend the relationship between Gustad and Tehmul. His way of handling rats has the effect of emphasizing how ethics should work when it

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<sup>41</sup> The city of Bombay (now Mumbai) where the novel is set in the year of 1971 offers incentives for killing rats. The city authorities offers 25 paise for every rat presented to it, dead or alive, as part of its campaign (Mistry 1992: 32). According to *the Straits Times* (23 May 2012), during the financial year that ended March 31, 2012, Mumbai's rat killers have killed 375,000, whereas 200,000 rats had been trapped and 100,000 poisoned in the city's 24 administrative wards. The rat catchers of the city are paid per rat killed, and a rat killer of 15 years' experience earns about 9,000 rupees (about 200 US dollars) a month.

comes to the relationship between those who wield power and victims of power. The circuit of violence, theft, and deviant sex illustrates the way in which Tehmul converts his abjection into a counter-hegemonic means of acquiring human rights. But his transgressive practices become justified and legitimate only when they are recognized by an ethical person with just authority like Gustad who is always protective and supportive of the lame outcast. This relationship highlights the fact that Self gains presence in light of Other. Tehmul's theft of Roshan's doll and his paraphilia combine to make Gustad understand his desperate situation. After Gustad catches him in the act of masturbating on the doll he realizes that Tehmul is also a sexual being whose desire is denied and trapped, so he lets him have the doll instead of retrieving it for his daughter. This ethical behaviour, coupled with Tehmul's refusal to be a subhuman by seeking human intelligibility and legitimacy, bestows a *de facto* legitimacy upon his marginal, abject identity.

However, Sufiya is what Spivak (1990: 142) describes as 'non-narrativizable' subaltern for whom there is no access to representation. In *Shame*, there is no character like Gustad who will listen to her when she is in need of help. As she suffers discriminatory treatment for being a mute 'moron,' she develops a split personality, her insomnolent doppelganger overrunning her frustrated self. But her Jekyll-and-Hyde identity seems to be a strategy for questioning the formation of subjectivity within the bounds of family. Having failed to bring about a change in the hegemonic structure, however, she gradually transforms into a beastly destroyer and returns to wreak indiscriminate violence to overturn the male-dominated system and usurp the position of power. Sexual violence and killing spree empower her to achieve a completely new identity against ugly reality. For the mute idiot who is never allowed to occupy a position of enunciation, the act of violence speaks louder than words. Her body's language in the form of violence challenges the notion that there is no access to a materiality outside of language. Sufiya's

corporeal practice of violence impugns the theory of focusing on linguistic or discursive agency and its signifying process, which is advocated by Butler, Bhabha and other scholars.

Sufiya's resort to fury and destruction stems from her inability to represent or articulate herself as a speaking subject within the given order of patriarchy and Muslim fundamentalism. The exercise of violence is a kind of subversive tool of agency for the subaltern other. Such violence, which subverts the assumptions about the order of things, is a key practice for fashioning a new self. Sufiya refuses to be regulated from inside or contained within the hegemonic structure which exists at the expense of others. Her empowerment or freedom comes from a refusal rather than an engagement. The problem is that she can only represent herself as a 'speaking subject' by resorting to relations of violence:

For the first time in her life... that girl is free. He imagined her proud; proud of her strength, proud of the violence that was making her a legend, that prohibited anyone from telling her what to do, or whom to be, or what she should have been and was not; yes, she had risen above everything she did not wish to hear. (Rushdie 1995: 254)

She executes a sexual carnage of animals then men, symbolically obliterating the chains of social norms. As Grewal (1988: 37) points out, her wanton sexual appetite and killing of men is problematic because it operates by playing on fear and destruction although her "genocidal mimicry" of male power and control "is meant to be a critique of patriarchal culture." From a Foucaultian perspective, such violent refusal to be governed at all is a troubling strategy because it is in danger of leading to an essentialized and reductive understanding of power, negating the ubiquity of power relation itself. Such negation of power relations occludes all possibilities and signifies a zero-sum game in which only the winner or the superior force takes it all. Foucault's concept of power and freedom suggests that it is possible to escape from and transform the given relation of power, but it is not an escape from the power relation per se (Custer 1998: 140).

Therefore, the exercise of freedom needs to be considered not as rising “above everything” or a refusal to be governed at all, but rather as a refusal to be governed like that. From this viewpoint, Sufiya’s promiscuous exercise of power might be a failure because of its destructiveness which contributes to defining her identity—underwritten by oppositionality—as an unforgiving destroyer with predatory sexuality.

From this Hobbesian view of violence and sexuality, Sufiya appears to be a maladjusted, murderous pervert hell-bent on destruction with an appetite for control over the world. The violent endgame on the last page of the novel might be what Teverson (2010: 143) describes as “a warning about the terrible consequences of political repression.” Change or face annihilation! As Rushdie (1995: 173 italics in original) says, “*If you hold down one thing you hold down the adjoining*. In the end, though, it all blows up in your face.” Nevertheless, the subversion that Sufiya represents should not be dismissed as mere insanity or deviance. Her own particular experiences of shame, rejection, and contempt produce counter-hegemonic modes of agency with the aid of madness, deviant sexuality, and violence. To appropriate David Halperin’s words (2007: 94 italics in original) in this context, it is necessary to “think of abjection not as the symptom of an unconscious drive to self-annihilation, but as *a strategic response to a specific social predicament*.” In the framework of a calibrated strategy, Sufiya’s transformation from a killer of animals to a murderer of men can be said to be a process of creative destruction from the bottom up. Twelve years of “unloved humiliation” since her birth prompts her to kill 218 turkeys (Rushdie 1995: 138). Later, she targets men who represent what she considers the source of her woes. The process produces the metaphoric effect of creating a level playing field in the political context.

Still, there is concern about the lack of morals due to her unquenchable transgressive desire for sexual violence and destruction. Here is a moral dilemma. The question is what she should do now after she prevails. In fact, her practice of the self is a far cry from the norms of human ethics. It seems that she is even denied the legitimacy of her role as a destroyer as she is changed from a ‘white panther’ back to a ‘moron’ after killing her husband:

His body was falling away from her, a headless drunk, and after that the Beast faded in her once again, she stood there blinking stupidly, unsteady on her feet, as if she didn’t know that all the stories had to end together... (Rushdie 1995: 286)

Nevertheless, Sufiya’s practice of violence can be construed as a symbolic campaign for shaking and inverting a longstanding hierarchy or order. If so, the return of her imbecility after wanton destruction has the effect of making a deliberate mockery of male power which succumbs to the idiot in the end. Her efforts to transgress and furthermore blot out the limiting circumstances are conducive to opening the way for a completely new order through destruction. Her mass murder does not stop at breaking up the patriarchal alliance of men. It achieves the effect of overthrowing the whole system of institutions and morals created and reinforced by the hegemonic discourse of male politics and religious fundamentalism. Her non-conformist transgression is “a kind of reverse or counter-sublimation, undoing the discursive hierarchies and stratifications of bodies and cultures” (Stallybrass & White 1986: 201).

Significantly, her refusal to be governed at all—based on relations of violence—serves as a viable strategy for transforming and subverting existing power relations in favour of disenfranchised subaltern others. Her violence, which is reminiscent of Walter Benjamin’s conception of law-destroying sovereign (or divine) violence<sup>42</sup>, is not meant for destructive

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<sup>42</sup> For Benjamin, it is only divine violence whose principle is justice that is able to interrupt or break the eternal return of the same law and open a new era (Hirovonen 2011: 107). As opposed to mythic and legal violence which justifies and confirms the prevailing order, divine violence destroys all limits and boundaries that legal violence has posited, founded and preserved. Hirovonen (2011: 109) argues that the concept of divine violence is the sign and

nihilism or absolute rule. This enabling violence does not merely raise the possibility of recognition and justice, but raises the likelihood of going beyond the vicious cycle of oppression into the possibility of freedom from the given structure. Her practice of violence against divine Muslim laws and patriarchy makes way for whatever may come in its wake, other than the endless return of *ancien regime*. Therefore, her outright refusal to be governed at all needs to be seen as an essentialist strategy for transforming the abjection into agency which can prevent the Sisyphean repetition or circulation of nullity. In view of this possibility, Sufiya's abjection should be understood differently from that of Tehmul. To compare the two characters, I appropriate Butler's words (1993: 243, 1997: 7): Sufiya "would rather die than do or be that," whereas Tehmul "would rather exist in subordination than not exist." Sufiya's *desubjection* *from* the structure empowers her to overthrow and bypass the game of recognition while Tehmul's *resubjection* *within* the structure makes him accept and adapt the existential condition, which is an inescapable power structure.

Tehmul's mimicry of the normative pales in comparison with Sufiya's negation of the order. Tehmul seems to succeed in making a better arrangement only within the given social order of sexuality and gender by tapping into the agency of his abjection. His recognition and legitimacy as a human being depend solely on Gustad who upholds the hegemonic hierarchy of masculinity and patriarchy as opposed to marginalized sexuality and subordinated femininity. Tehmul's desperate efforts to prove himself and gain recognition are driven by the attachment to—and mimicry of—the masculinized ideal of Gustad in a Zoroastrian community, a microcosm of Indian society. Therefore, although Tehmul transgresses social norms and boundaries he actually accepts the status quo as being legitimate. His subaltern position as an

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seal of the break not only with modern law but also with the terrorist violence of religious and ideological totalitarianism and fanaticism.

outsider within the dominant system makes him challenge but at the same time reinforce the hegemonic norms of sexuality and gender. He acts on socially constructed codes of gender or masculinity although he refuses to leave them intact by engaging in deviant practices.

What Tehmul can achieve in this context is limited, only reinforcing the very ideology which subjects him to discrimination and exclusion in the first place. The doll is nothing but a trophy of his sexual conquest as a masculine being. In spite of his 'revolt' and recognition, Tehmul fails to redefine the norms of sexuality and masculinity. Gustad's intervention and termination of the suspected symbolic triangle relationship between Roshan, her bride doll, and Tehmul demonstrate how the hegemonic order is sustained, removing any possible threat or danger. After Gustad finds that the bride doll, Roshan's alter ego, is the object of Tehmul's sexual fulfillment, he cannot accept any hint of the violation of his daughter's chastity. Since childhood innocence is essential to the order of patriarchy, he is repulsed that the pure is defiled and the virgin is deflowered. The doll is a 'damaged good.' Gustad symbolically protects his daughter's innocence and virginity by giving away the doll tainted with Tehmul's semen. From this perspective, Gustad's funeral-cum-wedding ritual for Tehmul could be seen as a way of consummating his relationship with the doll to drive away any allusion of Roshan's involvement in the triangle. There is suspicion that the bride doll is expended as a fetishized object to obviate a symbolic in-law relationship between the two men who connive to maintain the order of patriarchy. In this regard, Tehmul's sexual transgression can only be vindicated in the service of the hegemonic order.

Nevertheless, it is impossible to deny that Tehmul achieves something subversive through the negotiation and construction of human ties. The most meaningful, beautiful scene of the novel unfolds in the wake of Tehmul's accidental death. Gustad's compassionate help shows



how transgressive behaviour and attendant recognition combine to lead to a significant change at the social realm, transforming the dominant discourse. No one in the compound is willing to handle the dead body *ruvaan* properly, but Gustad takes it upon himself to pick up and move the corpse<sup>43</sup> inside the building instead of leaving it until Parsi corpse carriers arrive below the tree—a symbolic place of relentless struggle between good and bad as insinuated by his daily religious practices of Zoroastrianism:

Without a word, Gustad slipped one arm under Tehmul's shoulders and the other under his knees. With a single mighty effort he rose to his feet, cradling the still-warm body... They looked in silence now, too ashamed to follow. Sohrab gazed after his father with fear and admiration. (Mistry 1992: 335)

Gustad takes the risk of the death's contagion because he understands how much Tehmul has suffered as an outcast since he fell from the height of the tree as a little boy in his failed attempt to rescue a tangled kite. Gustad's ethical behaviour transforms Tehmul into one of Mistry's finest creations. The scene is a powerful reminder of *Pieta*, the artistic image of the Virgin Mary cradling the dead body of Christ, which evokes sympathy for the sufferer as well as a mother's love for her son. Gustad's compassionate act goes beyond a mere pity for Tehmul's lifelong misery or a level of nursing care needed for a disabled idiot. His ethic of care associated with human rights and responsibilities produces what Berlant (2004: 9) calls "a particular kind of social relation" between authority and sufferer. Gustad's brave act ensures that after his death Tehmul is not banished or exiled from their midst into an abject zone. This ethical practice of self presents Gustad as the embodiment of just authority. Tehmul's admiration and emulation of Gustad become justified as he is not reduced to a mere victim of power.

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<sup>43</sup> In Zoroastrian tradition the corpse is regarded as contaminating and polluting, "immediately inhabited by the demoness of death," so it should be safely disposed of in a proper manner before the devil spirit gets into it (Clark 2001: 115).

The dynamic of compassionate agency at the intersubjective level offers an insight into how tension or conflict between those who wield power and victims of power can be reconciled in a wider context. It is not a simple counterpoint to Tehmul's sadistic torture of helpless rats mentioned above. While rowdy demonstrators exercise collective associative rights outside to protest the venality and abuse of the government, Gustad performs rituals for Tehmul, restoring "all the rights and virtues of mortals" to him as he had wished earlier (Mistry 1992: 303). Even agalmatophilia is sanctified on his deathbed as Tehmul and the doll lie in a simulacrum of bride and groom:

The naked doll lay across the bed... The doll's clothes were on the chair just as [Gustad] had seen them the night of the air raid. Leaning over Tehmul, he picked up the doll and began clothing it in its wedding ensemble... When the doll was dressed he slipped it under the sheet, beside Tehmul. (Mistry 1992: 336)

Despite the whiff of sexual fetishization, the ceremony is a kind of intersubjective ritual for bestowing acceptance and equal recognition upon the subaltern other. But the funeral-cum-wedding ritual carries more meaning than recognition and restoration of Tehmul's dignity as a human being. Gustad, who did not shed a tear for his mother or two close friends in their funerals since he swore at the tender age of 17 never to indulge in tears no matter what suffering or sorrow, feels tears running down his cheeks while reciting Parsi religious prayers. His weeping embodies an ethics based on empathy and compassion, representing his acceptance of the abjections and imperfections of the world, which culminates in his reconciliation with Sohrab, his rebellious son. In contrast to the eventual failure of the mass demonstration outside, Gustad's person-to-person relationship with Tehmul and Sohrab raises the prospect that the political whim of the outcasts can be transformed into a genuine intersubjective act with the help of ethical authority, and it can succeed in changing the status quo. In a sense, Gustad's inter-human relationship stresses the importance of what Foucault (1982: 38) describes as a "relational right"

that “permits all possible types of relations to exist and not to be prevented, blocked, or annulled by impoverished relational institutions.”

The ritual serves to liberate Tehmul from his quasi-colonial status and elevate him to the public sphere of human intelligibility. During the Zoroastrian ceremony, Gustad tries to speak to Tehmul in a gesture toward an alternative space where Self can extend to Other. To appropriate Bhabha’s words (2004: xxv), the dialogic coexistence enables Tehmul to enter “the territory of the right to narrate,” and he is now “part of a dialogue that may not, at first, be heard or heralded”—he may be ignored—but his “personhood cannot be denied.” Such dialogic possibilities refuse to submit to a certain hierarchical order but create a state of shifted order. The dialogic connection between Gustad and Tehmul raises the possibility of what Ashcroft (2001: 183) describes as “*horizontality*”<sup>44</sup> in human relations established within a hierarchy. Such a relationship would not lead to a form of colonial human relationship, instead making it possible to listen to the other and recognize him as the subject with a voice in which the other can be recognized as a self, and vice versa. Gustad’s tears for the subaltern do not symbolize his helplessness in the face of the venality and injustice of postcolonial India, but the prospect of equality.

In contrast, Omar’s relationship with his wife Sufiya displays the lack of compassionate agency associated with responsibility and human rights. Omar decides to marry her, 31 years his junior, while he takes care of her as an immunologist. However, she is objectified as a thing of sympathy or compassion for which he is responsible as her doctor only. Brought up by three weird mothers in a bizarre environment, he is not properly educated in caring or compassion of

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<sup>44</sup> “Yet effective resistance to the concept of the boundary is not another boundary but its opposite: what we may term *horizontality*. It is in horizontality that the true force of transformation becomes realized, for whereas the boundary is about constriction, history, the regulation of imperial space, the horizon is about extension, possibility, fulfillment, the imagination of post-colonial place.”

human beings, especially women. A peripheral hero “born and raised in the condition of being out of things,” he marries Sufiya to “woo her father” who had killed his brother (Rushdie 1995: 24, 144). He marries her for status and money, so he is not interested in conjugal ethics which involves loving her abject body. Her father is the ruler of the country who can ensure his status and success. His acquisition of Sufiya as a “shadow bride” enables him to emerge to the centre of power, but he banishes her to the margins by drugging and chaining her in the attic room. In this context, his sexual relationship with her Parsi servant, Shahbanou, does not amount to subversive racial or class transgression. Rather, it works to naturalize his sexuality as uncontrollable. Besides, the fact that the nanny overthrows her putative role of a foil for her charge highlights Sufiya’s relegation to the abject zone as a shadowy figure. Such an abject situation forces her—“family’s shame made flesh”—to discover “the hidden path that links *sharam* to violence...The beast inside the beauty” (Rushdie 1995: 139) as she realizes that what she had hoped to find in marriage lies outside marriage or the legal orbit.

Sufiya’s search for social recognition and justice is closely associated with her desire to embrace shameful, guilty sexuality and transform it into ‘shameless’ agency of liberation and pride. In contrast with Cundy’s fixed view of Sufiya, Sharpe (1997: 3) regards Sufiya as a dynamic character as she represents “the imaginative possibility of women’s shame producing anger and self-pride rather than embarrassment and family honor.” The argument shows that the abjection of shame can be converted into an agential force to help her transform herself and survive. Amin (2009: 168) argues aptly: “... pride is shame’s artful, protective, and decorative transubstantiation... pride is shame’s cultivation...shame’s resubjection.” Denied human rights to sex even after marriage, Sufiya explodes in anger and frustration. She transforms herself in a radical manner to resist:

Down she lies; and what Shahbanou took upon herself is finally done to Sufiya. Four husbands come and go. Four of them in and out...her hands reach for the first boy's neck. The others stand still and wait for their turn. (Rushdie 1995: 219)

Her rape and slaughter of the four youths in the slums—not only subverts hegemonic control over her body. It also mocks her husband's sexual escapades in the past and his shameless sex with her servant, posing a symbolic challenge to male-dominated Pakistani society which requires the testimony of four adult men to file a rape crime. According to Yaqin (2007: 68), the brutal rape and killings is a “dark reversal of the *Hudood* Ordinances passed in the 1980s in Pakistan” as part of her desperate efforts to overcome the abjection.<sup>45</sup>

Then, her indiscriminate sexual violence, a metaphor for demanding an alternative space for the abject, should be blamed upon the dehumanizing patriarchal and authoritarian system which imposes social and sexual codes on such a helpless woman. Unlike Tehmul, she cannot have social or economic activities which connect her with community or society. All she can do is to use her shameful body. Her radical problematization of the limits of representation reaches a climax in the form of unrestrained conjugal violence, which characterizes the relational nature of her agency. Relegated to the shame of family, society, then nation, she is denied a chance to ‘consummate’ the conjugal relationship with Omar until the end of the novel. Her return shows that she cannot avoid tackling oppressive power in a relational manner although she seeks to free herself from the given order in a drastic way. “...she had entertained for that tiny fragment of time the wild fantasy that she was indeed a bride entering the chamber of her beloved...” (Rushdie 1995: 286). The apocalyptic violence that she wreaks on the last page produces the

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<sup>45</sup> Women are not viewed as having rights over their body or sexuality. The law justifies such an egregious inequality and the gender asymmetry. Yaqin (2007: 67) explains that in Pakistan's history, family has been a prominent feature of the state's political discourse from the period of Field Marshal Ayub Khan's martial law in the 1960s, during which he introduced the liberalization of family laws, to the military regime of General Zia ul-Haq in the 1980s which implemented the Shariah laws. Zia deployed the media-led *Nizam-e Mustafa* (the law of Muhammad) campaign, making sex a public matter mediated by religious law. It is this aspect of Pakistani postcolonial politics that is satirized in *Shame*.

effect of handing back ‘shame’ that isn’t hers to the male-dominated society and polity represented by her husband. The hegemonic order is completely reversed when Sufiya takes the initiative with her body’s language and violently kills her husband at a simulacrum of conjugal consummation. The simulated consummation is a critical moment when she transforms the abjection into a mode of agency to overthrow her husband’s moral sham of normality disguised in the hegemonic discourse of science.

The crisis of the hegemonic discourse of language and law in *Shame* contrasts sharply with the dialogic relationship between Gustad and Tehmul in *Such a Long Journey*. After Omar goes back to his birthplace Nishapur, he is caught in feverish hallucinations. Language or reason is no longer able to sustain him before the day of reckoning comes when he can no longer avoid the confrontation with his own shame, Sufiya. Delirious with fever, he makes a confession, a sort of litany of his own shameless acts. He is destined to wait for the mute Beast “like a bridegroom on his wedding night” (Rushdie 1995: 286). He appears ready to listen to her now, but it is too late. There is no possibility of dialogue or communication between them, except for Sufiya’s hypnotism. What is reversed here is more than his self-styled justification of the use of the technique of hypnosis in seducing and manipulating white women for sex in the past: “Impossible to persuade a subject to do anything she is unwilling to do” (Rushdie 1995: 128). Omar, who represents the authority without just power, must die mercilessly at the hands of his wife in a simulated conjugal ritual without dialogic or persuasive possibilities.

Unlike Omar and Sufiya, Gustad and Tehmul come to share portions of a world in common although the former has trouble in comprehending the voice of the subaltern. Gustad is the only person in the compound who tries to understand Tehmul’s fast repetitive stuttering. In spite of physical and intellectual disability, Tehmul’s ‘motormouth’ helps carve out a discursive

space for a minimal voice. He mimics a language that in many ways encodes his oppression, and his repetitive linguistic practice raises the prospect of change and transformation. As Bhabha (1996: 13) argues, the interposing of “another voice” gives rise to “interruption, interpretation, and the disclosure of agency,” especially when it is the voice of the silenced, oppressed, or misrepresented. Tehmul’s speech impediment defies interpretation, but it causes a fissure or gap between speech and acceptance, which produces linguistic agency in a metonymic way. His conjoined words—‘words without boundaries’—transgress the norms and limits of grammar and syntax and unexpectedly produce what Bernard-Donals (1998: 123) calls a “subaltern effect” of affecting the course of the narrative.

While a melee triggered off by an anti-government protest is under way, Tehmul misspeaks unnamable four-letter words repeatedly at breakneck speed. His mimicry causes a scandal and he is punished by Bamji. The foul-mouthed policeman whacks him on the head, saying: “This will teach him repetition is bad for his health” (Mistry 1992: 331). After his effort at communication fails, Tehmul ventures outside the compound perhaps to evade the policeman’s surveillance and interpellation as well as in pursuit of new possibilities. His search for due recognition draws him to the chaotic fracas, only to cause his death. But it emerges that his accidental death produces a subaltern effect which marks not only the boundaries of social status but challenges them as well. Ambivalent and double-edged, such an effect is both positive and negative, enabling and constraining. Interestingly, the effect proves to be enabling and positive when an ethical authority like Gustad recognizes and restores Tehmul’s human dignity in the funeral-cum-wedding. To borrow McNay’s words (2009: 73) in connection with her discussion of agency, Gustad’s funeral rite helps the unintended consequences of Tehmul’s death

“contest the prevailing social order and disrupt hegemonic definitions of equality in the name of a more radical equality.”

Castration, mutilation, dismembering, and disfiguring are forms of social abjection often found in Mistry’s *A Fine Balance* and Rushdie’s novels such as *Midnight’s Children*, *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, and *The Shalimar the Clown*. They are not prediscursive forms of teratology, but the products of disciplinary technologies in postcolonial India. As Stallybrass and White (1986: 192) argue, “the body cannot be thought separately from the social formation, symbolic topography and the constitution of the subject.” Regardless of the two authors’ different style, the body is used as a trope to suggest how material experiences in family, society, and nation-state constitute the subject. Om in *A Fine Balance* and Saleem in *Midnight’s Children* suffer castration at the hands of the authorities in the same period of actual history in postcolonial India. The dismembering is not merely their tragic loss of bodily parts in their struggle with the forces of history. It tells similar but different stories of physical and discursive experiences wreaked by state violence like the Family Planning and the State of Emergency in the mid 1970s, when Indira Gandhi, beleaguered by the political turmoil from her election fraud, pushed ahead with coercive policy in the name of progress. Interestingly, the excessive grotesque suffering contributes to the construction of a counter-discourse through which they explore the possibility of transforming the abjection into agency. In this context, the power of counter-narrative works to transform the abject body into what Butler (1993: 21) calls a “valued and valuable body” and saves it from being relegated or banished to an abject zone.

As Shubha Joshi (2007: 266) argues, “The overwhelming number of impotent men in *Midnight’s Children* is undoubtedly an index of the anxiety about masculinity that permeates the



post-colonial Indian nation.”<sup>46</sup> The process of Saleem’s dismembering and eventual castration mirrors deep anxiety about the norms of sexuality and masculinity. As Neil Kortenaar (1999: 31) points out, the metaphor of the body is central to the national history of India, and Saleem’s body is used as an allegory for the history of postcolonial India. He is switched at birth by his nanny, Mary Pereira. His real parents are not the upper middle-class Indian couple, but William Methwold, an imperial Englishman, and a local busker’s wife Vanita, a subaltern Indian woman. Ties between Saleem and his family are the product of historical discourse because the foregrounded line of descent from Aadam Aziz to Saleem is a fiction as the latter is a changeling. Saleem commences the narrative of reclaiming his history from Kashmir where Aadam Aziz’s ancestry began. Likewise, the making and unmaking of his sexuality is closely related to the imaginative construction of the nation state. When the nation begins to crack, so does Saleem’s body. A fear and anxiety of premature aging, castration, and dismembering seems to possess him.

Here, it is important to heed how the counter-discursive mode of transgression enables abject subjects to transform into agents of change. The act of storytelling empowers Saleem in a different way from Moraes in *The Moor’s Last Sigh* who gets an erection as he tells a story and is enabled to outlive the limited time of human life. Unlike Moraes or Scheherazade<sup>47</sup>, storytelling is the only way of satisfying Saleem’s partner given that he lacks the power of sexuality. Padma, an illiterate subaltern woman, makes every effort to revive Saleem’s virility. She is “distressed, perhaps, by the futility of her midnight attempts at resuscitating [Saleem’s]

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<sup>46</sup> The list includes Ahmed Sinai whose testicles are turned into “round cubes of ice” when the nation freezes the Muslim’s assets; the idealist Communist Nadir (Qasim) Khan, the impotent ex-husband of Saleem’s mother; and Saleem’s childless maternal uncle, the only realistic screenwriter in Bollywood.

<sup>47</sup> Saleem compares his situation to that of Sheherazade (Rushdie 1991: 20), but there is a difference. Saleem’s life is not at stake. Moraes in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, who is hurtling towards death at double-quick time, has every reason to emulate Scheherazade to save his life. Sheherazade could save her life by sexually satisfying Prince Shahryar and telling him a different story every night until, 1,001 nights and three children later, she is spared the fate of her predecessors and attains the position of a new queen for life (Bernstein 2010: 118). The power of sexuality, coupled with storytelling, saves her life.

‘other pencil,’ the useless cucumber hidden in [his] pants” (Rushdie 1991: 137). For Padma, the working of the ‘other pencil’ seems to be the most important thing in their relationship. At one point, she uses a herbal concoction, which jeopardizes his life. However, to be impotent is not to be powerless although the two words are synonymous in a literal sense. Padma’s complaint about Saleem’s impotence propels him to make the most of his abject body: orally narrating a personal history to her, the audience, and at the same time writing it in paper for his adoptive son. A failure of his penis is not a failure of his life although his genitals are an integral part of himself. Saleem’s physical impotence spurs him to act to counter-discursivize historical events on his own terms. The power of storytelling produces a socio-political agency of representation in ways that describe back to the hegemonic centre of discourse, overcome his anxiety about feminization, and transform experiences and affects into a counter-hegemonic text for social recognition and visibility. Toward the end of Saleem’s story, Padma accepts him the way he is and proposes a marriage so that she can look after him, saying, “There is the future to think of” (Rushdie 1991: 511). The down-to-earth woman’s concrete action plan has the effect of materializing Saleem’s counter-discursive narration.

Saleem is castrated as a result of Indira Gandhi’s sterilization policy, but his body is damaged long before the incident. Among others, damage to the nose symbolizes his loss of supernatural powers. Saleem’s nose does not function merely as a trope of sexual organ. His telepathic ability to hear others’ thoughts fades after his parents have him undergo an operation on his sinus-inflamed nose.<sup>48</sup> The metaphoric castration deprives him of connection with his fellow midnight’s children, pushing him to search for a new identity. Deprived of mystical

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<sup>48</sup> Saleem whose biological father is a high-nosed British imperialist ironically “inherits the gift of Ganesh” as a storyteller with Indian expressions (Chari 1994: 311). Ganesh is an elephant-nosed Hindu deity, the eldest son of Shiva and his wife, Parvati. His elephant ears serve him to hear the needs of his people, and he helps write the *Mahabharata* as a scribe. Saleem’s dismembering and regeneration create new values by transforming the Indian tradition of storytelling, illustrating how he can develop a new ability to tell a story in spite of difficulties.

hearing powers, Saleem instead develops supernatural powers of smell and then an ability to tell a story after he undergoes physical castration. His prolific storytelling prowess is a metaphor for procreation. As Meenakshi Mukherjee (2000: 177) contends, Saleem's counter-discursive use of technologies of writing and narrating is a "cathartic effort at recapturing his control over the world through language." The appropriation and transformation of the means of representation empower Saleem to explore ways of interrogating and reinscribing the hegemonic discourse which constrains and threatens to undo his body. Self-representation such as oral narration and writing enables him to counter the inscription of power on his body and embody transformation in his struggle for meaning.

Palimpsestic reinscriptions are a crucial metaphor for presenting a counter-narrative of personal historical experience because they open the way for Saleem's reclaiming significance and centrality from the periphery. The palimpsestic process of erasures and overwritings is instrumental in his survival given that constant, unreliable storytelling challenges the ownership and origin of meaning. Alternative stories provide room for reinterpretation and give his story a dialogic aesthetic as an assertive and self-empowering response to persecution. His experiences, coupled with his discursive wounds of both personal and national history, show how the palimpsestic power of storytelling helps him to create a protean identity for survival. However, Saleem's growing skepticism or tragedy raises a question about whether the power of his storytelling is sufficient. In defense, Rushdie (1992: 16) argues:

What I tried to do was to set up a tension in the text, a paradoxical opposition between the form and content of the narrative. The story of Saleem does indeed lead him to despair. But the story is told in a manner designed to echo, as closely as my abilities allowed, the Indian talent for non-stop self-regeneration. This is why the narrative constantly throws up new stories, why it 'teems'. The form—multitudinous, hinting at the infinite possibilities of the country—is the optimistic counterweight to Saleem's personal tragedy.

Nevertheless, the narrative alone does not provide a solution to problems in the postcolonial context. A salient problem is that the restoration and transformation of male identity seems to depend on the process of female othering. Saleem's journey of seeking a new self comes at the expense of female characters. As Suleri (2009: 112) points out, Saleem "catalogs"<sup>49</sup> the women who have constructed the peculiarities of his history." From this perspective, the male body of Saleem, arguably allegory for the Subcontinent, represents a misunderstanding of gendered centrality to the narrative of postcolonial society.

Textual reality in *A Fine Balance* shows how human relations work in connection with violence. The Beggarmaster's exercise of violence demonstrates that relations of domination work in interrelated networks, not through naked power, beneath the surface of perceived reality. Such violence, which appears ubiquitous in postcolonial India, is different from the kind of violence that Sufiya in *Shame* subversively exercises from the subaltern position against the male-dominated authority. Kingpin of the begging industry in the city, the Beggarmaster's perverse power relations with his abject beggars show how the usual politics of safety and security is overturned when it is set against the power of the government and institutions. What justifies the Beggarmaster's violence is that it is a way of confirming the others' existence, place, and even transgression, not denying them. The circuit of violence which functions in their relations goes beyond the conventional idea of power. His power is exercised on a consensual basis given that his beggars and clients choose to be under his protection. The severity of mutilation and the attendant profit of begging determine the place of his beggars, and they are grateful to him for protecting them from hunger or enemies. Dina, Maneck, Ishvar, and Om request his protection from the absentee landlord who wants to evict them by means of thugs'

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<sup>49</sup> Saleem's literal cataloging of women appears in 465-467 pages of the text. The list demonstrates that readers are supposed to see female characters through the lens of Saleem's perceptions. The issue of female othering is elaborated on in Chapter II.

cruel violence. The Beggarmaster protects them by wreaking superfluous violence upon the thugs, all of whose fingers he breaks. At one point the foursome goes so far as to welcome the sadistic brute like a saviour, preferring his menacing presence to the landlord's rent collector or henchmen. Such dynamics of consent and dependency set the seemingly perverted form of human power relations apart from impersonal, anti-human institutional relations which doggedly plague the characters.

Importantly, the text illustrates the ways in which abject living with violence produces a range of strategies and tactics embedded in begging subculture. The Beggarmaster's power is real and brutal, but it is also contingent and reversible. The power relations between them are dialogic and negotiable. His relations of violence and domination do not rule out the possibility that the voice of the injured or mutilated can be heard, so that abject subjects are enabled to impugn and violate the discourse of ruling ideology. As Tokaryk (2005: 24) points out, the beggars and clients under his watch relate the stories that hegemonic "monologic economic discourse fails to tell." In return, the Beggarmaster badly needs them to redeem his humanity by "narrating his soft-hearted, family-oriented side" (Ball 1999: 237). Such dialogic power relations renders meaningless the categorical moral discourse of good and bad with regard to violence and transgression. The boundaries between the legitimate and the illegitimate are blurred in the context of these personalized power relations and ethics. A critical moment of an enabling transgression comes when his beggars' abject bodies are deployed during Shankar's funeral parade on the city streets. The beggars hilariously flaunt their deformed, mutilated bodies in public:

The deformities of some had atrophied their bodies, reducing them to a froglike squat: they swung along using their arms as levers. A few could only manage the sideways shuffle of a crab. Others, doubled over, crawled forward on their hands and feet, their behinds raised in the air like camels' humps. By a tacit consensus,

the cortege proceeded at the lowest common velocity, but their spirits were high as they laughed and chatted among themselves, enjoying a new experience, so that it seemed more a festival than a funeral. (Mistry 1997: 505)

The scene shows how the carnivalesque performance functions as politically subversive, although the parade might be a form of regulated or licensed transgression. The beggars use their abject bodies in a way that criticizes the hegemonic legitimate system which is threatening to displace them in the name of 'City Beautification' enforced by the government. The celebration of grotesque bodies is metaphoric of taunting and challenging the misguided government policy in the postcolonial context. In an ensuing sequence, the policemen, who mistake the beggars for political activists in disguise, beat them up for participating in an alleged political masquerade "portraying government figures as crooks or criminals embarked on beggaring the nation." After realizing their mistake, however, the police provide an official escort for the rest of the way. So the funeral turns into a kind of Bakhtinian carnival, "a world of topsy-turvy, of heteroglot exuberance, of ceaseless overrunning and excess where all is mixed, hybrid, ritually degraded and defiled" (Stallybrass & White 1986: 8). The excesses of abject body and the parade have the symbolic effect of turning upside-down official discourse or hierarchy in a way that highlights the possibility of negotiation, inversion, and reassertion.

It is also interesting to explore how the Beggarmaster's relations of violence operate in the wider dimensions of postcolonial society. Everyday economic relations between him and his beggars provide an insight into how the postcolonial economic system works. The streets occupied by beggars and pavement dwellers are controlled and regulated by the Beggarmaster who keeps detailed records of who begs where and how. He develops business by distributing them within his turf and keeping them under his surveillance. As Tokaryk (2005: 21) argues, the narrative suggests that the economy of begging is a "natural, accepted, and inevitable part of the

economic system promoted by the State of Emergency” in postcolonial India. On the surface, the Beggarmaster appears to be the equivalent of Dina’s brother Nusswan, a grueling capitalist, and Dina’s landlord who uses his rent collector or thugs to harass her without appearing in person. They are all motivated by economic profit. And there is a strong similarity in ethics suggested between the legitimate businessmen and the illegitimate Beggarmaster. One of the thugs, who argue that they are the landlord’s legal employees, says: “We are acting in the place of courts and lawyers. They are a waste of time and money. These days we can produce faster results” (Mistry 1997: 429). Nusswan represents “the economic and political discourses that combine to have such a profound impact on the marginalized characters in the novel” (Tokaryk 2005: 11). In support of the State of Emergency, Nusswan does not hesitate to argue for feeding homeless people “a free meal containing arsenic or cyanide, whichever is cost-effective” (Mistry 1997: 373). Similarly, the Beggarmaster does not mince words about reality on the streets, saying, “They will have to get used to it. Life does not guarantee happiness” (Mistry 1997: 445). His pursuit of a balanced universe seems like the corrupt politician Thakur Dharamsi’s advocate for the timeless balance which promotes the interests of those in power.

The same logic, language, and ethics of development economics are embodied in the organized practice of begging. However, the power that the Beggarmaster exercises on the street is different from that of development economics advocated by Nusswan or that of caste system by Thakur Dharamsi. The Beggarmaster’s consensual power relationship contrasts with the hegemonic political economic discourse’s dependence on coercion and corruption. His personalized laws are juxtaposed against malfunctioning institutional ones enforced by the police and kangaroo courts. This is why as Tokaryk (2005: 23) argues, the Beggarmaster’s relations of power tell a “more persuasive, believable story of economic development” because his discourse

leaves open the possibility of contingency and vagueness, whereas Nusswan speaks in the “reductive, empirical, monological language of the Emergency.” A variety of capitalized government slogans are examples of how coercive policy operates from the top down with the power of oppressive law. THE CITY BELONGS TO YOU! KEEP IT BEAUTIFUL!; FOOD FOR THE HUNGRY! HOMES FOR THE HOMELESS!; and THE NATION IS ON THE MOVE! (Mistry 1997: 303). As it turns out, however, such a grand narrative of progress and development does not benefit the public, especially the marginalized and downtrodden. The “city beautification” policy displaces slum dwellers, causing serious social problems, and the “family planning” policy aimed at reducing birth rates among the masses results in dismembering and deaths. In contrast, the Beggarmaster’s eerie drawing entitled “Spirit of Collaboration,” which is a trope of abject people’s indefatigable willpower despite harsh sufferings, operates as a critique of the 20-point official economic program announced by the Prime Minister which lacks the spirit of “the ancient story about friendship and cooperation” (Mistry 1997: 445). Although the Beggarmaster is a cold-hearted businessman in pursuit of profit, he is not a stooge of the institution like the calculating Facilitator with no human warmth. When his relationship with his clients matures he becomes benevolent: “Our contract can always be renewed. I will give you good rates, you’re Shankar’s friends. And—oh yes, Shankar sends you his greetings...” (Mistry 1997: 444). The depth of his character stems from the fact that power relations are negotiated at a personal level, which makes their relations real and immediate for each other.

The point is that the Beggarmaster’s power relationship is not a mere critique of postcolonial society, but it suggests a dialogic structure in which those in power allow putative victims to create an alternative discursive space. For the Beggarmaster, power relations are a game, like all other laws he is familiar with: “Easy to play, once you know the rules” (Mistry



1997: 379). These rules apply in a relational, flexible manner, inviting everyone to participate. However, the Beggarmaster's practice of the self short-circuits when he abuses his power rather than allowing it to be negotiated or altered at the level of intersubjective relations. His Nemesis comes from within the radius of his ruling domain. The deformed street performer Monkey-man, whom the Beggarmaster had forcibly separated from his young relatives for business purposes, inverts the hierarchy of power by wreaking a retributive, tit-for-tat killing for the mutilation of his nephew and niece for begging profits. His brutal murder of the Beggarmaster illustrates what happens when draconian powers attempt to deny, cancel or displace the marginalized. Senseless and gratuitous violence makes the Beggarmaster's relations of power no different from corrupt institutional ones, which give the cause for resistance and transgression from the lower rungs of society. When relations of power become fixed and deterministic, the possibility of negotiation and change is occluded, bringing an end to dialogic relations and regenerative possibilities. His death is a self-fulfilling prophecy of his grotesque self-portrait, "a man with a briefcase chained to his wrist standing on four spidery legs" (Mistry 1997: 461).

## **Incest**

Incest is a widely criticized perverse form of sexual relationship, conventionally considered a taboo. The word *incest* etymologically entails the notion of prohibition: "It comes from the Latin *incestus* which means 'unchaste' and connotes illicitness" (Shepher 1983: 27). There are differences and similarities between Roy and Rushdie in their respective treatment of such transgressive desire. In Rushdie's novels, incestuous desire is treated in a gendered manner. Male incestuous desire prompts a dynamic process of resistance and transformation. Although his male characters harbour anxiety or ambivalent feelings toward female family members, such

tension and conflict contribute to an agential process of self-fashioning. Examples are found in Saleem's incestuous desire for his sister Jamila Singer and other female kin in *Midnight's Children*, Flapping Eagle's sex with his sister Bird-Dog in *Grimus*<sup>50</sup> and the cloying closeness of sons and mothers in *The Satanic Verses* and *The Moor's Last Sigh*. All of the male protagonists achieve transformed selves with the help of—at the expense of—female characters.

Among others, I focus on the ways in which incestuous desire empowers Saleem. Transgression seems to have a precedent in buried incestuous desire between his grandfather and great grandmother. When Aadam decides to marry Naseem his mother gets jealous and asks him to massage her body: "See the nose on your face...I have worked in shops and been undressed by the eyes of strangers so that you should marry that Naseem!" (Rushdie: 1991: 22). Such desire, already present within the family, is articulated in the process of repetition and difference. The nose is often portrayed as an inheritance from Saleem's grandfather and described as a signifier of masculine prowess for both men: "We were a dynasty born out of a nose, the aquiline monster on the face of Aadam Aziz..." (Rushdie 1991: 311). However, tracing the origin of 'unnatural love' is meaningless because Saleem's phallic inheritance of the nose should be ascribed to his biological father Methwold, an English imperialist whose nose is "the legacy of a patrician French grandmother" (Rushdie 1991: 105). So Saleem's bastard changeling status makes the incest taboo literally irrelevant for him. Nevertheless, the materializing effects of family ties over time make him subscribe to the discourse of family and fulfill his role as a lawful son in spite of the revelation about his birth secret. Interpellated by such hegemonic discourse of family, he is supposed to dismiss any kind of incestuous desire for his female kin.

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<sup>50</sup> *Grimus* is Rushdie's obscure debut novel in 1975, a work that "to put it mildly, bombed" in the words of the author (Rushdie 1992: 1). Although it is generally neglected the science fiction is "actually the first of many, a blueprint of Rushdie's concerns and techniques, a proto-Rushdie novel that prefigures the other works in many ways" (Prasad 2009: 33).

He even denies that he “invented the whole story of the baby-swap to justify an incestuous love” (Rushdie 1991: 530). In this regard, forbidden desire serves as a test of family ties which have been forged not by blood but by claim. As part of efforts to expel unspeakable desire, Saleem acts on a binary view of woman as angel and whore. When he watches his mother’s perfidy with her ex-husband, Saleem summons up a binary moral code of honour and shame. When he is enamored of his beautiful aunt, he is quick to dismiss Pia as one of sexual manipulators. When he survives a war and returns to India he ascribes his incestuous feelings to the love of the nation, dismissing his sister as the “trollop of a crooner” (1991: 444).

Saleem’s incestuous desire alienates him from his family, but it is not an occasion for grief and regret. His incestuous desire as a changeling is meant to be rejected in order that he be recognized as a member of family and prove himself “worthy of their kinship” (Rushdie 1991: 329) in terms of affiliation, not consanguinity. His transgressive desire is also a way of extreme attachment to mollify his anxiety about mistaken or confused identity. By engaging and negotiating incestuous desire, Saleem ironically succeeds in securing his place within the family. The rejection and exile stemming from transgression solidify his position as a family member rather than banish him. In a Foucaultian sense, Saleem’s family is the locus of the interchange of sexuality and alliance. This interpenetration of the deployment of alliance and that of sexuality shows how Saleem’s discursive incestuous desire is produced and works. His unnamable desire is a strategy of seeking to gain social recognition and achieve a new identity rather than being subjected to the deterministic discourse of biological family. To appropriate Foucault’s words (1998: 108), Saleem interrogates “the law and juridical dimension in the deployment of sexuality,” rather than implementing “the economy of pleasure and intensity of sensations in the regime of alliance.”

Rushdie also appropriates Saleem's forbidden desire to challenge the boundaries of nation state and reinscribe postcolonial history. His incestuous desire for his mother and Auntie Pia in India, then his sister in Pakistan needs to be discussed against the backdrop of the tumultuous history of the Subcontinent which is divided after its independence from Britain. As Eldred (2005: 66) points out, "the sight of the 'gigantic Alfonso mango' reveals Saleem's mother as a sexual, physical object," but the anguish from this desire makes his nose-given telepathy disclose itself in ways that help him act to prevent his family from disintegrating. His incestuous desire for the aunt Pia makes him act to save her from the Indian cinema industry whose production system is dominated by men. His incestuous desire for his sister operates as a metaphor for growing anxiety about her complicity with Muslim fundamentalism in Pakistan. In view of Pakistan's aggressive assertion of its religious purity, Rushdie uses the transgressive idea of incest as a form of protest to purity rather than as a matter of sex itself. It is no coincidence that Saleem's incestuous desire for his sister arises after his family's move to Karachi in Pakistan, 'the Land of the Pure,' from Bombay<sup>51</sup> which represents multiplicity, pluralism, and hybridity. The critique of purity reaches a climax when he fucks the oldest (allegedly 512 years old), foulest-smelling ("[t]he richest spoor he, Saleem, had ever sniffed") whore in search of "profanity and lust" while his sister sings of "holiness and love-of-country" by hiding her body in front of crowds (Rushdie 1991: 364). Saleem's transgressive desire also enables him to symbolically save his sister from the master narrative of history by creating his own version of her fate. In a contrary narrative, he transforms her disappearance into an alternative history of escape, sanctuary, and survival in a convent.

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<sup>51</sup> Rushdie laments that Bombay, the inclusive and cosmopolitan city, is changed to a brutal, unforgiving, corrupt Mumbai where "money, as well as religion, was breaking all the shackles on its desires" (2006: 343-344).

In contrast, a female character like Arjumand Harappa in *Shame* whose transgressive desire challenges the taboos of kinship is not portrayed positively. Ahmad's criticism (1992: 144) of Rushdie is illuminating: "The frustration of erotic need, which drives some to frenzy and others to nullity, appears in every case to be the central fact of a woman's existence." After her love goes unrequited, Arjumand takes "the love she had intended to give Haroun and pour[s] it like a votive offering over her father instead" (Rushdie 1995: 172). Arjumand, once an ideal Muslim daughter, rejects the needs of her female body and makes it a repository of her father's memory to identify with him. Loathing her sex, she even masculinizes her looks: "She cuts her hair short, wore no cosmetics or perfume, dressed in her father's old shirts and the biggest trousers she could find, developed a stooped and slouching walk" (Rushdie 1995: 156). Her transformation suggests political pessimism: Even if women seize power from men things will not change for the better. Arjumand, nicknamed "Virgin Ironpants," takes revenge upon male enemies, but it turns out that she misappropriates the existing male power structure rather than refusing or transforming the practices on offer. By spurning or destroying men who seek relations with her, Arjumand is portrayed as demonic and monstrous, much like Sufiya. As Dayal (1998: 56) notes, such subversion of masculine power only shows that 'liberated' women "use power no more wisely than did the men in the patriarchal status quo ante."

Unlike Rushdie's discourse of incestuous desire, transgressive desire and 'perversion' materializes in Roy's novel in a concrete way. The twins' incest is real, not a punishable fantasy like Saleem's desire. Roy's portrayal of forbidden desire is not rendered in a gendered manner in favour of man. The twins' sexual transgression is quiet but a critical moment in the framework of the narrative in which they explore their prediscursive body and share a concrete experience. Rahel and Estha violate the law and push the limits of sanity and consciousness:

Only that there were tears. Only that Quietness and Emptiness fitted together like stacked spoons. Only that there was a snuffling in the hollows at the base of a lovely throat. Only that a hard honey-coloured shoulder had a semi-circle of teethmarks on it. Only that they held each other close, long after it was over. Only that what they shared that night was not happiness, but hideous grief. Only that once again they broke the Love Laws. That lay down who should be loved. And how. And how much. (Roy 1997: 328)

On the surface, it seems that Rahel offers her body as a solace for Estha's 'unspeakable' pain, to heal his psychic wounds. After divorcing her American husband, Rahel returns home to her soul twin Estha 23 years later in 1992, but the grown-up twins are separate beings. They are no longer like "a rare breed of Siamese twins, physically separate, but with joint identities" (Roy 1997: 2). But the narrative shows how the incest helps explore ways of reasserting togetherness and achieving unity in difference. The limit experience enables them to appropriate creative energies of alterity rather than indulging in victimhood as two alienated beings. The sibling incest achieves much more than simple healing or bond. Rather than a clichéd transgression or commodification as Ahmad (2006: 36) suggests, therefore, I argue that their incest is an enabling practice in space and time which interrogates, denaturalizes, and subverts the master discourse of history inscribed upon the body.

The present-day postcolonial reality is foregrounded as a formidable challenge to the twins' transformation into agents of change.<sup>52</sup> The image of decay, pollution and death is pervasive and even grotesque in the environment of their mother's hometown against the backdrop of the hegemonic order of neocolonial dominance:

...the banks of the river that smelled of shit, and pesticides bought with World Bank loans. Most of the fish had died. The ones that survived suffered from fin-rot and had broken out in boils... Past the new, freshly baked, iced, Gulf-money

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<sup>52</sup> According to Comfort (2008: 23), the novel's references to neoliberalism reflect the dramatic turn in Indian economic policy taken in 1991 when it started to aggressively implement a neoliberal agenda including trade liberalization, foreign investment, and reduction of workers' rights. India sought a loan from the IMF and agreed to adopt policies to boost its exports.

houses built by nurses, masons, wirebenders and bank clerks who worked hard and unhappily in faraway places. (Roy 1997: 13)

The Ayemenem House of the Ipe family is now decrepit and clotted with dirt, which symbolizes its decline and yield to pervasive American cultural imperialism and global capitalism. Baby Kochamma, the twins' grandaunt who is in charge of the house, worships her TV and satellite dish. The family pickle factory, the symbol of local capitalism, has been abandoned since Chacko, the sole male proprietor of the family assets, emigrated to Canada to run an antiques business. Only oppressors and tradition keepers like Baby Kochamma and Comrade Pillai are well ensconced in their territories. Against this ugly reality, the scene of incest has to be a ritual of mourning—born of “hideous grief” rather than “happiness”—especially in memory of the abject deaths of their mother and her lover two decades ago.

However, the twins' incest is a powerful metaphor for transgression and transformation whereby the marginalized and downtrodden can be empowered to subvert and reinscribe the symbolic order which punishes transgressors. They dare to instigate yet another punishment in order to subvert it, given that punishment such as their separation and the deaths of Ammu and Velutha proves to be enabling, not constraining. A palimpsest of transgressive desire in the novel illustrates the dynamics of repetition and difference: Transgression operates in a different manner within the recursive structure of law-defying desire. We can see that the problem with laws runs much deeper than it appears when the adult Rahel looks back to the past:

Perhaps, Ammu, Estha and she were the worst transgressors. But it wasn't just them. It was the others too. They all broke the rules. They all crossed into forbidden territory... It was a time when the unthinkable became thinkable and the impossible really happened. (Roy 1997: 31)

Eldred (2005: 72) argues that the twins follow a pattern of incestuous relations established by their uncle and grandmother. After Chacko saves his mother from his father's domestic violence

Mammachi “pack[s] her wifely luggage and commit[s] it to Chacko’s care” and Chacko becomes her man and her only love (Roy 1997: 168). Ammu’s “untamed, unsafe” corporeal desire (Roy 1997: 44) runs in the twins against the backdrop of the oppressive patriarchal space symbolized by the Ayemenem House. The family’s worry about perversion and madness—allegedly a genetic factor among Syrian Christians because of inbreeding—haunts them too. Besides, transgressive desire and madness assume wider dimensions of implication when they are invoked repeatedly in the trope of the long-dead Kari Saipu’s abode called the History House. Although it was part of a colonized rubber plantation<sup>53</sup>, the house was a sexually liberating space where the Englishman committed pederasty with an Indian boy and later Ammu and Velutha, a Paravan<sup>54</sup>, enjoyed their love tryst in violation of the caste law. However, these historical allusions are the conditions of possibility which call for the transformation of homogenized space and time to rearticulate the unspeakable misfortune of the marginalized.

The twins’ transgressive desire appears to follow the precedents outwardly, but it actually goes well beyond the established boundaries. The transformative process over the generations illustrates how Rahel and Estha, the new generation of postcolonial India, appropriate the brutality of history, “history lesson for future offenders” (Roy 1997: 336), to explore alternative modes of agency. They suffer, learn, and change in the run-up to their ‘revolt’ in the form of incest, which subverts and restructures the hegemonic order of space and time. The grown-up twins act on the lesson in a completely different manner, so that they can have more room to negotiate and contest disciplinary power than Kari Saipu, Ammu and Velutha did. In practice,

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<sup>53</sup> Susan Comfort (2008: 3-4) presents a brief overview of the history of imperialism in Kerala, the setting of the novel. The British annexed the coast of Malabar in 1792 after the Portuguese lost dominant power in 1662. With the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, the British’s exploitation became more intense. They began establishing coffee first then later rubber and tea plantations on a large scale. As a way of ruling, they relied on collaborators within Kerala including Syrian Christians who benefited from close contact with British missionaries.

<sup>54</sup> An Untouchable caste, usually of fishermen and tree-climbers. Velutha’s family are Paravans condemned to the status by heredity.



the twins are willing to go through the ordeal of alienation, silence<sup>55</sup>, invisibility, and complete othering in anticipation of the ultimate transgression. Among others, they defy the mapping of visibility or ocularcentric power. As Foucault (1991: 200) notes, visibility is a trap in the spatial distribution of panoptical surveillance. The twins' somber incest—Rahel takes the initiative in breaking 'Love Laws' like her mother—takes place in the "social invisibility" of the dilapidated family house (Bose 1998: 67). Whereas the relationships of Kari Saipu and an Indian boy, Ammu and Velutha were exposed to public scrutiny and violence, invisibility in the dark empowers the twins to escape the surveillance and gaze of the authority. While the squeamish Baby Kochamma falls asleep failing to fathom what Rahel is doing in Estha's room (formerly their mother's room), the twins secretly engage in forbidden sex in a powerful gesture toward inhabiting minimal space in a way that challenges the hegemonic order of traditionalism and creates an alternative discursive space. The sexual transgression produces the metaphoric effect of reasserting their place in the ancient family house in Ayemenem<sup>56</sup>. The possibility of the family house's symbolic transformation into an intersubjective place is set against the metaphor of a failed spatial practice in which a "sparrow" lies dead "like a joke" on the back seat of the obsolete family car as it fails to find its way out after it got in through a hole in the windscreen (Roy 1997: 296).

Temporally, the twins appear to be trapped in the tragic, ruptured past—"metonymically signaled by the motif of [Rahel]'s watch stopped at 1:50 lost at the site where they watched Velutha die" (Friedman 2005: 251). The painted time on Rahel's toy wristwatch might be a

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<sup>55</sup> The strategy and tactic of silence and invisibility are elaborated on in Chapter III with regard to Estha who has been traumatized into silence and refuses to be noticed by society. His silence and invisibility are reinterpreted as everyday practice in a minimal space within the family house.

<sup>56</sup> Roy attended an informal school run by her mother, Mary Roy, in her formative years in a quiet, sleepy village near Kottayam in Kerala. Roy takes the liberty to change the village's name from Aymanam to Ayemenem for the novel (Dhawan 1999: 14).

metaphor for the safety of childhood—arguably a timeless, unchanging period in memory. It is one of the accessories she wears to meet her English relatives at the airport. However, the safety of stoppage turns into tragedy after the little twins watch the police remove “frenzy,” “anarchy,” and “hysteria” in the name of “economy,” “efficiency,” and “responsibility” for the sake of “inoculating a community” (Roy 1997: 309). Since then, the faulty record of time on the back verandah of the Englishman’s colonial bungalow symbolizes not just the trauma of childhood but the caesura of postcolonial space and time whose history waits to be rewritten or reinscribed with a new meaning. The twins’ travails show that they are exiled in “despotic time,” or what Althusser calls “space without places, time without duration” (Bhabha 2004: 353). The beginning of a new history—the genuine signpost of progress or improvement in the postcolonial context—is held in abeyance until the twins appropriate the time lag to interrogate the ugly reality of the present dominated by “history’s henchmen,” as well as to restore ties to the past by uncovering subjugated or buried histories. As Baby Kochamma worries since Rahel’s return, the twins succeed in stealing “their present back,” making “the past creep up on her” (Roy 1997: 29). This return of agency raises the possibility of not merely healing the wounds from the traumatic past but also forging a new beginning in the here and now in a counter-hegemonic manner.

It seems that Rahel’s hope as a child “to own a watch on which she could change the time whenever she wanted to” (Roy 1997: 37) materializes in the form of sexual transgression. The act of incest produces the effect of transforming boundary markers of space and time, opening up a negotiatory space for the return of agency. The intertwined, nonlinear narrative structure plays an important role in the run-up to and after the climax. As the critical moment of incest approaches and passes, the missing pieces are supplied and fall into place. The novel whose narrative chronology is repeatedly interrupted and intermingled ends in the past on a hopeful

note promising “*Tomorrow*,” leaving readers wondering what will happen next. Just because readers will not be privy to future happenings does not mean that there is no possibility of completion or satisfaction. To appropriate Butler’s words (2004: 157), the “effect” of transgression and non-happening can tell us more than insisting on “verifying the truth” of what will happen afterward. In view of the dialogic narrative structure, the twins’ incest and the return of Ammu and Velutha raise the prospect of an alternative history which is strategically grounded in the past and yet defies the ‘timeless sameness’ of the present. The fact that the novel’s narrative is open-ended and undetermined instead of moving toward a decisive closure suggests that there is no natural teleology of the story. However, it is not a simple repetition of fragility or pessimism. The excavation and recovery of Ammu and Velutha from the buried history suggests the possibility of resistance and transformation that are not overrun by the consequences of the past.

As Comfort (2008: 22) argues, “the novel’s ending has the effect of a mobius strip that doubles back on itself, and so it is difficult to make final pronouncements about struggles of resistance.” But I argue that the reiteration of Ammu’s sex with Velutha at the end of the novel is not a simple return to the past, rather it should be seen as the possibility of a new beginning to uphold the radicality of resistance and agency which could materialize from the twins’ incest. Among other things, the subversion of the linear division of the past and the present raises the possibility of exploring what Spivak (1988: 291) describes as “social realities within the critique of imperialism” without succumbing to “a nostalgia for lost origins.” Although Spivak accuses Foucault of being unable to stand outside the Eurocentric hegemonic system of exploitation, a Foucaultian genealogical method is useful to understand how the dynamic agency of transformation emerges and returns in a strategic manner. A succession of sexual transgressions

is rediscovered and assumes significance in the historical context mainly because similar events and details produce different results that accompany a new point of beginning. The doubleness of similarity and difference provides an opportunity for the twins to subvert the ugly present for a better future without being subordinated to the past. Therefore, the return of the past accompanied with the promise of *Tomorrow* is not a mere sign of hope or “enforced optimism” (Roy 1997: 19). The return of the past which can project into a future open to transformation is the metaphoric effect of a long-running counter-hegemonic process of transforming a politics of personal desire into an alternative mode of political agency.

The twins’ incest and the return of Ammu and Velutha’s sex show how subjugated histories can be recuperated. Haunted by the memories of the hegemonic history of violence and cruelty, the twins make desperate efforts to make the reconnection with the past and reinscribe history for a better future. A striking contrast in the disposal of the dead body illustrates the way in which unmentionable histories are buried or removed. Unlike the official newspaper version of Sophie’s death and her elaborate funeral, the unjust deaths of Velutha and Ammu are simply ignored. Velutha’s body is unceremoniously dumped “in the *themmady kuzhy*—the pauper’s pit—where the police routinely dump their dead (Roy 1997: 321). The church refuses to bury Ammu, so her body is carried carelessly to be cremated in a crematorium where “only beggars, derelicts and the police-custody dead” are cremated (Roy 1997: 162). In this situation, transgression helps uncover buried histories by shifting and disrupting the discursive domain. The excavation of these buried histories serves to invoke memories of childhood and their mother, which are transient but strategically useful links to points of origin and departure. To borrow Bhabha’s words (2004: 10), such transgression “renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent ‘in-between’ space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present.”

Therefore, Ammu's return at the end of the novel demonstrates that to backtrack in order to move forward is a viable strategy for problematizing and revising the hegemonic idea of the sequential, teleological progress of history.

Last but not least, the repetition and difference of sexual transgression serves as a reminder of what should be done strategically in the *here and now* to prevent the Sisyphean repetition of subjects' undoing or slippage, so that sexual perpetrators will not be left behind, "spinning in the dark, with no moorings, in a place with no foundation" (Roy 1997: 192). The last scene illustrates that the violation of the master discourse of history raises the political possibility of rescuing Ammu and her Dalit lover from the official history of brutal violence and the symbolic order imposed by 'history's henchmen' like Baby Kochamma, Comrade Pillai, and the police. Given that going backward in time can set off a march of progress in the novel's ending, the value of progress is subject to the postcolonial translation. The subversion of the three-dimensional linear line between the past, present and future has the effect of upsetting the boundaries between the possible and the impossible, so the parameters of logical links, causes and effects are pushed to the limits. This transgression of official history—the inversion of the normal unfolding of time—enables the past to ring out anew in the present. The past is a reshaping force upon the present, but it is not a deterministic progress for conclusion. The novel demonstrates that history is an interrupted contingent progress for departure, calling into question the order of things or what Nietzsche (1996: 8) calls the value of our 'values.'

### **Pederasty**

The sexual other is constructed by systematically distinguishing what is 'normal' and 'aberrant' in sexuality. As Foucault (1998: 37) notes, the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries have been the

age of both multiple implantation of “perversions” and initiation of “sexual heterogeneities.” The growth of perversions is the product of the encroachment of a type of power on bodies and their pleasures. Although he does not address such issues in the context of colonization or race, Foucault (2002: 356) makes it clear that the construction of the other, or the “unthought” as he terms it, was a process that was instituted simultaneously with the inquiry of the self in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. If we put his Eurocentric perspective in the context of the Third World, it might be possible to contend that the constitution of sexual identity and discourse was influenced by the power and knowledge of colonialism, and so the discursive construction of sexuality or homosexual identity is closely allied to the colonial project. As Chari (1994: 41) argues, the constitution of the discourse of sexuality and of the homosexual other is similar to the strategies of the colonial power and to the construction of the other in colonial discourse.

It is true that the sexually normalizing processes of colonialism have had an impact upon the constitution of sexually marginalized people as others in India. For example, the infamous section 377 of the Indian penal code had been used to outlaw and criminalize homosexuality “against the order of nature” since its introduction in 1860 during the British colonial period (Boyce 2008: 116). The law<sup>57</sup> punishing the crime against nature—which arrived in the 19<sup>th</sup> century together with colonialism and Victorian-era Christian values—denies internal dynamic or capacity, exerting social pressures to conform to a rigid standard of ‘normality.’ Textual examples show that normality is an important virtue, and those who step out of it are oppressed so they have little space to articulate their desire except on the fringes. The oppressive social

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<sup>57</sup> On July 2 in 2009, the section was read down to decriminalize same-sex intercourse among consenting adults in a judgment by the High Court of Delhi (BBC 2009). Gay rights activists hail the overturning of the colonial-era ban as a major victory in their fight for equal rights in India. But social and religious groups appealed the decision to the Supreme Court in early 2012. According to *Newsweek* (3 December 2012), although there are no official estimates of how many of India’s 1.2 billion people are gay or lesbian, the Humsafar Trust, an NGO promoting lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) rights, puts the number at more than 70 million.

conditions deny their existence and alienate them as sexual others in postcolonial Indian society as the circuits of power are concentrated in heteronormative hands. In *Such a Long Journey*, Mistry portrays how homosexuality and homosexual subcultures are frowned upon. When Gustad travels on the train to Delhi to meet Bilimoria, he shares a compartment with a young bachelor who is going to meet his future wife for an arranged marriage out of duty to his parents. For him, gender acting in line with heterosexual norms is what Butler (1991: 24) calls a “compulsory performance,” in the sense that transgression brings about “ostracism, punishment, and violence.” Such a dynamic is portrayed in a hilarious way. In exchange for his upper deck seat, the anonymous man attempts to fondle Gustad’s genitals while he is asleep, only to get a punch in the eye. Although he pities the man’s closeted homosexual identity, Gustad, a patriarchal husband and father, epitomizes the prevailing societal view of homosexuality as deviant and punishable. His internalized view of the social norm or heteronormativity which compels sexual others to hide their identities contrasts with his acceptance of Tehmul’s deviant sexuality which serves to reveal the sham of normality and subvert it.

The appropriation of the concept of queerness as an analytical tool helps explore how the boundaries between homosex and heterosex are transgressed and blurred, and homosexual and other kinds of relations are negotiated in various ways in postcolonial texts. As Dayal (2001: 305) suggests, “queerness” entails a “displacement of colonial, heteronormative, or otherwise hegemonic stratifications.” In *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, Mull Standish, a transnational pirate music producer, impugns the gay-straight dichotomy as he sees a “vision of sublimity through that slash in the iron curtain between heterosex and homosex...” (Rushdie 2000: 261). His transgression of the sexual boundaries fits Gayatri Gopinath’s critical framework (2005: 11), which “enables a simultaneous critique of heterosexuality and the nation form while exploding

the binary oppositions between nation and diaspora, heterosexuality and homosexuality, original and copy.” This framework draws on the analogous relation between nation and diaspora on the one hand, and between heterosexuality and homosexuality on the other. In other words, homosexuality is to heterosexuality what diaspora is to nation. For Standish, homosexuality is not a fixed form of identity but a method which interrogates, crosses, or disrupts normative categories, labels, boundaries, or identities. This strategic utility of sexual identity raises the possibility of resistance and transformation because it enhances his agency or capacity for self-reflexivity within and across the border.

The example of Standish shows that, as Butler (1993: 21) notes, the assertion of “queerness” can be used to re-signify the abjection of sexual others into “defiance and legitimacy” rather than being desublimated or degraded. However, the celebration of queerness as an analytical framework does not work in Roy’s postcolonial text. The English pederast, Kari Saipu, goes down in history as a pervert and deviant other. The hegemonic discourse of sexuality dismisses and silences the Englishman, labeling him as contaminating, repulsive, or dirty. His sexual desire for a young native boy is a crime, nothing but a type of degeneracy or degradation which needs sanitizing or eliminating. Against this background, I explore how pederasty<sup>58</sup> in *The God of Small Things* illustrates the extent and the limitation of sexual transgression as a mode of agency in postcolonial India. The fact that Kari Saipu’s desire is dismissed as completely unacceptable reflects society’s fear of letting those that they call abnormal or mad live among them. The binary contrast between sexual adult and asexual child comes into sharp focus in the postcolonial context given that the former is a colonial English pedophile, the latter a little Indian boy. However, the exploration of marginalized histories in the novel shows why Kari Saipu

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<sup>58</sup> Pederasty, which usually involves sexual relations between a man and a younger boy, refers to “a form of homosexuality involving a differential of age, power, and experience in which... the elder partner is the more dominant and more ‘masculine’ sexual penetrator” (Amin 2009: 21).



should not be disregarded simply as an abusive child molester like a theater vendor who sexually assaults the seven-year-old Estha. Given that Kari Saipu's sexual transgression is a precursor to that of Ammu and Velutha, then of the twins in the narrative structure, it should be understood in a multifaceted manner, differently from the vendor's sexual exploitation.

First of all, the Englishman's pederastic desire sheds light on the workings of imperial power and knowledge. It operates metaphorically to suggest that colonial power has a close connection with sexual desire, that is, the dynamics of a perverse form of power relations between the colonized and the colonizer. India might have been a place of European sexual fantasy where Kari Saipu could look for what Said (1979: 190) calls "a different type of sexuality" or "sexual experience unobtainable in Europe." The other side of the river where Kari Saipu's colonial bungalow is located is an abandoned rubber plantation controlled by the Englishman during the colonial period, called the Heart of Darkness, which is the pun of the title of Joseph Conrad's famous novella. The colony where the Englishman known as "Ayemenem's own Kurtz" commits pederasty with an unnamed Indian boy might be "a site of European pornographic fantasies, emphasizing the sexual license, perversions, and gynecological anomalies of the Orient" (Chari 1994: 45). However, the Heart of Darkness is no longer a colonial utopia of sexual fantasy or practice after Britain loses India. In this context Kari Saipu's continued presence as a nativized Englishman in post-independence India is anachronistic. His homosexual affairs defying social customs are discovered, condemned, and demonized. After his young lover's parents take the boy away then send him to school, the pederast takes his own life by shooting himself through the head in 1959.

Kari Saipu, the Englishman's nickname, literally means 'Black Sahib' in the native Malayalam language. The moniker is a signifier of cultural impurity and exclusion, not a term of

endearment for his skin colour.<sup>59</sup> To appropriate Fanon's idea (2008: 178), Kari Saipu illustrates that the "white" man's destiny is subverted into that of "black" man. In this regard, he can be called a 'subverted white,' the opposite of those who remain Anglophiles in postcolonial India. The process shows how the colonizer is reversed into a "misfit—a grotesque mimicry or 'doubling' that threatens to split the soul and whole, undifferentiated skin of the ego" (Bhabha 2004: 107). Mimicry does not work for him as a tool of eluding control and power in a former colony. His tragic end suggests that mimicry turns out to be a fatal mistake. He fails to keep a British identity as he embraces native culture and falls in love with a native boy. Going native by speaking the local language and wearing native clothes undermines his power as a white European. From the inverted viewpoint of Fanon's concept of identity in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Kari Saipu's ontology as the 'black-masked white body' reflects the abortive encounter of Britain and India.

It is interesting to examine how colonial virtues and values of whiteness and progress are reframed and inverted in the postcolonial setting. It is apparent that the formerly colonized make efforts to undo the inscription of colonial power on their body as well as regulate degenerate types on the basis of sexuality and race. When Velutha, the pariah man, is found to have transgressed the taboos the police view him as a "sexual, transgender deviant, an 'AC-DC,' to reinforce gender and caste subordination" (Comfort 2008: 11). Kari Saipu is subjected to the anti-colonial system of discipline and governance. The discourse of child protection as seen in the rescue of an Indian boy from a supposed sexual predator shows how children, the future of the Third World, are desexualized and their innocence<sup>60</sup> is privileged in relation to adult sexuality in an increasingly disciplinary postcolonial society. In this situation the crime of

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<sup>59</sup> In a similar vein, the ultimate subaltern Velutha's name ironically means 'white' in Malayalam because the pariah man is so black.

<sup>60</sup> The discourse of child sexuality and innocence is discussed in detail in Chapter III.

pederasty subjects Kari Saipu to abjection, posing a menace to his existence in a former colony. His subject position as a marginalized outsider shows how contingent is the assumption of the West as ideal and original, which is subverted as Kari Saipu is reduced to a sexual, racial other. The Englishman does not embody universal human values and hegemonic European refinement. Rather, the racialization and sexualization have the effect of stigmatizing him as a ‘valueless poor white monster’ in contrast with what Chari (2001: 283) calls “the powerful, manly, and virile Englishman” in a colony. Kari Saipu’s downfall suggests that postcolonials are likely to make the mistake of reproducing the essentialist rhetoric of colonial discourse to exclude cultural others, which verges on reverse colonization. The challenge suggested here is how the formerly colonized can establish a system of systems of administration without being appropriated by an essentialist discourse.

In view of the workings of the discourse of domination, Kari Saipu’s suicide cannot be simply viewed as the corollary of his loss of identity as a white European, out of touch with his own world. The problem is that he has never been able to defend himself over what has been an attack on his race and sexuality. He never gets a chance to talk about his abjection as a sexual and racial other. To borrow Bhabha’s words (2004: 91), the English pederast is not granted an opportunity of articulating his “difference” or arguing for living “Other-wise” in a former colony. The total absence of his representation renders Kari Saipu more monstrous, evil, and perverse than deserved. Following his suicide, his cook and secretary engage in a lengthy legal battle over his colonial estate whose process of changing hands pays no attention to the history of his life. His derelict house’s subsequent annexation into a luxury hotel does not only symbolize the extension of a capitalist imperialist economy, but the expurgation of impurity or perversion. Although Roy’s Kari Saipu and Conrad’s Kurtz are both Europeans who go native, the former is

not lucky enough to have a fellow European like Marlow who attempts to fathom what kind of life he had lived and how much he had suffered, not to mention that he is never granted a chance to utter runes like “The horror! The horror!” before his death. Nor does Kari Saipu have a native sympathizer or follower like Baby Kochamma who adores Father Mulligan—an Irish-Jesuit priest who comes to India to prove the superiority of his religion only to convert to Hinduism later in his life—even after his death. So, Kari Saipu’s presence as a sexual and racial other in a former colony is analogous to living in a darkness within the Heart of Darkness. His doubly marginalized situation is forlorn and helpless. In this context, his loss of an Indian boy lover must be more unnerving than Kurtz’s separation from a native African woman. Moreover, the execrable accusations of moral degradation are directed at the abject white ‘Black Sahib’ in the postcolonial setting whereas the lies and hypocrisy of the European civilization conspire to gloss over the carnal perverse desire of Kurtz in the colonial context.

Against this backdrop, Kari Saipu’s return as an abject ghost is a crucial trope to suggest that mimicry and hybridity do not completely deprive him of the capacity for resistance. His ghostly presence—who sits stuck to a rubber tree and begs for cigars and lusts for an Indian boy (Roy 1997: 199)—can be easily seen as the haunting of India’s colonial past upon its present. Although it seems to have ended, colonial history haunts postcolonials as if it were living dead or dead alive. A Chari (2001: 279) argues, the pederast’s return might be an analogy to how colonial desire for natives still underwrites a new form of colonialism in spite of postcolonial resistance. However, I argue that his return as a ghost is not merely a metaphor for continued colonialism or colonial desire which haunts Ayemenem to “collect its dues” (Roy 1997: 199). Nor does it reawaken the specter of imperial discourse as part of efforts to recolonize natives. Rather, my argument is that Kari Saipu’s hovering around should be regarded as a clamour for

an alternative discursive space for the marginalized like sexual outlaws. Vellya Paapen, Velutha's father, allegedly put an end to the wanderings of Kari Saipu's ghost with his sickle, but the pedophile ghost's whereabouts remain a mystery. The metaphor of transgressive desire still at large portends a mode of agency in the vicissitudes of sexual transgression in the narrative structure. Indeed, his ghost haunts "future offenders" who commit sexual transgression in a different manner over the generations in defiance of the authority, opening the way for the return of agency.

So I pay attention to how the history of mimicry repeats itself, but in a different manner. The narrative structure shows that Kari Saipu's downfall serves as "history lesson" which sexual transgressors such as Ammu, Velutha, and the twins appropriate in a selective manner. As discussed earlier, Kari Saipu's obsession with native culture and people is a degenerative version of the power of mimicry and hybridity. But Kari Saipu's ghostly return reveals that there are still fissures in the dominant discourse of history, raising the prospect of counter-discourse in terms of resistance and transformative agency.<sup>61</sup> Unlike the abortiveness of Kari Saipu's mimicry, the peripheral postcolonials' transgressive practices illustrate that mimicry is not only constraining and disempowering but also empowering and enabling for them. They challenge not just the hegemonic construction of sexuality but the local tyranny of patriarchy, caste, ideology, and religion. The miserable deaths of Kari Saipu, Velutha, and Ammu—which haunt the novel—provide the twins with a valuable lesson: Transgression requires strategy and tactic for a better mode of resistance and transformation. This atavistic lesson drives the twins to appropriate the legacy in a more secretive and radical way to denaturalize and subvert the normative boundaries of society. The twins rework history's abortive transgression into a viable one in ways that they

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<sup>61</sup> The history lesson of Kari Saipu can be found in Bhabha's argument (2004: 153): "the colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference."

can explore a third, complementary space and time. Such appropriation of agency resident in the recursive structure helps them to interrogate and resist the way in which they are reduced to interpellated subjects or docile bodies within a given social space. Returning to and reinscribing the past with the help of the limit experience of incest raises the prospect that the twins achieve unity in difference and open up a new beginning.

The History House is a setting where a series of sexual transgressions happen. Kari Saipu's colonial bungalow used to be a secretive hybrid place where categorical barriers such as sexuality, race, class, and caste disappeared. The English pederast made love and committed suicide there after losing his boy lover. It was the colonial house's back verandah where Velutha made love to Ammu in secret and later suffered the brutal violence of the police while the twins watched. Such concrete human experiences over a long period of time which are subject to different interpretations serve to destabilize the assured historical truth sanctified by essentialist discourse. However, people no longer remember what happened in the History House. Ammu and Velutha's sex and death remain only a "whiff of scandal" (Roy 1997: 129). And people are oblivious to the story of Kari Saipu's pederasty and suicide. With regard to the conditions of alienation and oblivion, Chacko might be right to say: "...we can't go in because we've been locked out. And when we look in through the windows, all we see are shadows" (Roy 1997: 53).

Furthermore, a five-star hotel chain purchases the Heart of Darkness where Kari Saipu's bungalow is located and develops the abandoned rubber plantation into a tourist resort where local history degenerates into a farce called 'toy history' in the age of global capitalism. The History House and the ancestral home of EMS Namboodiripad<sup>62</sup> known as Kerala's Mao are

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<sup>62</sup> Although Roy says, "The Hotel People liked to tell their guests...", Aijaz Ahmad (2006: 34) criticizes her for making a factual error, saying that Namboodiripad's ancestral home does not exist anywhere near Kottayam or that it has been turned into a tourist hotel. Namboodiripad is the most important Communist leader in post-independence Kerala. In 1957, he became the Chief Minister of the first democratically elected Communist government in India

now part and parcel of a sprawling hotel called Heritage where “Kurtz and Karl Marx join palms to greet rich tourists” history and literature have been “enlisted by commerce” (Roy 1997: 126). The literary and historical figures are the subject of commercialized modern history, and former communists work as porters wearing exotic ethnic clothes. Roy satirically describes this kind of comprador relations with capitalistic power as it represents “the intermingling of Europe and non-Europe in a context already determined by advanced capital in the aftermath of colonialism” (Ahmad 1995: 17). As shown in the truncated and translated traditional Kathakali dancing performances aimed at pandering to tourist tastes, local culture succumbs to the spread of global capitalism and neocolonialism: “So ancient stories were collapsed and amputated. Six-hour classics were slashed to twenty-minute cameos” (Roy 1997: 127). The spatial transformation of the colonial rubber plantation into the tourist complex is a powerful metaphor for “the structures of European imperialism and American economic and cultural hegemony that link Kerala—by extension—all of India with the West in the 20<sup>th</sup> century” (Friedman 2005: 253). The bungalow’s integration into a vital part of the luxury hotel with a towering view symbolizes the growing influence of global colonial expansion. As the epicentre of recolonized territory, the Heart of Darkness whose physical boundaries are refurbished and reinforced epitomizes a reinvented form of colonialism to affect the lives of people on the periphery. The back verandah of the History House where cross-caste transgression had taken place is enclosed and converted into the hotel kitchen. It is no longer accessible from the river which Velutha had swum across for a romantic tryst, and it is screened off from the slum by a tall wall. In this situation, postcolonials are destined to be like the level-crossing lunatic Murlidharan whom the little twins see on the

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and was re-elected in 1967.

way to the movie theater. The homeless veteran of the Indian National Army has no doors to lock but has old keys tied carefully around his waist.

However, there are still possibilities of uncovering smaller, insignificant versions of history which are buried or subjugated in the tourist resort. As the Anglophile Chacko inadvertently implies, the History House's doors are locked but its windows are still open. The "shadows" seen through the open windows suggest how cracks or fissures in the dominant system can be appropriated to reflect the world, albeit not in a perfect way. For example, the impoverished kathakali dancers who are patriarchal wife beaters are engaged in counter-hegemonic practice. Although they turn to tourism to eke out a living, they perform in a temple "to jettison their humiliation in the Heart of Darkness" and "to apologize for corrupting their stories" (Roy 1997: 229). The practice of self during low season is a way of countering sanitized, commercialized 'toy histories' for rich tourists to play with at the hotel, a playground for neocolonialism, where Kerala's Communist history merges with colonial pederastic history. Besides, the counterintuitive understanding of pollution can illustrate the possibility of transgressing the borders of the enclosure which marks the certainty of omnipresent global capital and neocolonialism. The grandiose hotel commands a magnificent view, but the river surrounding the building is polluted and filthy because of environmental destruction stemming from failed World Bank policy and agricultural exploitation:

The History House (where map-breath'd ancestors with tough toe-nails once whispered) could no longer be approached from the river. It has turned its back on Ayemenem. The hotel guests were ferried across the backwaters, straight from Cochin. (Roy 1997: 125)

Although the Heart of Darkness has a tightly-sealed capitalistic structure after undergoing a drastic change, the malodour of the fetid river suggests that its borders are still porous and violable. The stench encroaches upon the territory while the smell of hotel food wafts from the



kitchen. Despite the metaphor of despair in damaged nature, the olfactory offence shows that the powers that be have failed to take care of nature, implying the social and political crisis of hegemony with little future prospect. Here, the porous boundary can be construed as suggesting the prospect of alternative forms of knowledge and power that can survive on the margins of capitalist imperialism. The fact that the tourist structure is vulnerable and “not immune to appropriation and adaption by [locals] for their own benefit” (Ashcroft 2001: 209) means that it is still possible to transform it into a better structure in harmony with nature.

My argument is that interpolation or the use of such marginalized elements as cracks, impurity, pollution, or filthiness can serve as a strategy of overcoming ugly postcolonial reality and leading to praxis, a small but meaningful step toward change. (Mind that even Kari Saipu’s condemnable pederasty can be appropriated to explain the counter-discursive power of recursive transgressive desire.) Therefore, we should not discount the possibility that the History House, albeit now part of a global tourist industry, can transform back into a liminal, minimal space where closeted and silenced subjects can revel in liberatory moments from the governing discourse or ideology. I regard the continuing fight for the territory of the Heart of Darkness as a symbolic effort to refuse to be mapped out or defined by the master narrative of history. It makes us think what should be done to repossess or reterritorialize the colonial space now occupied by neocolonial commercialism and rich tourists. The twins’ subversive spatial practice in the family house hints at the possibility of turning a neocolonial structure like the History House back into an alternative space where buried histories and hidden spaces can be uncovered and reinscribed. The Ayemenem House of the Ipe family starts to become a reinvented place of history in our eyes since we know that the twins transform the place into a space where transgressive practice challenges hegemonic stratifications and laws. Such possibility of reterritorialization suggests

that a reclaimed house of history could be different from the previous versions of the History House—the colonized territory by Kari Saipu, the imaginary house that Chacko uses as a metaphor for the family's, and India's, history, and the luxury hotel boasting of toy histories. The twins' symbolic effort to restart the stopped time of postcolonial history raises the possibility of history's new beginning in a better time and space rather than a mere search for origins, so that the meaning of the Heart of Darkness can be reversed and rewritten in favour of the silenced and marginalized.

In this chapter, I have tried to reinterpret the abjection and deviant practices of individual characters who are prone to be dismissed or subjugated as 'perverts' in postcolonial contexts. Such perverse acts as incest, agalmatophilia, and post-sex violence are not simply morally condemnable, given that transgression enables them to challenge and subvert such structural constraints as language, institutional violence, and (neo)colonialism in a strategic manner. The cases corroborate Roy's argument (1997: 231): "In [their] abject defeat lies [their] supreme triumph." The counter-hegemonic transformative process suggests that real monsters or perverts in postcolonial society are the keepers and abusers of those structures like Baby Kochamma, Comrade Pillai, Nusswan, Omar, the police, and dictators. Here, the dichotomies of oppressor and victim, purity and impurity are questioned and inverted in social, cultural and political contexts, especially as peripheral and marginalized characters seek recognition, justice, recovery, and a new beginning.

As for subaltern others like Tehmul and Sufiya, sex is not just a physical act but an important marker for social recognition. They have no choice but to commit unspeakable sexual acts to be validated as human beings. To differentiate a level of abjection and attendant resistance, I explored the concept of subjectivation in accordance with the extent of acquired

freedom: Sufiya's *desubjectivation* from the structure and Tehmul's *resubjectivation* within the structure. Sufiya's violence and critical deconstruction offer subversive potentials in the face of the unethical authorities. In spite of the lack of ethical reconstruction, her radical strategic response to adversities opens up a possibility of a completely new order. Since perversion is not exclusively sexual, the chapter focused on the dynamics of violence, criminality, and counter-discourse. Such transgressive practices as theft, storytelling, and mockery help produce the capacity to countervail the norms imposed upon them. Tehmul's theft of Roshan's doll and Sufiya's killings of men empower them to transform the abjection into a mode of agency. Saleem's power of counter-discursive storytelling enables him to overcome the state of castration and impotence, which are the wounds of state violence upon him, and the beggars' carnivalesque exposure of grotesque body mocks and even subverts the legitimate power of the police. These examples show that corporeality and discursivity are not exclusive of each other so they work together to transform the hegemonic structure. The tension and interstice between discursivity and materiality produce a variety of modes in which transgression enables them to exploit the dominant discourse to their advantage. In this framework, I analyzed how Saleem's incestuous desire is different from the act of the twins' incest although they both produce modes of agency to countervail discursive formations.

The chapter also addressed the efficacy of strategic essentialism aimed at changing the system or ending the repetition of oppression. Sufiya's enabling violence is powerful and useful as a strategy to topple the oppressive system and create a new order. The problem is that her unlimited power can be appropriated for yet another discourse of domination against men. Although Tehmul's complicity with Gustad seems problematic, the latter's ethic of care provides an answer to what the relationship between the authorities and the weaker party should be like.

Their dialogic relationship does not bring about a drastic change like Sufiya's unforgiving violence, but it suggests that such ethical practice as empathy and compassion can help open the way for subaltern others to make their way to the centre from the margins and become subjects of their history and experience. The threshold of transgression condoned by just authorities can help transform the hierarchical structure into a horizontal one where the strong and the weak can have symbiotic relations. In a wider context, human ethics as a guide for sensible conduct rather than a hegemonic moral code suggests ways of improving power relations in postcolonial society. The Beggarmaster's perverse power relations and his grotesque death illustrate the possibilities and limits of human conduct.

The highlight of this chapter is the probe into the ways in which the dynamics of transgression shape up to be a structure of experience in a circular and relational manner. A Foucaultian genealogical analysis shows that a series of sexual transgressions committed by Kari Saipu, Ammu, Velutha, and the twins over the generations interrogate the essentialist hegemonic discourse, raising the need to rewrite the past, subvert the problem-ridden present and open up a possibility for a better future. The impulse of forbidden love brings together a colonial pederast, caste violators, and incestuous siblings in the recursive narrative structure. (Such a succession of transgressions which also happen in the form of death on the railway in Chapter III is haphazardly circular, destabilizing the legitimacy and truth solidified and maintained by hegemonic power.) Learning the 'history lesson' that the price for transgression can be miserable death, the twins try to transform space and time in a different way for the sake of making a new beginning rather than seeking a mere return to the past. Their strategic use of mimicry ultimately inverts Chacko's colonized view of history that "They [are] a family of Anglophiles. Pointed in the wrong direction, trapped outside their own history, and unable to retrace their steps because

their footprints had been swept away” (Roy 1997: 52). It was important to examine the transgressive practices of Kari Saipu’s pederasty and the twins’ incest because it shows that efforts to tell the story of small forgotten things in their own words will go on over a period of time as long as there is a possibility of retracing and retrieving the footprints of the abominable marginalized. The repetition and difference of transgression is a dialogic, open-ended process to retrieve the voice of the silenced and marginalized. I will discuss how transgression works in a strategic manner to enable female characters to cope with barriers and constraints in Chapter II.

## Chapter II – Women and Subversions

The portrayal of female characters is an important issue in postcolonial literary criticism. In a reflection of the norms of postcolonial society, the texts of Mistry, Roy, and Rushdie show male-dominated perspectives, limited roles for women, and even misogyny. Some of their female characters seem pliant and ready to fulfill what is expected of them in the familial and social realms, and this compliance perpetuates a structure where they are socialized to take subject positions that accept traditional responsibilities and burdens as fixed beings or passive ciphers. In particular, Mistry often comes under fire for portraying female characters as if they are objects or chattel to be possessed or dominated. In *Such a Long Journey*, Mistry's protagonist displays a typical patriarchal attitude and perspective. All Gustad hopes for his little daughter is that she grows up, gets married, and has children. Roshan falls behind even Tehmul, the crippled idiot, in a hierarchy. When she protests against Tehmul's fondling of her bride doll, Gustad chides her, establishing the primacy of the male urge and patriarchal values (Mistry 1992: 89). Female rights are marked as lower than male needs. When Gustad later discovers that Tehmul has stolen the doll and repeatedly masturbated on it, he even allows the perpetrator to keep the doll since "the loss to Roshan would not be as great as it would to Tehmul" (Mistry 1992: 303). An object of sympathy from adults, Roshan's scope of action, limited by her illness, represents her situation which is analogous to an immobile doll whose eyes shut as it lies down. As Ekelund (1995: 10) argues, her doll seems to make a more significant contribution to the development of the plot given that Tehmul's deviant sex with the doll creates a critical moment of transformation in Gustad's perception of subaltern others.

Roy's characters are not immune from such criticism. Many of her male characters inflict domestic violence. It is impossible to detect any transformative agency in the local communist

leader's wife Kalyani who is willing to take his sweat-soaked shirt and hold it "as though it was a gift. A bouquet of flowers" (Roy 1997: 272). The fact that his wife is musically talented and runs a factory does not sit well with Pappachi who beats her every night with a brass vase. Husbands beat or abuse their wives whether they are traditional patriarchs like Pappachi and Comrade Pillai or frustrated breadwinners like Ammu's drunkard husband Baba and Kathakali dancers. However, the authors do not represent the minority situation of women as entirely one of victimization or lack of agency. Rather, it is presented as a challenge to be tackled. Some of their female characters are as strong or stronger than their male counterparts. Although they appear to be limited or defined by their relationships to their male counterparts, they actually interrogate, resist, or subvert the interpellation of the laws or the hegemonic discourse in a personalized, selective manner. In this chapter, I scrutinize various modes in which female characters transform the abjection into modes of agency, so that they can overcome the limiting circumstances and the stereotypes surrounding their duties and roles as daughters, sisters, single women, wives, mothers, or widows. The textual examples I examine show how the sexed or gendered codes of feminine passivity are called into question and even reversed in a transgressive way. In the process, the female body no longer remains docile, feminine, or object as a site of domesticity, sexual reproduction, patriarchy, colonial or nationalist discourse.

First of all, I appropriate Chandra Talpade Mohanty's theory to problematize the limiting critical framework of hegemonic ideology or discourse like Western feminism or egalitarianism. Placing women within a one-size-fits-all theory is what Mohanty fears because it produces a singular "third world woman" that needs "the authorizing signature of Western humanist discourse" (2003: 53). Margaret's juxtaposition against local women in *The God of Small Things* illuminates the danger of positing a singular woman as opposed to various women in the Indian

context. The contrast raises the need to have multiple views of women and overcome the limits to hegemonic modes of judging them by a deterministic binary logic. The British woman is presented via a kinder route of marriage. She shares a certain marginality as a woman. She is not bad-looking and not special, thinking of herself as “somewhat uninteresting, thick-waisted, thick-ankled” (Roy 1997: 245). She is just a shopkeeper’s daughter for which Chacko’s class-conscious mother shows contempt. After divorcing Chacko, she struggles to achieve independence and pursue her dream of becoming a teacher. However, Chacko’s white ex-wife represents the cultural hubris of the West as she serves to flatten and dehumanize socio-cultural formations and relations in Kerala, India. When Margaret observes Kochu Maria kissing her daughter’s hands Margaret unwittingly denigrates the act as “sniffing,” wondering aloud if men and women there do it to each other too (Roy 1997: 85). Her attitude is an exposé of the presumed superiority of what is Western and the inferiority of what is not. For Margaret who comes from London, a putative centre of the world, the local custom is not a civilized method of endearment. Rather, it is an exotic, even repulsive way of expressing affection for a Western eye.

Here, Margaret is an exemplified figure of what Bakhtin calls the classical body, which is the bourgeois individualist conception of a body “situated as high, inside and central by virtue of its very exclusions” (Stallybrass & White 1986: 23). Such positional superiority makes her see Kochu Maria, the diminutive cook, as only the object of contempt, not a full human being. The ‘sniffing’ by a racial ‘Other’—believed to be an unrestrained or savage practice—is supposed to pose a threat to her daughter Sophie. Taking her status as a domestic servant as it is perceived, Margaret is unable to comprehend Kochu Maria’s heterogeneity, particularly her place in her community. In fact, the latter belongs to what Derrida calls the *antre*, the dominant indigenous



groups “[a]t the regional and local levels” (Spivak 1988: 285). Kochu Maria tries hard to maintain her dignity as an upper-caste Syrian Christian despite her menial job:

Her kunukku earrings were thick and gold. Her earlobes had been distended into weighted loops that swung around her neck, her earrings sitting in them like gleeful children in a merry-go-(not all the way)round. Her right lobe had split open once and was sewn together again by Dr Verghese Verghese. Kochu Maria couldn’t stop wearing her kunukku because if she did, how would people know that despite her lowly cook’s job (seventy-five rupees a month) she was a Syrian Christian, Mar Thomite? Not a Pelaya, or a Pulaya, or a Paravan. But a Touchable, upper-caste Christian... Split lobes stitched back were a better option by far. (Roy 1997: 170)

Here, we find that it would be a serious mistake if the diverse lived experiences of specific Indian women—Hindu, Muslim, Parsi, Syrian Christian, etc.—are taken or defined collectively. As Mohanty (2003: 42) argues, this kind of mistake stems from regarding Third World women as a monolithic object of knowledge. It is wrong to assume that there exists a monolithic traditional culture, which all classes, races, or genders are supposed to adopt and pursue. Especially in a country like India, it is dangerous to lump them as a homogeneous group because there are various cultures, practices, and experiences.

The first night Ammu makes love to Velutha—hours after Margaret arrived and belittled the local custom—impugns the British woman’s way of seeing Third World women and subverts her Eurocentric subject position. The enactment of steamy sex shows how Ammu revalorizes the act of ‘sniffing’ in a counter-discursive manner in the form of riposte: *Yes, Margaret. We do it to each other too* (Roy 1997: 340). (Mind that the act of snuffling is repeated in the twins’ incest.) The cross-caste lovemaking challenges not only local injustice but also the Eurocentric perception and consciousness of formerly colonized others. The challenge inverts the discursive homogeneity and predisposition represented by Margaret, a school teacher who had once rebelled against her parents to marry Chacko but “traded [him] in for a better man,” a white

Englishman named Joe. The interjection of a contesting narrative in the form of sexual transgression serves to problematize and countervail the Western discourse of race and sexuality, illustrating that natives are not reduced to the Eurocentric discourse of the racial body. In contrast, Margaret's sexual relations with Chacko show how ethnocentric discourse or ideology intervenes to work even as the binarism of the East and the West is invoked in a counter-discursive manner to interrogate the hegemonic framework of classification and objectification. The way she is getting to know him is the process of overcoming unknown fears. She surrenders her "tiny, ordered life" to Chacko's "truly baroque bedlam." The binaries of order and chaos, warm and chilly epitomize their mixed-race relationship denied by her parents. The physical encounter is compared to "the quiet gasp of a warm body entering a chilly sea." Her marriage, the outcome of her wish to escape "the narrow confines of her island country into the vast, extravagant spaces of his," proves to be an illusion. Her travel to the Heart of Darkness, her fawning ex-husband's exotic hometown in south India, unmask her internalized view and consciousness of racial others. When she hears the news about Joe's accidental death she hides her sadness to protect her daughter "under the brisk, practical mask of a schoolteacher" (Roy 1997: 250). Such dissimulation is, however, no longer workable in India where she loses her self-restraint and slaps Estha whenever she can following her daughter's accidental death.<sup>63</sup>

To appropriate Mohanty's words (2003: 19), the juxtaposition of Ammu with Margaret is similar to putting varied "women," "real, material subjects of their collective histories" opposite the marker "Woman." The novel shows how 'women' like Ammu are enabled to tackle constraints in a counter-hegemonic manner rather than becoming the object of knowledge on the part of 'Woman' like Margaret whose positional superiority "puts the Westerner in a whole

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<sup>63</sup> Sophie says that Margaret slaps her in private when she breaks the ice with Rahel and Estha during their first meeting at the airport.

series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing [her] relative upper hand” (Said 1979: 7). The unilateral, one-sided attempt to define non-Western women as victims of and slaves to hegemonic cultures runs the risk of committing what Butler (1993: 18) terms “epistemological imperialism.” The above examples demonstrate that the specifics of history and culture should not be lost in the layers of the universal, which dismisses the private lives and specific experiences of women. Female characters with various religious and cultural backgrounds are implicated in forming social ties in power relations within particular communities, so it is important to explore how social interactions acquire values and meanings in their lived experiences.

### **Cracking Patriarchy & Imperialism**

As McClintock (1992: 92) argues, postcolonial progress and modernization have been “overwhelmingly and violently male.” Men and women don’t have a singular postcolonial condition, but different ones. Two salient examples of how unequal relations between men and women were produced and maintained in terms of patriarchy and imperialism are sati, the Hindu ritual of burning widows alive, and Muslim veiling known as purdah. As Nalini Natarajan (1994: 82) points out, Fanon’s problematization of politics behind the colonizer-led unveiling movement draws attention to the colonizer’s insidious attempt to annihilate the colonized culture. Fanon (1965: 35-67) argues that colonizers tried to abolish veiling in the colonial context in the cause of rescuing the colonized woman from the backward native male. Ironically, however, the newly independent male members demand in the course of decolonization what they had opposed during colonial rule or agreed reluctantly in the face of criticism for their backwardness. As Natarajan aptly points out, both cases show that the uncovering of women’s bodies is related

more to the “politics of men’s power relations” than any “interest in female subjectivity.” Fanon’s disclosure of male politics with regard to veiling is analogous to Spivak’s problematization of male discourse on the Hindu ritualistic death of sati, arguably the most representative example of passive Indian female subjectivity. Spivak (1988: 307) mentions the suicide of a teenage girl, an independence activist under the British rule who times her death while she is having a period so that her suicide will not be appropriated by either the patriarchal nationalists or the British colonizers.<sup>64</sup> The examples of veiling and sati suggest that women caught between tradition and modernization are often positioned in a double or multiple bind as the object of patriarchal, imperial, or other normative discourses.

As Butler (1998: 282) argues, however, the veil is very complex and it is often a certain kind of power that women can exercise to express themselves. The ambivalence of the veil is insidiously powerful in postcolonial texts. According to Suleri (2009: 113), the figure of the veil is a mode both of empowerment and of disempowerment in Rushdie’s novels. In *Shame*, women are not passive victims of male power who are helplessly trapped and driven to despair. The wives of authoritarian leaders conspire to impugn male power from the margins. Their painstaking weaving of shawls and burqas is troped as a strategy of empowering them. Rani Harappa’s epic series of eighteen shawls contradict the official narrative of her husband’s regime and expose the execrable crimes and corruption of the dictator. Her embroidering entitled ‘The Shamelessness of Ishkander the Great’ reinterprets Pakistan’s history from her own memory and reinscribes it from a minority perspective: “Locked in their trunk, they said unspeakable things which nobody wanted to hear” (Rushdie 1995: 191). Her friend Bilquis chooses to wear a black

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<sup>64</sup> According to Spivak, her intention is clear: 1) Her choice of time rules out the possibility of “illicit pregnancy”; 2) The suicide has nothing to do with the religious ritual of sati, which is supposed not to take place while women are contaminated having a period. Her suicide signifies that she does not want to be the object of male protection. Therefore, the British colonizers cannot claim that they save native women from native men while the patriarchal nationalists cannot claim that their women want to die voluntarily to honour them.

burqa from head to toe even indoors after her daughter Good News, who became a baby-producing machine after marriage, commits suicide. Her voluntary veiling and concealment are used in a counter-hegemonic way to protect herself from the male gaze or unwanted attention. The veil of “her solipsism” helps her to be invisible as a shadow (Rushdie 1995: 209), and this strategy is an enabling way of resisting the panoptical surveillance of male-dominated society to make daily life bearable. Only when the right time comes does she emerge from the background to mock male power. She cloaks her profligate son-in-law Omar and her husband Raza Hyder in her head-to-toe black burqas for their disguise as women before flight. Her act is subversive given that she had gone to great lengths as a nubile woman to cover up her nudity in the aftermath of a fire in her father’s cinema at the time of Partition. She exploits the burqa which is usually imposed by men, not only as her refuge but also a tool for concealing the cause of hypocrisy and shame. As Bhabha (2004: 89-90) notes<sup>65</sup>, these instances show how the veil that epitomizes the limits of women’s representation can be insidiously used in a transgressive manner as “a technique of camouflage, a means of struggle” rather than being simply turned into a “symbol of resistance.” The authorial voice intervenes to acknowledge efforts to create a discursive space for the female voice, given that veils symbolize the possibility of new interpretations of suppressed women’s histories:

I had thought, before I began, that what I had on my hands was an almost excessively masculine tale, a saga of sexual rivalry, ambition, power, patronage, betrayal, death, revenge. But the women seem to have taken over; they marched in from the peripheries of the story to demand the inclusion of their own tragedies, histories and comedies, obliging me to couch my narrative in all manner of sinuous complexities, to see my ‘male’ plot refracted, so to speak, through the prisms of its reverse and ‘female’ side. (Rushdie 1995: 173)

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<sup>65</sup> In his discussion of Fanon’s essay “Algeria Unveiled,” Bhabha explains how a strategy of subversion emerges when the veil “transgress[es] the familial and colonial boundary” and exercises “a form of power at the very limits of identity and authority.”

Rani and Bilquis's appropriation of sewing in the domestic sphere stands in contrast with the complicity and obeisance of Arjumand in the public sphere who adopts the existing male power structure without adaptation or transformation. Although there is a question mark over whether their practice is subversive enough, it is impossible to deny that such efforts chip away at power from the margins, raising the possibility of an alternative form of discursive practice.

In *Midnight's Children*, the veil is appropriated as a trope to suggest that women are allowed only incomplete, fissured identities. Dr. Aadam Aziz is only allowed to see Naseem through a hole in a sheet. The veil-like perforated sheet with a seven-inch diameter hole in the middle is a prop for ritualizing male voyeurism as Naseem's body is exchanged between her blind father and an ogling suitor. As Natarajan (1994: 81) argues, the representation of Naseem's body as interchangeable parts in hegemonic discourse "provides an occasion for imagining wholeness" on the part of man. Here, what is at stake in a male-dominated exchange system is Naseem's integrity. Her wealthy father executes the clandestine plan to accommodate the gaze of the Western-educated doctor at Naseem's expense. Under a contract, Aadam receives a large sum of dowry to buy a large house in Agra from Ghani. As Chari (1994: 47) contends, this system seems to fit Sedgwick's argument, influenced by Levi-Strauss, that women's identities are affected in male relations especially when men exchange women to bind themselves in relationships of kinships and reciprocity. But Aadam's voyeuristic imagination of Naseem's whole, behind the perforated sheet, turns out to be an illusion like his longing for a unified independent nation<sup>66</sup>. When her whole is unveiled it turns out to be very different from the imagined sum of her parts glimpsed. From a male-centred sexualized perspective, Naseem's

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<sup>66</sup> In the text, Aadam Aziz is portrayed as supporting the Free Islam Convocation which opposes the partition of India unlike the Muslim League allegedly in complicity with British colonial rulers. "They go like toads to the British and form governments for them, now that the Congress refuses to do it... they are mad. Otherwise why would they want to partition India?" (Rushdie 1991: 46).

unveiled body provides not wholeness but only rupture. Naseem's transformation into a formidable figure proves that Aadam had made "the mistake of loving [her] in fragments" (Rushdie 1991: 39).

Naseem's subject position is more vulnerable and even precarious when it is seen through the lens of a gendered anti-colonial, nationalistic context during and after British colonial rule. As Partha Chatterjee (1990: 248) argues, patriarchal nationalism gave women a new social responsibility, but it bound them to a new, yet entirely legitimate, subordination by associating the task of female emancipation with the historical goal of sovereign nationhood. In other words, anti-colonial nationalists replace older patriarchy with a new one, so women are supposed to be still keepers of tradition even as they participate in the construction of male-centred secular nation. After marriage, Aadam who is involved in the independence movement forces Naseem to quit wearing her veil by burning it: "Forget about being a good Kashmiri girl. Start thinking about being a modern Indian woman" (Rushdie 1991: 33). The forced unveiling reflects a wider social reality imposed upon women in the context of decolonization efforts. In contrast with his mother who voluntarily came out of purdah to finance his Western education, his wife's unveiling symbolizes the imposition of modernity on her. Such unilateral liberation of the female body is problematic because it is used as a site for "testing out modernity" or national identity at the expense of female integrity (Natarajan 1994: 79).

However, Naseem's body is not just the sum of its parts that explains her whole. She turns out to be something greater than the sum of her parts, which is a symbolic inversion of male-dominated postcolonial regimes. Rather than viewing her body as a 'gift' for her husband, she refuses to subscribe to the dominant discourses of patriarchy and male-led modernity. As Amrita Chhachhi (1994: 75) emphasizes in her discussion of Indian identity politics, Indian

women are “crucial makers of identity—of the nation, community, caste group and religious group. They have been objects as well as agents.” Instead of succumbing to the patriarchal power symbolized by the phallic image of her husband’s big nose, Naseem refuses to be a sign subordinated to the male gaze or desire, emerging as the stronger partner and formidable matriarch nicknamed Reverend Mother. Her power is even compared to “an ironclad citadel of traditions and certainties” (Rushdie 1991: 40). As she takes centre stage in family affairs the unequal gender relations are reversed. It is she that legitimizes the changeling Saleem, which no one can oppose. Her control of the household expands into the territory of family business too. She crosses the border and runs a successful petrol business in Rawalpindi, Pakistan:

The pump rapidly became famous in those parts, drivers began to go out of their way to use it... Moustachioed, matriarchal, proud: Naseem Aziz...grew, with alarming rapidity, wider and wider; until builders were summoned to expand her glassed-in booth. (Rushdie 1991: 376)

Her growing physical presence in contrast with her husband’s decline shows that she becomes a historical subject in her own right, not a signifier for the male gaze or desire. Her body’s being uncontainable within the cubicle of the gas station is a trope to subvert the voyeuristic male view, suggesting that she is greater than the sum of her body parts previously seen through the perforated sheet. Although she is not a beauty like her daughter-in-law Pia, her power of discourse attracts customers, making her business prosper. The episode illustrates how bodily corporeality and discursivity work together to empower Naseem.

Interestingly, a veil-like perforated sheet returns to symbolize how Naseem’s granddaughter’s body is constrained and gendered. The once free-spirited girl nicknamed Brass Monkey is transformed into the meek, docile Jamila Singer after her family emigrates to Pakistan, the Land of the Pure. The veiled body of Jamila is used as a metaphor for constructing national identity at the expense of female integrity, just as the exposed body of her grandmother signified



male-centred decolonization efforts. She becomes a popular Pakistani chanteuse whose career is managed by men and whose respectability is salvaged only by performing behind the veil. The perforated sheet has a three-inch diameter hole at the centre, much smaller than the seven-inch hole of her grandmother's sheet. "That was how the history of our family once again became the fate of a nation...she became public property, 'Pakistan's Angel,'..." (Rushdie 1991: 375). Subjected to the collective male gaze or desire in the public sphere, Jamila is the scapegoat for the emergence of fundamentalist Pakistan. The spectators participate in the gendered voyeuristic activities of female viewing, and she becomes a martyr to the idea of nation, captive to the Pakistani nationalist rhetoric and its view of women. Othered as inspirer of men's desire and souls, she is reduced to the voice of Pakistan. "Jamila, daughter, your voice will be a sword for purity; it will be the weapon with which we shall cleanse men's souls" (Rushdie 1991: 376).

The unveiling and veiling of the female body show how gender is used as a trope in the narrative imagining of nation-building and decolonization. The construction of male-centred national identity depends on the process of female othering and comes at the expense of female characters. As Natarajan (1994: 88) argues, the female body is exploited as a sign and narratives seem to collude to gender nation as male-centred through their representation of the female body. When Jamila challenges male politics her time is up. After she speaks out against the perpetrators of the Indo-Pakistan war, she vanishes. However, as the hole in the sheet symbolizes a possibility of reclaiming the whole in the case of Naseem, Jamila's impure palatal desire and flirtation with Christianity raise the prospect of political subversion in the Land of the Pure. Her transgressive desire for leavened bread at the nunnery<sup>67</sup> is a metaphor for a fissure or crack in the official narrative of history. So there goes Saleem's alternative history of her fate:

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<sup>67</sup> Rushdie fictionalizes his personal experience about leavened bread in Karachi, Pakistan. He says (2003: 110), "All this I knew only by hearsay, for I never got up at such an unearthly hour to see for myself." What he learned was

Jamila did not disappear into the clutches of the State; because that same night, I dreamed that she, in the shadows of darkness and the secrecy of a simple veil... fled by air from the capital city... there is a high wall with bolted doors and a hatch through which, once, long ago, I received bread, the leavened bread of my sister's weakness, she is asking to be let in, nuns are opening doors as she cries sanctuary... Jamila Singer who once, as the Brass Monkey, flirted with Christianity, finds safety shelter peace in the midst of the hidden order of Santa Ignacia... yes, she is there, safe, not vanished, not in the grip of police... (Rushdie 1991: 453)

By choosing to hide in the invisibility of the nunnery of Santa Ignacia, wearing a different kind of veil, Jamila refuses to be a victim of the emergence of militancy and national heroism in the context of the Indo-Pakistan war. She transgresses boundaries and survives in the Catholic convent where she can bake and enjoy her favourite leavened bread to her heart's content while singing for the nuns. Jamila's fate contrasts with those of her mother Amina and auntie Pia who ultimately become the collective scapegoat of the nationalistic, cross-border war as foils for their male counterparts. Saleem's story about her choice of personal happiness over public stardom demonstrates that the collective voyeuristic imagination of her whole—supposedly a symbol of Pakistan—behind the perforated sheet turns out to be an illusion.

The above examples show that although Rushdie is criticized for using the female body as a signifier of male desire or gaze, he does not rule out the possibility of transgression and agency in connection with patriarchy and colonial politics. In *Shalimar the Clown*, Rushdie foregrounds sexual politics by telling the story of three generations of women who challenge patriarchy, imperialism, and terrorism to reclaim the history of women in a circulatory process. The lives of Giri, Boonyi, and Kashmira show how they are caught between what Spivak (1988: 306) calls two traditional forms of domination: patriarchy and imperialism. First of all, I discuss how the female characters negotiate the liminality of identity to counter the hegemonic discourse,

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that servants got up at dawn and stood in line outside a small hatch in the wall of a hidden order of nuns known as the Monastery of the Angels.

before I delve into the ways in which the female body is colonized and restored on a discursive plane while at the same time corporeal practices create transformative power. Renaming is a counter-hegemonic way of achieving new identities in the practices and lived experiences of social life. By challenging singular representations of identity, they try to escape discursive control in order to reassert woman's place in man's world as active agents. Boonyi changes her name from Bhoomi to Boonyi 'the beloved tree' because she thinks that her name which means 'the earth' signifies only passivity or waiting. With the new name comes a whole new character. Her mother Pamposh prefers the nickname Giri which means a 'walnut kernel' to her real name which means 'the lotus flower.' She looks docile and obedient on the outside, but she is a free spirit and independent-minded on the inside. Unlike other village women, she does not follow her husband's sexual desires but leads them. Boonyi's daughter, the illegitimate child of Max, is the strongest female character that Rushdie portrays in the novel. After finding out who her mother is and what her father had done in the past, she restores her original name Kashmira. Her name's switch from India to Kashmira symbolizes the reterritorialization of not only the Indian-occupied Kashmir but the American-controlled world.<sup>68</sup> Her symbolic rebirth as Kashmira represents the establishment of an alternative order which challenges the hegemonic order of patriarchy, neocolonialism, and terrorism.

They might create the impression of remaking themselves by the names they choose, but they cannot succeed in changing the world surrounding them in that manner. The text shows how patriarchal oppression and imperial domination are historically connected to each other through

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<sup>68</sup> The American occupation of Boonyi's body is compared to the Indian presence in Kashmir. Boonyi uses the Indian presence in the valley as a surrogate for the American occupation of her body (Rushdie 2005: 197). Rushdie's interest in Kashmir, the land of his ancestry, is apparent in his works like *Midnight's Children* and *Shalimar the Clown*. He (2003: 305) says that he has loved Kashmir all his life, asserting himself to be "more than half Kashmiri myself." Furthermore, he describes Kashmir as "one of the most beautiful places in the world...which the Mughal emperors thought of as Paradise on earth."

the male-dominated power struggle between India, the U.S., and terrorism. Giri lives in a patriarchal society that is at least a century behind the times she has in mind. She pretends to be happy to be in it, but her name meaning ‘hard walnut shell’ implies that she is a completely different woman inside, aloof and discontented. Her dreams are “far more radical and dangerous” (Rushdie 2005: 52). Giri recounts an emancipatory view of female life to her daughter Boonyi. Encouraged by the future and vision of unshackled freedom, Boonyi grabs a chance to run away from her terrorist-to-be husband so as to give herself the future which she believes she deserves. Boonyi brazenly flaunts her achieved status as the American ambassador’s paramour in defiance of tradition and orthodoxy.

Boonyi, who battles the restricting and reductive forces of patriarchy and neocolonialism, is keenly aware that a crucial aspect of the neocolonial vision is sexual. The trope of the sexual relationship between Boonyi and Max Ophuls is an analogy to America’s relationship with the Third World after World War II. For Max Ophuls, she might represent what Said (1979: 207) calls “the creature of a male power-fantasy” in a land where the American ambassador as the architect of a new global order enforces a “male conception of the world.”<sup>69</sup> Boonyi’s body mirrors post-independence India:

I am your handiwork made flesh. You took beauty and created hideousness... I am the meaning of your deeds. I am the meaning of your so-called love, your destructive, selfish, wanton love... Your love looks just like hatred... This is not me. This is you. (Rushdie 2005: 205)

Boonyi’s bodily transformation tells the story of how she is appropriated, colonized, and proprietorized by the American envoy to India. It symbolizes more than America’s replacement of Britain in postcolonial India. The process shows that the new Western power’s rule is more

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<sup>69</sup> Said examines the ways in which the Oriental races and cultures are feminized within the sexual and political dynamics of colonial discourse. He likens the discourse of Orientalism to that of patriarchy: “the Orient was routinely described as feminine, its riches as fertile, its main symbols the sensual woman, the harem, and the despotic—but curiously attractive—ruler” (1985: 12).

sophisticated and insidious. She and Max hammer out a ‘treaty’ of their sexual affairs with contraceptive pills essential to the deal as if it were a back-channel negotiation or an international arms deal. Max is likened to a drug dealer who supplies for his chosen addicts. The price for her voluntary surrender to colonization is inscribed upon her body as she succumbs to addiction to drugs, tobacco, gluttony, pills, etc. Following her failure as a dancer, Boonyi’s body becomes abject as a result of growing addictions, which are symbolic modes of colonization. Her hair loses its lustre; her skin coarsens; her teeth rot; her body odour sours; her bulk increases; her head rattles with pills; her lungs are full of poppies. Max stops seeing her, putting the blame on her: “What a wreck she has made of herself” (Rushdie 2005: 199-203). Max’s transformation from a renowned Jewish freedom fighter against the Nazis into an agent of a new imperial power is ironical. Max finds himself playing the kind of role of seducing and exploiting a lesser power, which he had once despised. Boonyi’s relationship with him is a powerful reminder of his painful experience of sex with a Nazi fascist with whom he had slept for a great cause of liberation.

Nevertheless, Boonyi is not a victim forced to sell herself. She is well aware of her power of sexuality over men who desire her. She wills herself to be the American ambassador’s lover in order to achieve her ambitions. She is a collaborator who “would do anything” to escape from the trap of a small village life (Rushdie 2005: 114) and fulfill her dream of becoming a reputable dancer. This process has the effect of rewriting the *Ramayana*, an ancient Indian epic, providing a completely different perspective to the power of female sexuality represented by Boonyi. In the original story, Sita the pure is kidnapped and her husband Rama fights a war to win her back. When Rama questions her chastity during her capture by Ravana, Sita has to go through a trial by walking into a blazing fire in order to prove her purity and devotion. However, the myth is

reconceptualized and inverted in the postcolonial context: “In the modern world everything had been turned upside down and inside out” (Rushdie 2005: 263). In an allegorical tale told in reverse, she rejects men’s authoritative power. She chooses to abandon her husband and run off with her American ‘Ravana.’ After she becomes the American’s mistress she chooses to be pregnant and bears him a child. Her subjection to such colonial products as drugs, tobacco, and pills is tantamount to Sita’s trial by fire as a test of purity. As she endures and survives all the hardship, it turns out that Boonyi’s body is not regulated or controlled as Max had wished. Boonyi’s agency and resistance stand out especially because the American ambassador’s control over her biology and free speech fails. Her surrender of her body to him proves to be a victory for her. Here, I use her as an exemplar to demonstrate why the body should be explored on discursive and corporeal planes in order to explain how oppression can be converted into a mode of agency in the postcolonial context.

Different transgressive modes of agency and resistance empower her to interrogate the patriarchal and imperial structures from the subaltern position. Firstly, she is enabled to speak back to the American ambassador after learning enough English to speak for herself. She tells Max what she really thinks of him: “I kept my love for my husband though my body served you, Jew. Look what you have made of the body I gave you. But my heart is still my own” (Rushdie 2005: 205). The counter-hegemonic process of appropriating the language illustrates Boonyi’s strategy which “terrorizes authority with the *ruse* of recognition, its mimicry, its mockery” (Bhabha 2004: 165). Her poor use of English proves to be a *ruse* to express love for her cuckolded husband:

Whenever she said “Kashmir” she secretly meant her husband, and this *ruse* allowed her to declare her love for the man she had betrayed to the man with whom she had committed the act of treason... Her American love was obviously

too stupid to crack the code, and attributed the pronoun slippage to her incomplete command of the language. (Rushdie 2005: 197)

Secondly, she takes advantage of the irreducible corporeality of her body to subvert the mechanism of imperialistic control. She outwits the American ambassador by giving birth to his child, a baby girl, after avoiding obligatory birth-control pills. Her obesity, the dire effect of her bodily decay, ironically helps to cover up her pregnancy despite Max's panoptic surveillance through his voyeuristic spy. Her body's materiality produces the metaphoric effect of transforming her abjection into a mode of agency which counters the symbolic imperial invasion. Such maternal agency overturns the conventional interpretation of pregnancy as a natural passive bodily process. Boonyi's pregnancy is subversive, not a symbol of what Grosz (1990: 95) describes as "the abandonment of agency" with regard to pregnancy. The context demonstrates the interstice of her body's materiality and discursivity. Her body is not simply the site of colonization or subjugation, but a discursive space for calculation, negotiation, and interrogation. Boonyi's refusal of contraceptives and pregnancy invert the trope of colonial rape and unwanted pregnancy in Spivak's concept of "enabling violation" (1999: 371). As it turns out, the existence of Boonyi's "healthy child" is "advanced as a justification" for her pregnancy on the grounds that she grows up to complete the cycle of recovery and emancipation that her mother had intended to. In this regard, Boonyi's voluntary pregnancy is a powerful symbolic practice to subvert the world dominated by patriarchy and imperialism.

However, Boonyi's return to her hometown and suffering show that such transgressive practices as pregnancy and speaking back are not enough to reclaim her downtrodden history from the clutches of oppression. The whole village including her family denies her existence. She finds out that she is dead in official document. After she defied the village laws in order to follow her dream and desire, her family, neighbours and friends filled out a form of her death

and got it signed and stamped by the authorities. Since the whole village's collusion makes her the living dead she has to fight to justify her existence. Here, it is important to note the transformation of a hut to which Boonyi is confined like a madwoman into a subversive place of recovery and regeneration. As Rushdie (2005: 263) argues, she is exiled into the forest like Sita but some people secretly help her to survive. In a minimal space free from the ruling discourse, she can communicate with her dead mother and overcome the symbolic colonization inscribed upon her body. The negative effects of addiction leave her body, and the dynamics of recovery due to bonding with her friends and her dead mother illustrate the palimpsestic process of erasures and reinscriptions to repossess her body and be reintegrated. The process empowers her to use her restored body to challenge the boundaries between the norm and madness, self and other. Physical labour holds her madness at bay and strengthens her body, but at night her mind takes over from the body. She takes advantage of people's perception of her as a madwoman to freely dance naked outside together with the ghost of her dead mother in the moon (Rushdie 2005: 241). The moment of freedom from the hegemonic view enables her to listen to her body's genuine needs and seek an alternative form of life. In the end, she is willing to give up her physical body at the murderous hands of her clown-turned-terrorist husband because she realizes that there is no difference between life and death, love and hatred, materiality and discursivity (Rushdie 2005: 318).

Mistry's *A Fine Balance* also foregrounds the oppressive traditions and structural constraints that women have to battle. As Bharucha (1996: 132, 141) argues, although Parsi women have not been rigorously subjected to the regimen of the veiling they also suffered in the limited and restrictive world like their Hindu and Muslim sisters in India. It is true that Parsi



women were allowed to remarry and were not to be victims of sati. This is evident in the text when Nusswan insists on her remarrying:

“Do you know how fortunate you are in our community. Among the unenlightened, widows are thrown away like garbage. If you were a Hindu, in the old days you would have had to be a good little sati and leap onto your husband’s funeral pyre, be roasted with him.” (Mistry 1997: 52)

But Westernization or modernization was mainly confined to men, so the majority of Parsi women received little education and were subjected to the taboos and oppressions of a strict patriarchy.<sup>70</sup> Dina is denied continued schooling by her brother after their mother’s death. No proper education means being denied a position of enunciation in a male-dominated world: “Look how I have to slave now because I was denied an education” (Mistry 1997: 427). Nevertheless, she fights hard to carve out an alternative space within the governing patriarchy of Nusswan and the dominant structure of capitalism represented by her landlord. My study of her character aims to comprehend the process of her transformation into “a person of dynamic agency, possessive of a sophisticated and believable interior life” (Ball 1999: 236). Touted as Mistry’s most fully developed female character, Dina is a multidimensional character with a fierce sense of purpose and identity who spurns the traditional ideas of women and their role despite the political and economic oppression of men.

First of all, it is necessary to understand her situation in the context of male chauvinism and ‘colonial’ family relations. After their father’s death her brother assumes the role of family head and becomes her legal guardian. When Dina catches him having sex with their domestic servant he lets the servant go and forces her to take up the servant role. Dina’s subordinate position in the family represents the unequal relationship between the siblings. In the name of

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<sup>70</sup> It seems that Parsi women have not been as widely subjected to the oppressive traditions and perceptions that Hindu and Muslim women have. Trembour (1984: 115) argues that they were encouraged to pursue higher education and independence, and often to go abroad to pursue their interests. However, only rich Parsis educated their daughters in British India, so they became doctors, lawyers, and teachers.

family duty, her domineering brother exercises violence to tame her within the bounds of family.

This is how he disciplines and controls her body:

Dina's taunt unleashed the fury of the disciplinarian... With lashes of the ruler across her calves and arms, he drove her to the bathroom, where he began tearing off her clothes... Shivering, she stared defiantly at him, her nipples stiffening. He pinched one, hard, and she flinched... He was eyeing her strangely, and she grew afraid... It would be safer to seem submissive, to douse his anger. She turned away and started to cry, her hands over her face. (Mistry 1997: 24)

Although his sadistic sexual assault makes her pretend to be submissive, her desire for independence grows ever stronger. Dina's experience following her husband's death shows how the hegemonic discourse of patriarchy combines with economic oppression to make it increasingly difficult to assert an independent self. She suffers economic hardship, but she refuses to go back to her family house occupied by her brother who insists on her remarrying one of his friends. Fortunately, in-home sewing business, which she sets up with the help of Aunt Shrin, enables her to stand on her own financially, so that she doesn't have to rely on her brother and rejects his scheme for remarriage. How much Dina values independence is well reflected in her ending sexual relations with her well-to-do customer Fredoon. She does not want to give up independence in exchange for the comfort of remarriage, aside from her loving memory of the late husband.

Her dogged struggle for economic independence is a reminder of how she had survived patriarchal oppression in the family house before she married Rustom. She refused to marry one of her brother's friends so that she could break from the family straitjacket. She developed an independent free spirit by spending most of her time outside of her brother's house with the money she had skimmed off from the purchase of groceries. The petty theft enabled her to move around in the city and meet her future husband. She matures from a headstrong girl into a down-to-earth young woman who chooses to marry the unpretentious Rustom and strikes on her own

after his death. However, she is forced to accept and implement the discipline of global capitalism disguised as a free market system by working as a purveyor for an export company. After her eyesight deteriorates with needlework and age, she hires Ishvar and Om as tailors and takes on Maneck as a boarder in order to eke out a living. Mrs. Gupta, manager of the clothing company, teaches her how to discipline workers and supervise production: “You are the boss, you must make the rules. Never lose control” (Mistry 1997: 66). Taking Mrs. Gupta’s instruction, Dina tries to embrace the grueling principle of piecework pay as a way of maximizing labour, but it turns out that such labour exploitation goes against the grain with her. She does not want to impose the rules which are similar to patriarchy and caste to which she and her cobbler-turned-tailors had refused to submit.

In this regard, Dina’s practice of the self differs from those of Mrs. Gupta and her brother, both of whom support the predatory economic system and compulsory sterilization and are willing to exploit those who are weaker. For Mrs. Gupta, “Indiscipline is the mother of chaos, but the fruits of discipline are sweet” (Mistry 1997: 352) and Nusswan believes that sterilizing people against their will for population control is necessary because “at least two hundred million people are surplus to requirements, they should be eliminated” (Mistry 1997: 372). Dina’s harsh experience as a widow and subsequent years of loneliness and hardship shape her as a cautious and suspicious woman. The arrival of Maneck, Ishvar, and Om at her flat underlines her strong sense of self-preservation and mistrust of strangers, especially the low-caste tailors. However, Dina comes to develop a strong network of social ties with her tailors, which “transcends religious and class divisions” (Ball 1999: 237), and they survive the onslaught of economic exploitation, political crackdown, and forced sterilization. Their human relationship develops into a structure of social practice and experience which makes it possible to appropriate

their marginal position as a political survival strategy. Such intersubjective relations help explain why her eviction<sup>71</sup> by the profit-driven landlord and then her return to the family house occupied by her chauvinist brother do not lead to the collapse of her community<sup>72</sup>. Returning to her brother's, she seems resigned to her fate and ready to be tamed and domesticated, submitting to the terms of abjection for cooking and cleaning as a drudge.

However, there is a critical moment when Dina realizes that she cannot get completely free from structural constraints in spite of her strong will to do so by transgressing and changing them. After the Beggarmaster's eerie death, Dina raises a fundamental question about freedom. Because of his death his beggars are free now, but she asks herself what is the use of freedom to them: "Scattered about the miserable pavements of the city, orphaned, uncared for—weren't they better off in Beggarmaster's custody?" (Mistry 1997: 556). The question applies to her too because she has to go back to Nusswan-occupied family house after being driven out by the thugs employed by her landlord. The idea of independence might be a fantasy after all in this situation because she has no choice but to rely on someone like the Beggarmaster or her abusive brother. Nonetheless, her resilient social ties with Ishvar and Om enable her to savour the return of autonomy that she had struggled to cultivate against all odds. As I argue in Chapter III, her kitchen becomes a liberating space within the family house governed by the patriarchal businessman since the marginalized meet every day in a carnivalesque manner. Such a

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<sup>71</sup> One of the mantras in the novel is "possession is nine-tenths of the law" when it comes to the issue of occupation and eviction. Dina's absentee landlord forcibly evicts her for using the flat as a workshop only with the help of gangsters. In the 1970s, when the novel is set, tenants were under the protection of the Bombay Rent Control Act of 1947, which was introduced to provide relief to the city's migrants after the partition of colonial India. Rents were set at 1940 levels to prevent building owners from charging excessive rates during a time of distress (Straits Times 27 June 2012). The act was renamed the Maharashtra Rent Control Bill in 1999, allowing for a gradual increase in the rent.

<sup>72</sup> The intersubjective community's transition from flat to kitchen is elaborated on in Chapter III in connection with the daily practice of carnivalesque transgression.

transformation of the abjection into agency demonstrates that it is possible to engage and negotiate the dominant structure to carve out an alternative space.

### **Black Magic**

Female bonding through transgressive practice fosters intersubjective agency, empowering individual characters to cultivate a sense of belonging and transformation in shared experiences. Among others, I now wish to explore how the transgressive practice of black magic in *Such a Long Journey* provides avenues for female bonding and agency of empowerment. Dilnavaz and Miss Kutpitia's forays into black magic are more than dalliance in the dark arts, given that they make a significant impact on the outcome of events beyond the well-being of individuals, family, and community. The dynamics of female subculture show how power relations are reformulated and reinscribed, so that the perceived low discourse of female subculture subverts the official, high discourse of male-dominated culture. The effect of such an inversion goes well beyond the confines of family and Parsi community to interrogate and reinscribe the public sphere represented by the corrupt government which is implicated in a financial scam.

On the surface, Dilnavaz appears submissive to the headstrong and overbearing patriarchal husband and spends much of her time on performing her duties as wife and mother in the domestic sphere. Her husband Gustad, an average hard-working bank worker, is preoccupied with knowledge of the world and is oblivious of her daily household chore. Early in the morning, he tries to read a newspaper to Dilnavaz who has to carry out daily drudgery for the family. Rather than domestic issues, he is interested in national and international politics. Dilnavaz also has to endure his childish and violent behaviour when he disowns his son for refusing to go to

IIT in order to study arts. The “meting out of the punishment that a father was supposed to” (Mistry 1992: 50) illustrates that his behaviour is a typical example of patriarchal authority. In contrast, Dilnavaz’s subject position as wife and mother makes her a sensible, mediatory being with a strong, patient voice of reason. She cannot be labeled with what Ekelund (1995: 7, 14) describes as Mistry’s two binary types of women: “either pure and silent-suffering, or malevolent.” And she is neither reduced to mere plot devices nor objects through which men reveal their characters. The text shows that she does not hover at the periphery of the narrative as a hapless observer when her domestic crisis assumes national dimensions. Rather, she is an active participant in the crisis.

I draw attention to the ways in which Mistry addresses the power of women’s private sphere rather than portraying female pursuits as inferior to the political interests of men. When Gustad is unwittingly entrusted to take care of slush funds intercepted by his friend Bilimoria, he seems more interested in saving his honour than protecting his family. It is Dilnavaz who gives him instruction on how to decline the offer and deal with the money. She allows Gustad to hide the piles of money that Bilimoria had siphoned off from the corrupt government in the deep corner of the kitchen, the most personal and intimate space which she fiercely protects from her husband’s “meddling” or “interference” (Mistry 1992: 18). So Dilnavaz’s domestic sphere no longer serves as a mere backdrop or counterpoint to the larger world that her husband represents. Rather, the recesses of her kitchen are foregrounded as a site for what Bhabha (2004: 13) calls “history’s most intricate invasions.” The episode epitomizes how the boundaries between the private and the public are transgressed and blurred. The slippage between public and private worlds serves to identify and highlight Dilnavaz’s value and authority, debunking the assumption that her work is only domestic, behind-the-scenes, and insignificant in the public sphere. The

symbolic intertwining of public and domestic spheres shows the way in which Dilnavaz is empowered to assert her sovereignty and individuality. The presence of public money in a minimal space resituates the private world of home as a central place, and the resulting interstice interrogates and challenges an exploitative, corrupt public realm such as society and nation. In this regard, her daily struggle, disempowerment, and exclusion from male-centred power in the domestic sphere are only the conditions of possibility. The home, the primary site for her struggles, turns out to be not a passive and private enclosure, but a discursive space for engagement and negotiation.

In fact, the problems of the male-dominated public sphere suggest themselves in Mistry's novel, raising the need to question and correct the official political discourse. Set in 1971 against the backdrop of the Bangladesh-Pakistan war, the novel shows that male characters are the allegory of postcolonial India which cannot properly address the daily needs of its ordinary citizens. Gustad's haphazard spending, despite flagging domestic finances, is analogous to India's growing military spending amidst worsening economic conditions. Dilnavaz complains: "Not enough money for food or school uniforms, and baap goes and buys aeroplanes and fish tanks and bird cages!" (Mistry 1992: 166-167). Gustad and Dinshawji are both portrayed as incompetent husbands who are often sentimental and idealistic. With no prospect of promotion in their job, they are nostalgic dreamers and potential sexual harassers while their wives appear to be pragmatic, unimaginative realists. Although Dinshawji proves his worth as a partner for Gustad in a money-laundering scheme, he is a reckless womanizer who always speaks ill of his wife and jokes around in spite of his ill health. His image as a lecher can only be offset by male-dominated corporate culture as well as his wife's alleged mistreatment. Gustad often dwells on the past or dreams of an idyllic future for his son whose life he had saved in return for sustaining

leg injuries. His limp from the traffic accident is not just a proud legacy of his parental duty but also a discursive wound, a metaphor for India's abject defeat in its war with China in 1962, the same year when he suffered the accident. The blackout paper, which has been put up for eight years, is the symbol of recurrent war and wound which haunt his world, blocking light from his home.

For female characters, the title *Such a Long Journey* does not refer to the physical distance of a journey. Dilnavaz and Miss Kutpitia do not journey physically beyond the apartment compound in the text. A decrepit old woman of seventy, Miss Kutpita rarely goes out of her own flat. She has been isolated and virtually imprisoned by 35 years of her grief over the deaths of her brother and nephew. In fact, she is stuck in the memory of happily acting as Farad's 'surrogate' mother, which is described as a "golden time in Miss Kutpitia's life" (Mistry 1992: 62). Their rooms in her flat are revealed eerily, still kept as if they lived there:

Cobweb wreaths and layers of dust made it difficult to identify objects, except for the ghostly furniture... From the lower rod, two dark, holey rags dangling like moults of mysterious reptiles were definitely the remains of socks... Her three and a half decades of reverently observed isolation had allowed the tropical climate to work its rot and ruin... On the bed, the mattress's black-striped ticking showed through gaping holes in the bedclothes where generations of moths had feasted for ten thousand nights... the cobwebs had spread their clinging arms and embraced the relics of Miss Kutpitia's grief-stricken past. (Mistry 1992: 283-284)

Her reputation of being mean, cranky and abusive, excludes and ostracizes her. Gustad thinks that Miss Kutpitia is a crazy witch, and children act as if she were a witch from picture books. Objectified and demonized by her neighbours, she is stigmatized as "the ubiquitous witch of their fairy stories come to life" (Mistry 1992: 2). However, the Miss Kutpitia-led everyday practice in mundane, banal life steadily takes precedence in the narrative as it serves as a powerful metaphor for the significance of daily practice in the run-up to the climax. Superstition and magic in the domestic sphere show that the distance or destination of journey does not matter



for transformation. As the travelling street painter's answer to Gustad insinuates: "Where does not matter, sir" (Mistry 1992: 338), in a society where the stone wall surrounding the Parsi community can become a public toilet or a sacred place for worship. Here, the focus is on how Dilnavaz and Miss Kutpitia are empowered to reject the label imposed upon them and deal with situations that initially seem beyond their control by taking recourse to superstitious rituals.

Dilnavaz takes the initiative to reverse the situation when her family is hemmed in by many problems. The package of slush funds hidden in her kitchen alcove is not the only problem for her. Dr. Paymaster, an elderly family doctor, cannot cure Roshan's chronic illness, and Sohrab, who ran away from home after a quarrel with Gustad, refuses to return home. So Dilnavaz decides to take the matters into her own hands. Initially skeptical but eager for solution, she enlists the help of Miss Kutpitia. It is ironical that her participation in supernatural rituals led by Miss Kutpitia is a 'reasonable' approach to the complicated situation. Black magic is a transgressive mode of practice which challenges religious norms in the Zoroastrian community. The first scene of the novel starts with Gustad's prayer for Ahura Mazda, the God of Zoroastrianism. But the secret practice enables the female characters to step out of their expected roles in order to find ways of coping with the limiting circumstances. The rituals are supposed to be everyday practice. At one point Miss Kutpitia chides Dilnavaz for being impatient: "You want a miracle or what? You want Seem-Salamay Foofoo and Abracadabra? Then go to a magician" (Mistry 1992: 150). The materials needed for the practice are readily available: limes, nail clippings, chillies, spices, alum, lizard, etc. The mode of ritual is two-track: one is for curing Roshan's illness and the other is bringing Sohrab back home. Whether it is a coincidence or not, Roshan recovers from her illness after a few experiments. To realize her son's return, Dilnavaz has to exploit the halfwit Tehmul in collusion with Kutpitia. Making him suffer for the sake of

her son is out of her character. She feels an intense loathing for herself, but she carries out the callous, disgusting and dangerous ritual. After a series of failures, she insists on the implementation of a “final remedy” that Miss Kutpitia is reluctant to risk, warning: “Terrible things could happen” (Mistry 1992: 275). The ensuing ludicrous and contemptible ritual has a significant impact on the plot beyond the constraints of family and community.

In spite of its dire consequences, the transgressive act has a positive influence on the development and transformation of female characters. They are enabled to avoid being confined to the recesses, a subordinate position in the community of Parsis, and gain a new sense of self. Dilnavaz proves to be definitely not an adjunct or lieutenant of her husband. Miss Kutpitia owes her coming-out to the symbolic power of fire<sup>73</sup>, the metonymy of Zoroastrianism. The accidental fire releases her from a life of lonely and miserable seclusion, destroying the shackles of the past. The fire guts only the locked rooms previously occupied by Farad and his father, and she reads the message of the benign fire. It produces the effect of enabling her to overcome her closeted history that has kept her in a state of isolation and abjection for decades. Therefore, her character is developed beyond an initial impression of her as an older, crankier version of Tehmina in *Tales From Firozsha Baag* whose cataracts and related strange behaviour cause social ostracism and alienation. Miss Kutpitia’s faith in supernatural magic gives her the confidence and answers that she needs to cope with her grief and realize the appropriate time to let the past go. Finally she reaches out to people and enjoy their sympathy since she no longer has to protect herself from their gaze. She is elated at the prospect of cleaning up the mess and being on her own with the help of others (Mistry 1992: 291).

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<sup>73</sup> In the Zoroastrian context, the metaphor of fire is different from Sita’s trial by fire as a test of purity in the Hindu context. The fire for Miss Kutpitia is not a test of a woman’s chastity and devotion but instead helps clean up the mess from the past, raising the possibility of renewal.

In view of these implications, the rituals are neither what Ekelund (1995: 12) calls a “diversion” nor what Bharucha (1996: 139) calls a “mere manifestation of women’s irrational nature.” They both discount the fact that female bonding arising from the rituals forges a powerful subculture of affiliation and solidarity that enables them to interrogate the hegemonic narrative and reinscribe power relations. Contrary to Bharucha’s argument, the female characters are not hapless spectators or passive recipients of the outcome. The deeper Gustad gets mired in the financial scam and conspiracy, the more risk the duo are willing to take in black magic. Their transgressive practice causes a chain of events, subverting the main narrative led by Gustad. The main plot and a subplot are completely reversed when Miss Kutpitia’s warning of grave consequences materializes in the form of Tehmul’s death, the funeral rite, and the destruction of the Parsi community wall. It is Gustad who helplessly watches a crisis unfold in the world that would never be the same. Thanks in part to the unexpected effects of their supernatural experiment, Gustad comes to shed what Ekelund (1995: 14) calls his “stern patriarchal armour” to reveal the warmth of humanity inside. He used to scorn Miss Kutpitia’s superstitious proclivity and erratic personality, but he recognizes her as a respectable neighbour and he is willing to help the elderly woman to clean up her flat. The patriarch who was once critical of women’s bonding and irrational behaviour is now on their side. The process of female subculture and man’s recognition illustrates how structural constraints surrounding women can be overcome.

The consequences of the female shenanigan also empower Gustad to emerge from the darkness and nostalgia of the past and come to grips with the problem-fraught present. The fact that the blackout paper is not removed from his house until the end of the novel illustrates Gustad’s inability to embrace the present as it is, rather than his laziness or Dilnavaz’s dependence upon him to remove it. The blackout paper, the vestige of wars, symbolizes a limbo

where time is frozen or does not move forward properly. His preoccupation with his nostalgic memories of the past as well as his son's success is a form of escape from—or resistance to—the present riddled with barriers. On the last page of the novel, he plucks up the courage to remove the blackout paper from the windows and ventilators: “As the first sheet tore away, a frightened moth flew out and circled the room” (Mistry 1992: 339). In Roy's *The God of Small Things*, the moth symbolizes despair or the legacy of colonialism because of the Anglophile Pappachi's failure to get recognition for discovering a new species of moth. In *Such a Long Journey*, the frightened, circling moth may imply “the predicament of frail, fragile man caught in the web of flux and illusion struggling to complete the endless cycles of his karma” (Ramachandra 1994: 30). However, I would like to construe Gustad's decision to strip away the blackout paper as the will to get over the past riddled with harsh postcolonial experience. Although he still feels vulnerable he resolves to take the action that he has avoided for nine years since India's abject defeat to China. Facing up to the moth can be seen as a small but significant step toward terminating the seemingly endless repetition of the past for a better future.

### **Crossing Boundaries**

Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* show how transgressive sex empowers female characters to challenge the boundaries, redefine human relations, and reinscribe the dominant discourse. Vina is one of the most free-spirited female characters Rushdie has ever created. The hegemonic idea of sex goes against her grain. She says: “Sex is trivial, like blowing your nose” (Rushdie 2000: 323). She rejects a form of sexuality that does not operate in her interests. Her pursuit of autonomous sexuality rather than a passive or docile one has a lot to do with gender and power. Sexual freedom enables her to be a “fiery,

witty speaker on behalf of women's rights and against the sloppy imperium of men" (Rushdie 2000: 394). It is interesting to explore why the conventions of love and sex become anathema to Vina. The main reason she challenges the traditional structures of marriage, family, society, and nation is because her world had been impoverished because of such institutions. Her mixed-race background, early orphaning, loveless childhood, and a deep-seated sense of rejection and exile combine to make her realize the injustices and cruelties of institutional relations. Unlike in the case of Boonyi and her female kin in *Shalimar the Clown*, the frequent change of her name from Shetty, Poe, Egiptus, to Doodhwala does not help produce counter-hegemonic agency because a new identity is imposed upon her, not chosen by her. Helen, her biological mother, is a counterpoint to Vina. Helen is crushed beneath the façade of the adult she had been forced by necessity to become, and fails to convert the abjection into a mode of agency. She takes to drink and pills, stricken with debt, after her homosexual husband leaves her and three daughters. Music is the only outlet for the othered and silenced Helen's frustration. She would secretly swing her hips to the R&B music which her second husband calls the devil's boogie. She kills her whole family except Vina who loves to sing to be a part of sound, not silence. She tells Vina to "follow your star, honey, don't get sidetracked by anyone or anything... Not like me" (Rushdie 2000: 106).

As part of efforts to be free from the painful memory of her childhood, Vina refuses a captivity of human relations. She appropriates rock and roll in a counter-hegemonic manner in the postcolonial context. Along with free sex, rock and roll represents the anti-war or counter-culture movements in the West, but Rushdie (2000: 378) argues that just as England can no longer lay exclusive claim to the English language, so America is no longer the sole owner of rock and roll. Here is an alternative history of pop music:

When the slaves came across the sea and were forbidden to use their drums... they listened to the music of the Irish slave drivers, the three-chord Celtic folk songs, and turned it into the blues. And after the end of slavery they got their drums back and that was r&b, and white kids took that from them and added amplification and that was the birth of rock 'n' roll. Which went back across the ocean to England and Europe and got transformed by the Beatles... and that stereo mutation came back to America and became VTO et cetera. (Rushdie 2000: 545)

It is important to note that Vina's perceived debauched activities—drugs, booze, cigarettes, sexual aggression, abortion, etc.—ironically contribute to her appropriation of alternative methods such as ayurveda<sup>74</sup>, vegetarianism, and natural Indian birth control (Rushdie 2000: 332, 334). For instance, having misused Western-style abortion as a birth control technique she becomes barren. However, she does not feel guilty or useless because she does not regard her inability to give birth to children as her failure. She does not think that producing children is one of her duties as a woman. Rather, she dismisses the dominant birth control practice in a way that raises the possibility of countervailing power inscribed upon her body. She denounces Western birth control methods as “the scientific manipulation of women's bodies for men's pleasure” (Rushdie 2000: 226). Instead, she uses Indian-style natural birth control to repossess her own body which is colonized, subjugated, or controlled by the Western medical discourse.

Such sexual freedom and unfettered interrogation of the hegemonic discourse pose a threat to structure keepers and the old guard of purity. Her mysterious death produces the subversive political effect of enabling her to transcend “all frontiers: of race, skin, religion, language, history, nation, and class,” causing fear of women's free expression of autonomous sexuality (Rushdie 2000: 480):

In some countries there are generals and clerics who, alarmed by the Vina phenomenon, by its otherness and globality, seek to shut it down, issuing commands and threats. These prove useless. Inspissated women in sexually

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<sup>74</sup> Ayurveda, or long-life science, is a system of traditional medicine developed over thousands of years in India.

segregated societies cast off their veils, the soldiers of oppression lay down their guns... Vina has blown down the walls, and this has made her dangerous.

However, her success cannot avoid the aporia of transgressive desire. Is she really a free individual, not a repository or product of the history of sex? Or is she a prisoner of her own desire? How can she be completely free if she negotiates and engages the discourse of sex or sexuality even if she refuses to be confined to the institution of marriage? While Vina refuses to be a culturally-generated human automation, a mere product of history, she does not deny the existence of institutional human relations *per se*. She refuses to be tied down by marriage, but finally agrees to marry Ormus. While she promises to spend the rest of her life with him because she loves him, she makes sure that he does not ask for high fidelity because she is a “lo-fi kind of girl” (Rushdie 2000: 412). Her ambivalent position illustrates that she does not want to foreclose the possibility of revising or reinscribing the existing system. The text shows that Vina escapes and transforms the given relation of power, but it is not an escape from the structure of power relation *per se*.

In *The God of Small Things*, the laws of love strictly governed by family and society are repeatedly transgressed by subversive sexual desire. As Janet Thormann (2003: 300) points out, the novel is a radical project to resist and “undermine the laws of social exchange, what the narrator in a repeated refrain calls ‘the Love Laws... That lay down who should be loved. And how much.’” Roy’s novel explores two different sexual transgressions of taboos in a Syrian Christian family. Interestingly, both cases are female-led, not to say female-dominated. Both Ammu and Rahel return home divorced and make forbidden love to their partners in defiance of the dominant order. Ammu crosses caste lines to have sex with Velutha, and her daughter Rahel initiates incest with her twin brother Estha some two decades after their mother’s fatal love affair. Their acts are not simply to be conceived of as physical sexual exchanges. More than that, the

sexual transgressions initiated by Ammu and Rahel interrogate and subvert the binary opposition of master/slave and self/other, challenging the hegemonic system of scrutiny as to who will love whom and how, which is aimed at a systemic purging of transgressive desire seen to imperil normalcy or order.

Ammu and Chacko, sister and brother, are counterpointed to illustrate double standards for men and women with regard to gender and sexuality in patriarchal and misogynistic India. The gendered discrimination shows how Ammu is constructed as a subaltern other in a male chauvinist society where such issues as education, marriage, and inheritance right detach women from the sources of power. Chacko, who eventually emigrates to Canada, studies at Oxford as a Rhodes scholar. He is so proud of his Oxford education that he hangs his Balliol oar on the factory wall. In spite of his façade as a self-styled Marxist sympathizer, Chacko does not want to see any change to the status quo. He is resigned to the fate of the colonized and invaded as “Prisoners of War” who adore “our conquerors and despise ourselves” (Roy 1997: 53). In contrast, Ammu receives limited education and the only way she can escape from the small village of Ayemenem for a change is to marry. In Indian society marriage is usually determined by socially accepted norms like religion, caste, and class. However, both Chacko and Ammu choose a spouse instead of accepting traditional arranged marriage. They marry outside the family religion of Syrian Christianity, get divorced and return home. But their status is diametrically opposed. Chacko’s marriage to a white British woman raises his status while Ammu’s marriage to a Hindu lowers hers. Margaret remains Chacko’s proud trophy even after they divorce, but Ammu is stigmatized as a divorcee, occupying an almost bottom rung in the hierarchy. Patriarchal oppression also combines with economic oppression to entrap her. Her Hindu husband forces her to comply with his white boss’s demand for sexual services in order to



maintain his job. She returns to her unwelcoming parents after divorce, and her Anglophile father does not trust her story because it is unthinkable that “an Englishman, any Englishman, would covet another man’s wife” (Roy 1997: 42). After their father’s death, Chacko takes over the family house, the Plymouth, and his mother’s pickle factory, relegating her to ‘sleeping partner’ in business. He borrows heavily from the bank by mortgaging the family land and assets to run the factor. In contrast, Ammu has no inheritance rights as a daughter, claiming nothing. Chacko’s quip “What’s yours is mine and what’s mine is also mine” (Roy 1997: 57) epitomizes the injustice of patriarchal economic oppression.

The repetition of female-led sexual transgression over two generations should be understood against this context, so it is possible to explore how Ammu and Rahel impugn the hegemonic system differently. In a sense, Ammu gets a second chance through her daughter as transgression of one generation carries on to the next. In contrast with Ammu and Chacko, conventional gender roles are reversed for her twin children. They challenge the binarisms, stereotypes and contradictions exemplified by the previous generation of Ammu and Chacko. As Friedman (2005: 251) points out, Estha is obedient, silent, neat, and housebound whereas Rahel is rebellious, loud, messy, and world-traveling. Estha is returned to his father then returned *back* to Ayemenem, only to occupy “very little space in the world” (Roy 1997: 11). But Rahel goes out into the world, from the little village of Ayemenem in Kerala to Delhi then to America after her marriage. As Ahmad (2006: 37) says, “The leaving of the family home and the sowing of the wild oats endows her with the autonomous self that would have been denied to her...in the stifling world of the provincial, caste-bound gentility of her family.” Like her mother she divorces, but it is entirely her own choice. Larry McCaslin, her American husband, treats her like a precious gift, but she cannot resist the call of her traumatized twin back home. As soon as she

hears that Estha had returned home, she returns, exactly the same age as her mother was when she died: “Thirty-one. Not old. Not young. But a viable die-able age” (Roy 1997: 3).

Since I dwelled on the significance of Rahel’s incest with Estha in Chapter I, I now focus on the ways in which the systems of patriarchy and caste oppress Ammu and Velutha and the ways they respond to them. As Friedman (2005: 254) argues, Roy’s novel is a “political allegory of both Kerala<sup>75</sup> and the nation state” which fail to address the sufferings of women<sup>76</sup> and Dalits. The events of 1969 in the text expose the violence of patriarchy and the caste system in Kerala, as well as the hegemonic discourse of gender and sexuality that clings to outmoded traditions. Chakco’s view that all of their problems stem from British imperialism does not make sense, given that such local issues as patriarchy, caste, and land reform<sup>77</sup> are as harmful as the effects of colonialism and global capitalism. The persistence of caste politics is ironic in view of the Syrian Christian family’s outraged response to their violation of Hindu laws.<sup>78</sup> Traditional Hindu ethics

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<sup>75</sup> The Indian state of Kerala is often cited as an exemplary model for India and the developing world. In “China and India,” *The Argumentative Indian*, Amartya Sen praises the achievements of Kerala which combines democratic participation with a radical social commitment, compared with any other Indian state and most Chinese provinces.

<sup>76</sup> Friedman (2005: 255) argues that despite the highest literacy rate for women and many other indicators of a higher status for women in all of India, Kerala is a gender backwater, where women have little choice about marriage and property and where being divorced is a major family disgrace. Kalyani, the submissive wife of Commrade Pillai, is a typical example in Roy’s novel. In a stark contrast with Ammu, she, the object of male sexual desire, dutifully serves food for her husband and visitors.

<sup>77</sup> According to Comfort (2008: 18), Kerala has a bad record for land reform. After the Communist Party was elected a major land reform bill became law in 1959. But it was overturned when the Communists lost power a few months later. It was not until 1969 that major land reform was instituted again. The Communist Party is criticized for playing the “caste card” to win votes from lower caste workers and unions but blocking the advancement of the Dalits. In the 1970s, however, social tensions, coupled with caste-based violence and the awakening of lower caste workers, led to them being united and asserting their political and social rights. Citing the example of the state of Uttar Pradesh, Novy Kapadia (1998: 132) argues that it is an indication of the rise of the Dalits that the Bahujan Samaj Party won 67 of the 428 Uttar Pradesh Assembly seats and formed a coalition government with the Bharatiya Janta Party in India’s most populous state.

<sup>78</sup> As Friedman (2005: 255) points out, Syrian Christians in Kerala, descendents of the original Brahmin converts, “retain the aura of the upper castes and assume the prohibitions against caste pollution as their own.” Comfort (2008: 4) explains that Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism were established in Kerala as a result of the trading networks with the Middle East. Integrated into a social order of caste and rank defined by Hinduism, both Christians and Muslims recognized caste as markers of social status. Among Christians, there is a subcategory: Syrian Christians, Latin Catholics, and Lower Caste Christians. This is why in spite of the Dalits’ conversion into

seem to be the norm in Syrian Christians' daily life in which double standards of sexual morality stand in stark contrast: one for the patriarch, the other for the ruled. The self-contradictory character of Chacko—an "Oxford avatar of the old zamindar mentality" (Roy 1997: 65) with a Marxist mind and feudal libido—is exempt from caste laws at home. His mother even arranges a private entrance to the house so that "Man's Needs" can be discreetly taken care of (Roy 1997: 160). The arrangement facilitates Chacko's sexual and economic exploitation of female factory workers. While Chacko's loveless promiscuity is tolerated, Ammu is guarded from the attention of men. She is supposed to live out what Friedman (2005: 255) calls a "modern form of *sati*," like that of traditional Hindu widows, a "sexual status of living death." It is Chacko who throws her out for the sake of family honour after her love affair with the Pariah is discovered and Sophie is found dead. Even the police refuse to take a statement from her, saying that prostitutes or their illegitimate children have no rights to testify. Her violation of the laws governing human relations brings about exile in penury and miserable death. Roy's textual exposure of these double standards charges the state of Kerala with hypocrisy in touting its progressive stand on gender.

Socio-political inequality within female sex is as serious as the lack of equal opportunity between the sexes. Baby Kochamma, Ammu's spinster aunt, does not try to understand the sufferings of fellow women in a lower rung. By practicing condescending abstinence, she attempts to regulate other women's needs and desires from the moral high ground. For her, "transgressive desire is as sterile as the rocks for her 'scree bed'" which no one is interested to know about (Lanone 2002: 130). Her perverse behaviour does not stem from "motiveless

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Christianity, they are made to "have separate churches, with separate services, and separate priests" (Roy 1997: 74).

malignity,”<sup>79</sup> but it is based on relations of power and knowledge. The Western cultural forms of religion and education play a vital role in shaping her as a hypocritical oppressor of fellow natives. In her youth she flouted traditional social norms for the sake of love. She was willing to give up everything and entered a Catholic convent in pursuit of Father Mulligan. As she had little prospect of marriage due to the scandal, her father, Reverend E. John Ipe, sent her to study a non-degree course at the University of Rochester in America. The problem is that her own experience of oppression does not produce what Fanon (2004: 16) calls a “stimulant” for “getting ready to do the right thing.” Instead, her failure to escape the norms and the drive to mimicry of Western culture make her a sadistic guardian of the hegemonic system who executes moral injunctions and violence. After returning home with a certificate in ornamental gardening, she stands at the forefront of weeding out those who dare to violate the laws she had once transgressed, “in the way that the unfortunate sometimes dislike the co-unfortunate” (Roy 1997: 45). Her historical experience does not create dynamic transformative energy, and she only vindicates the misery and oppression that she had once tried to escape.

In this regard, she is not simply the antithesis of Ammu or Rahel, but a perverted vision of female freedom. To borrow Fanon’s words (2004: 16), Baby Kochamma acts as if she is an oppressed person “who is forever dreaming of becoming the persecutor.” She returns as the ultimate colonizer, more patriarchal than men and whiter than white people. Back home she re-establishes order and reasserts a traditional authority as if to compensate for her inferior status as a woman who has little prospect of marriage or inheritance in spite of her education abroad. She is a typical figure of domination who takes herself as the norm of civilization (this is because of her foreign education). A manipulative and vindictive spinster armed with ‘upright’ morality, she

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<sup>79</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge used the phrase to explain Iago’s derivation of pleasure in seeing others suffer from pain and despair in *Othello*. It was endorsed by generations of literary critics before the text was critically deconstructed in terms of class, race, gender, and sexuality.

trivializes the experiences and ideas of the underprivileged like Ammu, Velutha, and the twins. Reinforced by the hegemonic discourse of patriarchy, caste, and race, Baby Kochamma's sense of social and cultural bounds is fixed and fanatic, leaving open no possibility of negotiation. An Untouchable smell is unbearable to her who loves an Irish-Jesuit smell. Full of jealousy and hatred, she does not hesitate to capitalize on the ruling discourse and banish those who are weaker than she is if the need arises. Her aversion to desire or any attempt to fulfill it is embodied in the form of misogyny or hostility toward woman, which justifies her persecution of her divorced niece Ammu who quarrels with a fate that she herself had graciously accepted: "the fate of the wretched Man-less woman" (Roy 1997: 45). Her intolerance and disavowal of difference are an example of what Bhabha (2004: 13) calls "the dangers of the fixity and fetishism of identities." Such fetishistic, essentialized, and deterministic subjectivity deprives her of positive human agency and the will to resistance.

Baby Kochamma puts up the façade of a foreign-educated pedant, but her moral discourse belies only the repressed, dystopic side of subjectivity. Her frustrated desire deteriorates into hypocritical double-thinking and narcissistic fetishism. As Rahel aptly observes, her grandaunt is living her life backwards: "As a young woman she had renounced the material world, and now, as an old one, she seem[s] to embrace it" (Roy 1997: 22). In this regard, her aging groomed body is wasteful, irrational, repugnant, and obsessive. At the age of 83, she wears a lot of jewelry, starts to wear makeup, and has her hair dyed coal-black. Besides, the image of foot fetishism is a trope to suggest her retrogression from a rebellious daughter in pursuit of star-crossed love into a perverse oppressor and bigot who is complicit with the enforcement of a hierarchy of subordination and victimization. Being a diabetic, "Every night she cream[s] her feet with real cream and pushed back the cuticles on her toe-nails" (Roy 1997: 27). But her

practice carries more than preventive medical purpose, making us realize what she feels about her sexuality. She is so proud of her tiny manicured feet that she makes fun of the large feet of everyone who visits her house. Her childlike sexuality represents a grotesque image of femininity and a lack of sexual autonomy. Her body is the more grotesque not just because of her old age, but because it is bound by her obsessive upkeep and well ensconced within the hegemonic structure. Her everyday practice for catharsis is to write “*I love you I love you*” to Father Mulligan. She still believes that her body is something to be offered as a gift to the already dead Western priest for whom she had a crush as a teenage girl. Yet it is nothing but her fantasy of wasted romance or sexual submissiveness without passion. Her self-styled vindication stems from a fictive sense of unitary selfhood rather than being factored into a socio-cultural context. To that end, she alters the past to fit her present needs. She deceives herself into believing that “her unconsummated love for Father Mulligan had been entirely due to her restraint and her determination to do the right thing” (Roy 1997: 45). His death, which neutralizes his rejection of her and perpetuates her arbitrary memory of him, makes her believe that her love is complete.

The way the estate in Ayemenem is managed highlights Baby Kochamma’s passivity and the lack of will to resistance in the economic context:

After Paradise Pickles closed down, some rice-fields were sold (along with their mortgages) to pay off the bank loans. More were sold to keep the family in food and clothes. By the time Chacko emigrated to Canada, the family’s only income came from the rubber estate that adjoined the Ayemenem House and the few coconut trees in the compound. This was what Baby Kochamma and Kochu Maria lived off after everybody else had died, or been Returned. (Roy 1997: 281)

Such a parasitic image coalesces with the decay of the family house and its garden which Baby Kochamma is in charge of maintaining. Filth “clotted every crevice and clung to the windowpanes” (Roy 1997: 88). She also abandons the garden after more than 50 years of

‘relentless’ attention in order to watch satellite TV all day. All she does in her twilight years is to “presid[e] over the world in her drawing room on satellite TV” watching American sports, soap operas, or news (Roy 1997: 27). Her couch potato life is a trope to suggest not only the pervasiveness of neocolonial cultural hegemony but also her lack of will to resistance and change.

In contrast, female desire pulsing through Ammu empowers her to transgress the laws governing her body. What initially plays out in Ammu is the conflict between woman as mother and daughter, regulated by social norms, and woman as a subject of desire accommodating her own *jouissance*. The hegemonic discourse of norms is an obstacle to the reconciliation with her desiring body. She has to choose whether to satisfy the needs of her family or live for her own needs. This is “an unmixable mix. The infinite tenderness of motherhood and the reckless rage of a suicide bomber” (Roy 1997: 44). In the end, however, she refuses to be confined to her essentialist gender role and decides to hazard an affair with Velutha, the Untouchable. Her cross-caste sex shows how it is possible to appropriate the corporeality of the body as an essentialist strategy for impugning and inverting the hegemonic discourse of norms. Her refusal to give up on sexual desire enables her to transgress and reinscribe the rules and norms that perpetuate the vicious cycle of domination and submission.

Nevertheless, there is a debate about whether Roy valorizes sexuality or erotic desire as an acceptable politics. Ahmad (2006: 36) characterizes her preoccupation with sexuality as indulging in the theme of the privatization of both pleasure and politics:

...this phallogentric utopia is of course all the more pleasurable if partners in it transgress such boundaries as those of class and caste... it(discourse of pleasure) also dismisses the actually constituted field of politics as either irrelevant or a zone of bad faith.

He even suggests that Roy was looking for the most marketable formula of sexuality in line with the Western literary tradition, and sexual transgression is profoundly capitalist politics. Given his

strong cynicism, it is possible to ask the following questions: Can sexual transgression alter power relations? Can it open the way for transformation even if it does not depart from the system? Can it achieve more than the effect of private transgressive performance? The miserable end of Ammu and Velutha's love affair implies that there is no actual change in the existing power structure after all. The cost of their sex is death. It is as if the sexual outlaws are preordained to suffer death or living death, achieving nothing more than fleeting moments of sexual pleasure. They seem to be what Butler (1997: 27) calls "objects marked for death" as neither can avoid the outcome dictated by disciplinary power.

In defence of Ammu's alleged indulgence in an erotic utopia, however, Bose (1998: 69) argues that it is "neither too personal nor too utopic for political consideration." In fact, the novel revalorizes sexual transgression as a strategy of interrogating and subverting the nexus of power and knowledge (as shown in Ammu's appropriation of the act of sniffing in a sexual manner to dispute Margaret). Ammu suffers familial, economic, and social control in the hands of men or their henchmen, and she fights hard to create an autonomous self. She inverts the male tendency to dominate in sexual relationships by taking the initiative in breaking the "Love Laws," rather than waiting for Prince Charming to come and awaken her repressed sexuality like a Sleeping Beauty as Ahmad (2006: 36) contends. The lovers' deaths—seemingly the obverse of jouissance—ironically hint at an anticipatory element of agency in their desire for change and transformation. In consideration of the recursive narrative structure as discussed in Chapter I, Ammu and Velutha who are fellow sufferers and fighters perhaps "hasten to assume death in order to avoid it" to appropriate Zizek's words (2003: 76), in anticipation of subverting the hegemonic structure which would outlive them. Then, their precipitation toward death could be a



drastic strategy of demanding due recognition from the symbolic order<sup>80</sup> which Rahel and Estha are to transgress and reinscribe two decades later through their incest. The redemptive moment finally arrives when “History’s twisted chickens [come] home to roost” (Roy 1997: 283) with the twins’ return as sexual outlaws. In this context of the recurrent strategic order, a personal politics of atavistic transgressive desire—led by mother and daughter over two generations—cannot be dismissed as irrelevant to a political empowerment campaign which aims to reconceptualize and reinscribe hegemonic power relations for the sake of the oppressed.

Given that the physical union between Ammu and Velutha does not come into being in a social and political vacuum, it needs to be contextualized in connection with their resistance to the discursive formation of social norms. As Bose (1998: 66), quoting Deleuze, writes:

...the process of (sexual) desiring is not confined to being a personal politics because it does not enact itself in isolation; this is so not even simply because it desires (an)other, but because it involves an entire set of social codes in its process of (re)construction.

As what she seeks from him is not merely sexual gratification or an indulgence, Ammu’s “fatal attraction” to the Untouchable should not be dismissed as mysterious or arbitrary, as Ahmad (2006: 39) argues. So it is important to explore what makes Ammu willing to take the risk of bringing shame and even death upon them by having a sexual affair with the Untouchable. Velutha is a gifted young man who is a trained carpenter and has a way with machines. As Ammu’s mother says, if he had not been a Dalit he could have become an engineer. Unlike his illiterate crippled brother Kuttappen, he is not a “good, safe Paravan” who accepts things the way they are. He is a Marxist union member, but he is resented and discriminated at her pickle

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<sup>80</sup> Two primary examples are the Christian church and the Communist Party which deny due rights to Velutha. Velutha’s grandfather converted to Anglicanism, but the church discriminates against the Untouchables. Velutha’s call for help from Comrade Pillai is rejected because the latter, a grass-roots communist leader, endorses social discrimination against the Dalits. The two systems represent anti-human institutions which prevent justice and equity in human relations. Roy satirically calls the communist movement a “cocktail revolution. A heady mix of Eastern Marxism and orthodox Hinduism, spiked with a shot of democracy” (1997: 67).

factory by Touchable workers who put caste ahead of ability. His frustration with structural constraints finds an echo in Ammu's rage against the circumstances surrounding her life as a divorcee. At some point, Velutha tries to hate Ammu, telling himself that she is one of the oppressors. But it turns out to be otherwise. Going through patriarchal oppression from her father, husband, and brother in her life, Ammu also develops "a lofty sense of injustice and the mulish, reckless streak that develops in Someone Small who has been bullied all their lives by Someone Big" (Roy 1997: 181-182). She is supportive of Velutha's hardcore Communist politics and sees in his silent anger against the "smug, ordered world" (Roy 1997: 176) a possibility of relating to his ideology and creative power, not just his body. It is through this sense of a shared rage that she dares to cross boundaries "to a better, happier place... like an insect following a chemical trail" (Roy 1997: 332) which raises a fundamental question about the hegemonic system. The boundaries between public and private spheres are blurred in the History House, their secret meeting place, where the history of colonialism and private desire collide. A sense of fragile resistance and the inevitability of nullity and death, denounced by Ahmad, ironically work to demonstrate that they do not attempt to colonize each other as the object of desire for phallic ecstasy, and they are not inclined to enforce the domination or subjugation to which they themselves have been subjected as the marginalized in society.

Ammu's drive to sovereign intimacy with Velutha cannot simply be said to be the outcome of impulse because her transgressive desire is intervened and mediated by history and ideology. It is never a case of rape by Velutha, as Baby Kochamma charges in order to cover up the shame at the cross-caste affair. It emerges that what is at stake is not the simple repression of sexuality, but the hegemonic control and regulation of the marginalized. When Ammu's mother finds out about the scandal her reaction is vitriolic. As Indian women are believed to belong to

their fathers, husbands, and sons according to the stages in their lives, Ammu's sexual affair flabbergasts her mother, who is the victim of cruel patriarchal violence but ironically the custodian of patriarchy. With the help of Baby Kochamma and Kochu Maria, she locks Ammu up in her bedroom "like the family lunatic in a medieval household" (Roy 1997: 252). The Ammu-Velutha relationship can be seen as a dialogic intertextual parody of the Miranda-Caliban relationship in *The Tempest*, one of the canonical English literary works mentioned in the novel. Like Velutha, the Untouchable who does not stand for the norm, Caliban, a native inhabitant, is represented as a beastly and foul creature who attempts to rape virginal Miranda, a white European woman. Mammachi's attitude toward Velutha can be analogous to what M. Mannoni calls the "Prospero Complex"<sup>81</sup> (Fanon 2008: 80). Her fear of transgression stems from the fact that it inverts the master/slavery distinction, disturbing the hegemonic order of human relations. Since it is believed that Velutha violates her daughter's modesty, she reminds him that he is nothing but a foul "pariah dog" and threatens to have him castrated and killed if he ever comes near her house (Roy 1997: 284).

The contradictory status of a high-caste divorcee provides Ammu with a double identity as oppressor and victim. But her sexual desire serves to challenge such ascribed identities. Before a critical moment of cross-caste sex arrives, signs of anomaly or fissure emerge in the dominant discourse of history: "Madness slink[s] in through a chink in History" for Velutha (Roy 1997: 214) and "History [i]s wrong-footed, caught off guard" for Ammu (Roy 1997: 176). Ammu's worry about madness—due to the alleged high incidence of insanity among Syrian Christians—is embodied in her "restless, untamed, feral" desire to love a man she is forbidden to love. Such anomaly or slippage as transgressive desire and madness contributes to bringing about

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<sup>81</sup> Fanon sees the complex as "the sum of those unconscious neurotic tendencies that delineate at the same time the 'picture' of the paternalist colonial and the portrait of 'the racist whose daughter has suffered an [imaginary] attempted rape at the hands of an inferior being.'"

a different but related type of ‘revolution’ which longs for the exchange of power at the intersubjective level, not just physical exchange. Transgressive desire makes hegemonic ‘History’ slip up finally in Chapter 21 of the novel, titled “The Cost of Living.” In this regard, it is significant to note that uncontrollable personal desire should not be underrated in comparison with political action when it comes to challenging a hegemonic power differential.

### **Vulture, Vampire, Cannibal**

As Alladi Uma (1989: 18) argues, male writers may create roles for Indian women in their fiction that reflect their own limited and hierarchical perspectives as well as patriarchal attitudes. Indeed, there are reductive and objectifying elements in the portrayal of female characters in the works of Mistry and Rushdie. The metaphor of vulture, vampire, cannibal, or monster is often invoked to describe them when they are viewed as transgressing social norms or laws. The binary depictions are found in Alamai the “domestic vulture” in *Such a Long Journey*, Behroze the “succubus” in *Tales From Ferozsha Baag*, Ayesha the “whore” and Zeeny the “cannibal” in *The Satanic Verses*, Sufiya the “beast” in *Shame*, and Vina the promiscuous in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. However, the authors’ handling of these female characters shows that such binarism can be appropriated as a critical tool for challenging and subverting male-dominated power relations, so that they can emerge as admirable, distinct, and sometimes powerful individuals. The contrast of siblings in *Shame* is effective in focusing the spotlight on the oppression of women in the Third World. As I have argued in Chapter I, Sufiya, who is demonized as a beastly murderer, successfully transforms the abjection into a mode of agency by drawing on sexuality, violence, and madness from the subaltern position. In contrast, the suicide of Sufiya’s favoured beautiful sister Good News Hyder, following her endless production of girls,

highlights the plight of women in a male-dominated patriarchal society. As Ball (2003: 138) argues, “This image of grotesque excess...enables a vivid satiric admonishment of patriarchal ambition fearsomely imposed on the functional female body.” These characters illustrate that the binary opposition can be strategically utilized as a counter-hegemonic tool for interrogating the framework of discursive categorization and stratification.

Rushdie (2003: 375) argues that in real life he comes from an Indian family dominated by women, “few of whom resemble the stereotype of the demure, self-effacing Indian woman.” As a result he has “repeatedly sought to create female characters as rich and powerful as” those he has known. Some of his female characters are capable, intelligent and opinionated, and he instantiates and exposes the problems and mechanisms of patriarchy or male-dominated society through them. However, Cundy (1993: 15) argues that his female characters are portrayed in extreme terms as feminized or demonized. Indeed, Rushdie often pushes the portrayal of women to the limits. They are either loving or dangerous, one thing or another. The butterfly girl Ayesha in *The Satanic Verses* is split between the binary images of religious virgin and whore. Her dual identity connects with the Prophet’s wife Ayesha and the namesake whore in a brothel where a group of prostitutes impersonate the wives of Muhammad to excite clients. Chari (1994: 313-314) argues that the monstrous image of Ayesha who chews on delicate butterflies is analogous to that of a vampire sucking human blood. At the same time, the act of swallowing the butterflies symbolizes an enactment of the sexual act, with the landlord Mizra Akhtar becoming the voyeuristic partner. Her seductive, sexualized body is portrayed as bewitching Akhtar to enter her libidinous body. Similarly, the identity of female characters in *Shame* is caught up between the binary opposition of virgin and monster. Sufiya is a “virgin who is really a vampire, the irresistible temptress who seduces men in order to kill them, not an object of male manipulation

but a devourer of hapless man” (Ahmad 1992: 148). This dichotomy is invoked to describe Omar’s three mothers too. They used to be innocent young women cloistered in Nishapur, the enormous colonial structure. After their infamous party and pregnancy, the three Shakil sisters seal up the great gate and install the dumbwaiter for isolation. The stiletto blades that lurk lethally inside the dumbwaiter—the only means of access to their labyrinthine stronghold located above the English Cantonment and the native village—symbolize the perverted sexuality of the threesome who become destructive witches.

Although binarism can be appropriated for yet another essentialist discourse, it is acceptable and useful insofar as it is “neutral and descriptive in postcolonialism’s recuperative, decolonizing, and recentering projects” (Ball 2003: 138). His argument is that a binary structure can be utilized to help construct postcolonialism’s simultaneous assertions of difference and syncretism. I agree with Ball’s argument to some extent because such appropriation serves to prove the utility of transgression as a mode of resistance and agency, a strategic step toward the dissolution of the binary opposition such as self and other, subject and object. For instance, Ayesha’s erotic body is used to desecrate the authority of the Islamic religious order and the ruling system. More directly, the femme fatale challenges and subverts patriarchy and feudalism represented by Akhtar, the landlord, who loses his wife and almost everything in the end. Sufiya and Omar’s three mothers also participate in a campaign to destroy the male-dominated system. From a Freudian perspective, the dumbwaiter is the sisters’ fetish, which serves to conceal their lack and castration. Their fetish invests them with the capacity to castrate by means of a vagina dentata which is demonically destructive when they open up to love others. However, there is no male victim who submits and faints for these phallic and fetishized women until the corrupt

dictator Raza Hyder shows up and is brutally killed in the dumbwaiter. The first and last use of contraptions functions to show how power relations are reversed in a radical manner.

Mistry also portrays some of his female characters as active agents who negotiate and engage the world in multiple ways to break out of the given frame. Interestingly, Behroze, a self-assured and independent-spirited female character in Mistry's *Tales From Ferozsha Baag*, is not judged for the way she looks or behaves by men, but by her boyfriend's mother who is afraid of losing control over her son. Jehangir finds her physically attractive, but he also appreciates her straightforward sense of humour, confidence, and their common interest in books and movies. But Mrs. Bulsara is anguished that Behroze's short skirt and thick makeup may displace her as the principal female in her son's life. She tries to simply deny her existence, saying that her son has been trapped by "a flesh-and-blood succubus" (Mistry 2006: 257). However, Behroze—a Parsi girl with a strong sense of personal freedom and independence—is willing to take advantage of her sexuality in defiance of conservative parents, in contrast to Vera and Dolly who are objectified and sexualized by men. Behroze challenges Jehangir to stand up to and separate from his bossy mother by encouraging him to engage in sex. She also wants to take advantage of the chance to transgress her parents' protection of her virginity: "Maybe my parents think we've broken up, and they didn't need to stick around to guard my virginity" (Mistry 2006: 266).

But Arun Mukherjee (1994: 150) criticizes Mistry for portraying female characters in *Such a Long Journey* as victims of sexualization or sexual harassment. Alamai is perhaps Mistry's most demonized female character. Her husband Dinshawji, a halitosis-plagued womanizer nicknamed Casanova of Flora Fountain, describes her as a "domestic vulture," a greedy wife neglectful of his sexual needs. The unappealing portrait of Alamai is set against that of the young typist Laurie, a victim of Dinshawji's unwanted sexual jokes and advances better

known as ‘Eve-teasing’<sup>82</sup> in India. Laurie complains to Gustad about his best friend’s escapades, but Alamai is not given a chance for articulation as a speaking subject. Being the butt of Dinshawji’s joke at his workplace, Alamai is subjected to the hegemonic discourse of sexism. She is accused of defying the standard Indian belief that a wife should sexually satisfy her husband whether she wants it or not. Therefore, by the time she makes her first appearance after more than half of the novel, she has already been essentialized and determined as ‘Xanthippe’ because of our acceptance of her husband’s unflattering description of her. When Gustad sees her for the first time, all he has is a gendered, sexualized view of her whose image had been reinforced during 24 years of his friendship with Dinshawji. The sexualization and othering of Alamai naturalize her as an alienated, detached presence with bizarre and inappropriate behaviour when she arrives at the hospital ward. Therefore, as Ekelund (1995: 8) points out, her ensuing actions are nothing but “a literal fleshing out of the label that has been imposed on her early in the novel.”

However, it is important to note that Mistry utilizes the framework of male gaze to illuminate and impugn the discursive formation of patriarchy and misogyny. Alamai’s choice of

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<sup>82</sup> Sexual harassment of women in crowded and secluded places is a rampant social problem in India. According to the Straits Times, Akshara, a women’s organization, surveyed 5,000 women aged 15 to 55 in Mumbai in 2011 and found that 95 percent of them had been sexually harassed (20 Sept. 2012). The report quotes Akshara’s official as saying that 93 percent of the harassment was verbal while 65 percent involved physical contact, such as touching and groping. In the texts, female characters are even subjected to sexual harassment by the authorities. In *A Fine Balance*, Dina suffers sexual harassment at the hands of lawyers. She goes to the courthouse for legal advice, but a mob of lawyers surround her: “...in the crush, a hand squeezed her bottom, while another passed neatly over her breast” (Mistry 1997: 560). In *The God of Small Things*, Ammu goes to the police station to make a statement, but an officer taps “her breasts with his baton. Gently. Tap, tap. As though he was choosing mangoes from a basket” (Roy 1994: 8). Meanwhile, sexual assaults are often dismissed as mere ‘Eve-teasing’ in India where, according to government figures by the National Crime Records Bureau, a woman is raped every 20 minutes. At a time when I am concluding the dissertation, India is engulfed by outbursts over the death of a young woman from the unspeakable violence of gang rape. On December 16 in 2012, a 23-year-old physiotherapy student was assaulted and gang-raped by five men and a teenager on a moving bus before she was dumped on a highway where they tried to run her over. The incident sparked shockwaves and protests across India, and the victim died of severe multiple injuries on December 29 at a Singapore hospital where she received emergency medical treatment after being airlifted. It prompted the whole country to do much soul-searching about its treatment and portrayal of women.



the quicker one-day option for a Parsi prayer ceremony is denigrated as stingy. Gustad's sarcasm sums up his biased view of her: "Poor Alamai, with her modernistic ideas and her orthodox confusions" (Mistry 1992: 251). Her wailing during the funeral is caricatured as a silly woman who is ignorant of the Parsi tradition<sup>83</sup> calling for staying calm to honour the deceased. Ironically, Gustad's disgust with her frugality and uncontrolled grief shows how badly she needs to transgress the Parsi orthodox tradition to free herself from the constraints of male gaze and patriarchy insisting on a certain acceptable version of a grieving Parsi widow. She cannot be let off from the cast of the "domestic vulture" until Gustad realizes that he might have failed to see her for what she is by demanding what he expects from her. This moment of epiphany serves to question the simple distinction between good and evil, making it necessary to rethink the question of man's authority in relation to woman. As Bhabha (1996: 59) argues, "the very process of authorizing, however hegemonic it may be, in its effectivity or practice, cannot authorize without entertaining an ambivalent relation to the object of its representation, regulation, authorization, marginalization." It suggests that the marginalized like women are likely to remain the object of knowledge and gaze on the part of the authorities were it not for their drastic change of viewpoint. In spite of Gustad's epiphany, Alamai's subjectivity still takes shape in the discursive male gaze as she is not given a proper chance to have her own voice heard.

As it turns out, the authors' use of binarism illustrates both possibilities and limits of interrogating and inverting the hegemonic order. They suggest how female characters try to overcome the limiting circumstances, refusing to be circumscribed by conventions or stereotypes. However, it is debatable how much such binarism can empower female characters in their

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<sup>83</sup> In Parsi tradition, over-lamenting or deep mourning over someone's death is regarded as sinful because by doing so, "one makes the soul of the deceased unhappy because the soul is very happy to proceed to the realm of eternal bliss from this frustrating world" (Kotwal & Boyd 1982: 63).

engagement and negotiation with the dominant structure. In spite of the strategic usefulness of binarism, it does not always produce a positive mode of agency for subject formation. The problem is that if dichotomization becomes essentialist or Manichean in political opposition and resistance it deprives female characters of positive agency or creative energy. Then it poses more of threat to others than producing a mode of strength and self-reliance. As Bhabha (2004: 188) suggests, a Manichaeian division consists of “two zones that are opposed but not in the service of a ‘higher unity.’” Such essentialist binarism runs the risk of undercutting the possibility of female characters’ dynamic agency as they are likely to be sacrificed for the sake of either satiating or obliterating male desire. For example, if the three sisters and Sufiya are “powerful only as monsters, of one sort or another” (Spivak 1989: 83), such determinism is prone to result in the demonization and othering of women, whether as exercisers of capabilities or as oppressed victims. Either way, they are likely to be reduced to the object of male desire or gaze, deprived of opportunities to negotiate a balancing act of transformation as capable individuals. This is why it is necessary to be careful when it comes to the use of binarism or essentialism. If their aim is only construed as killing off men, it would be impossible to differentiate Sufiya’s desire as excess from the three sisters’ desire as lack from a strategic viewpoint.<sup>84</sup>

In *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, vampire is symbolized as tyranny or obsession of love, which does not allow for transgressive desire. Ormus’s pursuit of Vina becomes necrophiliac and vampiric after she leaves him:

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<sup>84</sup> I draw attention to Deleuze’s concept of the body without organs to explain Sufiya’s desire as excess as opposed to the three Shakil sisters’ desire as lack. Deleuze’s understanding of desire as excess rather than as lack is at the core of his persistent attacks on Freud. The body without organs, a matter of endless becoming, is not driven by desire to possess a certain object it lacks. Rather, it is the experimental, accidental, serendipitous, and unpredictable outcome of forces of desire productive in their own right (Thanem and Wallenberg 2010: 7). On the positive side, Rushdie’s novel shows how Sufiya overthrows the Freudian female sexuality represented by Omar’s three mothers, opening up a new interpretation of female desire in a political context.

He was sucking the lifeblood out of living women to keep alive the phantom of the Departed...he felt like Dunyazade, Scheherazade's sister, sitting at the foot of the queen's sleepless bed while she told tall stories to save her life. (Rushdie 2000: 180).

Ormus had successfully 'reverse-colonized' the Western pop music together with Vina to disseminate creative forms of expression against dominant structures of authority, but he later wants to tie her down in the institution of marriage. This kind of obsession symbolizes a loss of dynamic agency or creative energies as his music is increasingly appropriated and homogenized by the uncontrolled expansion of global mass culture and its attendant power. His ten-year celibacy pact with her as a condition for marriage illustrates "an excess of determination; there was something domineering about it, something obdurate" (Rushdie 2000: 429). His dogged pursuit of Vina serves to show how the conventional gender role is reversed with regard to sexuality. In spite of the danger of Manichean demonization, Vina's subject position as nymphomaniac is instrumental in transgressing and redefining cultural boundaries. There is a wide discrepancy between the love she desires and the reality of discursive love. The appropriated metaphor of slut illustrates how Vina abandons the gendered identity that others have imposed upon her. For her, monogamy is a manacle, and fidelity is a chain. Celibacy for Ormus and promiscuity for Vina are a respective metonymy of what they each call love. Her view of the institution of marriage can be summed up in a metaphoric manner: Monogamy is to promiscuity what tyranny is to democracy. As for her passion for sex, she appropriates all the justifications of infidelity which men have long used: take it or leave it, "as if Olive Oyl were to usurp the catchphrase of Popeye the Sailor Man: *I yam what I yam an' that's what I yam*" (Rushdie 2000: 340). For Ormus, trust and responsibility are essential to love. For Vina, however, a love with trust is an oppressive construct. She thinks of trust as a prison and prefers a 'relational' love without trust in which the two can love each other "without selling our souls to

one party or the other while remaining free” (Rushdie 2000: 354). This kind of love clears an alternative discursive space where a love, which attempts to impose order on chaos and meaning on absurdity, can be transformed into a love which “raises us above the limitations of our bodies and gives us free will” (Rushdie 2000: 423).

In *The Satanic Verses*, the metaphor of cannibal or vampire is invoked as a way of appropriating and transforming the hegemonic culture. As Chari (1994: 338-339) argues, Zeeny, an Indian female doctor, pulls Saladin Chamcha<sup>85</sup> back and reinstates him to Indian roots with the power of her sexuality. Cannibalistic consumption is foregrounded as a trope of countermanding the dominant structure of power like uncontrolled consumer capitalism, raising the possibility of fashioning an autonomous self in the framework of an intercultural discourse. Here, we find that the usual gendered binarism between the enticing siren and the malicious cannibal is subverted in the postcolonial context. Zeeny, described as a “siren” tempting Saladin back to his old self, makes it her project to return him to his Indian Muslim roots, and she makes love “like a cannibal” as if he were “her long pork” (Rushdie 2008: 53). Touted as “beautiful vampire,” she succeeds in helping him not to fall into a rootless limbo by ‘devouring’ and reclaiming an Anglicized Saladin. Her cannibalistic image is set against Saladin’s willingness to be a ‘proper’ British citizen and Solanka’s submission to multinational capitalism in America, “the great devourer” (Rushdie 2002: 69). Zeeny is an ambivalent figure—dangerous and powerful as well as loving and comforting. But she acts in politically subversive ways by working locally. Although she is a Westernized modern Indian woman, she is armed with mystical Asian culture and vegetarianism. Saladin’s transformation illustrates the usefulness of

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<sup>85</sup> Rushdie says (2012: 69) he chose the name Chamcha “for its echoes of Kafka’s poor metamorphosed dung beetle, Gregor Samsa, and of Gogol’s scavenger of dead souls, Chichikov. Also for the meaning of the name in Hindustani, literally ‘spoon,’ but colloquially ‘toady’ or ‘sycophant.’”

her subject position, a form of strategic essentialism which is based on irreplaceable cultural roots as well as intercultural ambivalence and contradictions.

The re-situation of Saladin's identity back home in India shows that his erstwhile existence as a British citizen is far from the forgetting of the past or its complete rupture. Saladin once believed himself to be a well-assimilated Indian immigrant, but gets disillusioned because of institutional racism in Thatcherite England, especially after his metamorphosis into a supernatural monster is viewed as if it were the most banal. The figuration of Zeeny as a cannibal has the effect of challenging the returnee to reverse dominant Western cultural practices. Her 'cannibal' sexuality also illustrates the counter-hegemonic process of Saladin's repossession of an Indian identity in a departure from his Anglophile facade symbolized by his estranged English wife Pamela Lovelace. Thanks to Zeeny, Saladin realizes that he had been living in a state of phony peace in England and is able to make a comeback to 'Salahuddin Chamchawala' in his country of origin. It turns out that in spite of his outward change, his heart is still Indian.<sup>86</sup> In contrast with Saladin, his alter ego Gibreel insists on remaining continuous as an 'un-translated man.' He suffers from paranoid schizophrenia and kills himself. Here, one immediate question arises: Why can one overcome the border condition, but the other fails? The shift of the buried homosocial nuance of their bonding to their heterosexual relationships might help explain part of the reason. Their female partners' power of sexuality produces the opposite results. Allie Cone, a white British mountain climber, is determined to "defeat in [Gibreel] this mad, angelic divinity and restore the humanity she loved" (Rushdie 2008: 449). Unlike Zeeny, however, she is not able

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<sup>86</sup> The old song "Mera Joota Hai Japani" sung by Gibreel Farishta as he tumbles from the heavens illustrates the possibility of restoring roots. "O, my shoes are Japanese... These trousers English, if you please. On my head, red Russian hat; my heart's Indian for all that" (Rushdie 2008: 5). Ironically, Gibreel, the proselytizer of reincarnation, resurrection, and transmigration, fails to survive, while Saladin, initially skeptical about metamorphosis requiring a symbolic death, succeeds in returning to his old but new self back home. Gibreel "can neither return to the love of God, nor succeed in replacing it by earthly love" while Saladin is able to return "to his roots" only after he abandons his dream of total transformation into a British citizen (Rushdie 1992: 398).

to save her uprooted lover from confusion or fanaticism although they enjoy perfect sex like dream lovers. The difference is that Zeeny succeeds in helping Saladin reclaim the Indian identity he had lost while Allie fails to do so.

This chapter has focused on subversive practices on the part of female characters who are often othered and marginalized in the Indian context because of persistent structural problems such as patriarchy, misogyny, and imperialism. Postcolonial regimes that have gone through colonization and decolonization still bind or oppress women in spite of political and social change. Modernity is forced upon Naseem's body in the name of national progress while Jamila's body should be covered up because of religious fundamentalism. Boonyi tries to achieve freedom from men only to end up being trapped between patriarchy, imperialism, and terrorism. Dina has no choice but to return to her domineering brother's in the end because of economic oppression, and Ammu has no inheritance rights as a stigmatized daughter in her family.

I demonstrated that these and other female characters can become agents of their own destiny, not foils for their male counterparts or helpless observers. Rather than being doomed to the pre-determined role that family, society or nation has prescribed for them, they are determined to escape the strictures that bind them. Transgressive practice enables them to challenge assumptions about women's place in the patriarchal and misogynistic environments coupled with imperialism. Boonyi's counter-discursive use of language and her pregnancy suggest that her case is the postcolonial reinterpretation of Sita in the *Ramayana*. Dina's social ties with tailors hold out the possibility of reterritorializing the male-governed space. I also paid attention to how imperial supremacy and the hegemonic view of Third World women are questioned and subverted, stressing the need to see them as social beings in specific contexts.

Double standards and cruelties of sexuality and gender come into sharp focus when Margaret and Baby Kochamma, both posited as a singular ‘Woman,’ are set against varied women such as Ammu and Rahel.

The highlight of this chapter is the examination of the ways in which women’s domestic, minimal sphere challenges the male-dominated public sphere, pushing the limits of the drawn boundaries. Instead of just emoting for men or the authorities in conformity with gender stereotypes, they actively engage in strategic ways of appropriating flaws or cracks in the dominant structure. Female agency’s emergence and rise above the private sphere raises the possibility of transforming the domestic sphere into a liberating centre, especially with a subplot eclipsing the main plot in the narrative. Ammu’s sexual transgression questions and subverts the dominant discourses of sexuality, race, and caste, producing as powerful effects as any political activity in the public domain. Dilnavaz’s kitchen recesses and Boonyi’s hut are minimal space, but they ultimately serve to invert power relations between men and women, oppressor and victim, and colonizer and colonized by extension. Superstitious rituals and attendant bonding by Dilnavaz and Miss Kutpitia produce the unexpected effects of challenging and expanding the closed public domain.

Even as I problematize Mistry and Rushdie’s portrayal of female characters which can become essentialist in simple dichotomies, my analysis shows how their binary depiction of women can be strategically useful in countering discursive formations. The appropriated metaphors of cannibal, vampire, and vulture seem to caricature and demonize female characters, but they also serve to illustrate the power of female sexuality and resistance in a counter-hegemonic manner. Zeeny, a modern Indian professional woman, successfully restores Saladin home by using the transgressive image of cannibal or vampire in a strategic way. In the

following chapter, I delve more deeply into how social bonding and carnivalesque transgression work to promote syncreticism and even bring about unity beyond difference, in addition to exploring counter-hegemonic practices on the part of the young.



### Chapter III – Youth and Rebellion

Saleem's father in *Midnight's Children*, Cyrus's father in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, Ammu's father in *The God of Small Things*, and Maneck's father in *A Fine Balance* are all Anglophiles who hanker after good old days in the colonial period. This Anglophile family environment serves as a trope of wider social reality. Fathers' disillusion with postcolonial reality connects with control, manipulation, or banishment of their children. The hegemonic discourse reflects lopsided power relations between adults and the young in which the latter are subjected to coercion and exploitation often in the name of protection and nurture. The fathers' obsession with purity or the past glory works metaphorically to illustrate how they ignore their children's needs, subordinating or disempowering them. Such construction of normative identity often comes at the expense of trivializing their experiences, rather than helping them to be autonomous or independent. In this situation, the hegemonic discourse of protection is appropriated as an ideological tool of control and abuse, putting the children's subjectivity at the risk of silence, evasion, or erasure. The discourse of innocence is also employed to make them powerless and incapable of refusing molestation or other forms of abuse or violence.

In this chapter, I explore the ways in which the characters of the young, children, adolescents, and young adults, carve out an alternative space for themselves and others in postcolonial contexts as part of efforts to overcome structural constraints in the hegemonic order, including the Lacanian law of father. To that end, I problematize the linear or teleological model of age or time which demarcates the developmental stages of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. As Angelides (2004: 163) points out, such a demarcation pairs "childhood" with gender identity formation; "adolescence" with puberty, sexual fantasy, and emerging erotic identity; and "adulthood" with fixed sexual identity. But the fixed distinctions are likely to cause

a hierarchy of power, prejudices, and stereotypes. So I employ a Foucaultian genealogical method to discuss the emergence and return of agency in a non-linear, non-teleological manner in order to investigate the intertwined but distinct workings of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood in sexuality and other experiences.

The dynamics of similarity and difference in the texts help debunk a chronological development of distinct stages of age and subjectivity. The subjectivities of child, adolescent and adult are mutually constitutive domains of meaning, both experientially and epistemologically, spatially and temporally. These similarities and continuities “give the lie to simple oppositions between premature and mature sexualities, between childhood and adulthood” (Angelides 2004: 158). But too much emphasis on the contiguous relations and overlapping boundaries would lead to overlooking the importance of individuality and sovereignty at each stage of development. The relationality and mutual constitution should not ignore discontinuities and differences as they serve to create particular moments in the construction of identity or subjectivity at each stage. The return of Maneck in *A Fine Balance* and Estha in *The God of Small Things* as adults respectively demonstrates the interplay or interconnection between the developmental stages. And yet different lived experiences show how they respond to the continued structural oppression or abjection in a different manner without subscribing to hegemonic discursive formations in postcolonial contexts. It means that the hegemonic discourse cannot make them silent or invisible although they appear so. The frustrated experiences of Maneck and Estha as children do not affect their lives in some absolute and undeniable sense. The seeds of trouble appear to be sown early in their lives, but it turns out that they are not deterministic when they return as adolescents or adults. Here, structural obstacles are put into sharp relief against their

efforts to fashion themselves in a different period of life. Estha's everyday practice in the run-up to incest and Maneck's suicide are discussed later in this analytical framework.

Nevertheless, it is impossible to elide the fact that young characters—especially child characters—are susceptible to manipulation by the hegemonic discourse. The subjective interpretations and the value positions of adults enforce the generally accepted standards of mores. Therefore, the subjectivity of youth, with all its ambiguity, is in danger of being determined by the hegemonic discourse of adults. In this situation, the young are likely to be disempowered as their experiences are dwarfed, reified, or even commercialized, especially when they are subjected to disciplinary practices like school and capitalism. Although children are not on an equal footing with adults, it is important to keep in mind that the former are not positioned outside power. As Suzanne Ost (2009: 236) points out, the respect of child autonomy and rights requires the acceptance of the uncomfortable fact that children are not the innocent and vulnerable beings adults wish them to be. Here, the usual glib formula of child-victim and adult-oppressor comes under question. Such a Foucaultian concept of power is useful to avoid subscribing to the homogeneous category of power and explore transgressive modes of youth vision and agency. The texts of Mistry, Roy, and Rushdie show that young characters are desirous, knowing agents in their relation to adults. Power does not move unilaterally from adults to the young because the latter are not always innocent, powerless, passive, blameless, and unconsenting victims. (Neither are they all seductive, flirtatious, and sexually precocious, of course.) They grow up to return better capable of dealing with the dominant structure. In a sense, the danger of objectification and victimization is the condition of possibility for them. Childhood, adolescence, or youth is not an affliction, and they are not powerless 'half-people' who just wait for the period to pass. The young exercise power in many subtle, complicated ways in their

relations with their parents and other adults. In a way that is reminiscent of Mohanty's argument about the heterogeneity and complexity of women, Angelides (2004: 161) suggests that we rethink the question of power in connection with subjectivity and adult-child relations in a much more complex manner than the binary of powerful/powerless allows. With this idea in mind, I focus in this chapter on how the young are able to negotiate and engage the dominant structure in a counter-hegemonic manner, transforming the discursive formations.

### **Speaking Back & Silence**

In *The God of Small Things*, Baby Kochamma's relationship with Rahel and Estha is akin to the 'colonial' one. It shows how the concept of child vulnerability or innocence is mediated by the nexus of knowledge and power of the world the twins live in. To take a cue from Loomba's idea of colonial discourse (1998: 52), it is possible to argue that they are "already other" like colonial subjects in their relationship with adults like Baby Kochamma. As children of a divorcee and mixed marriage, the twins are stigmatized as "doomed, fatherless waifs" (Roy 1997: 45). Baby Kochamma exploits the children's innocence and vulnerability as an ideology of control, and the twins suffer exclusionary operations like the binary dichotomization of angel and demon. The grand aunt acts like the authority created in the mirror image of colonizers. The fact that she tries to rid the twins of 'uncivilized' habits demonstrates her colonial mindset and attitude. An American-educated ex-nun, she is "put in charge of their formal education" (Roy 1997: 59) in the familial space to discipline the twins in colonial fashion. The façade of education only serves to divert attention from the socially constructed oppression of the twins.

Baby Kochamma's overweening 'civilizing mission' is linked to her self-interested moral burden of imparting knowledge and bringing order to her divorced niece's children. She aims to

mold the twins into particular roles by colonizing them with moral discourse and making them obey her authority. She is an exemplified figure of the native intellectual, to borrow Fanon's words (2008: 150), who has internalized the white "myths of progress, civilization, liberalism, education, enlightenment, refinement" to such a degree that she tries to "make [them] the scapegoat of [her] moral life." The moral outworking of such power in her civilizing mission enables her to exploit an ideology of child innocence and vulnerability to inculcate upon the twins social hierarchy, class and race distinction, and black-and-white views of the world. Rather than protecting the children from harm or corruption, she actually abuses her knowledge and power to make them conscious that they can be expelled from home anytime if they violate her laws. In the name of moral purity and education, she attempts to repudiate not only her niece Ammu's sexual desire but also govern the life experience of the twins.

Among others, Baby Kochamma employs a strategy of 'proper' speech to cement her discursive domination by denying the twins free speech. She exploits the English language as a primary civilizing discourse in a manipulative and insidious manner. Her insistence on the use of proper English is a vital tool for establishing a kind of juridical network of power over the twins. A form of cultural hegemony and control, her English education is not to make them equal and capable family members. Rather, such 'pedagogic' lesson aims to constrain and regulate them. It represents the contradictory nature of colonization: nurture and exploitation, which epitomizes Baby Kochamma's efforts to reproduce colonized minds by educating and disciplining them. The upcoming arrival of Margaret and Sophie from London highlights how she executes oppressive rules to impose the linguistic order. The whole week ahead of the English relatives' arrival, Baby Kochamma steps up the surveillance of them, eavesdropping relentlessly on the

twins' private conversations, and whenever she catches them speaking in the vernacular Malayalam she levies a fine and makes them pledge to "always speak in English" (Roy 1997: 36).

Baby Kochamma's condescending English teaching and censorship seem to have their basis in what Leela Gandhi (1998: 155) describes in her discussion of colonial English education as an "authoritarian and alien pedagogy." They are analogous to the civilizing and missionary spirit that prompted Thomas B. Macaulay in his notorious "Minute on Indian Education" of 1835 to dismiss the indigenous Indian education system as outdated and irrelevant. Macaulay (1995: 430) insisted on the spread of English language education to create a class of "learned native" Indians in the mirror image of Britain: "Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect." This image is not of an equal, capable citizen on a par with the British, but a class of "interpreters" as an instrument of the ruling class who would mimic the British through European education. But many postcolonial Indians are willing to learn and mimic English as a sign of accomplishment and privilege. When Baby Kochamma meets Sophie and Margaret at the airport she mimics a strange British accent and boasts of her knowledge of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*<sup>87</sup> to "announce her credentials to Margaret" and to "set herself apart from the Sweeper Class" (Roy 1997: 144). In a related farce, even Comrade Pillai, a grass-roots communist leader, boasts of his family's English-speaking ability.<sup>88</sup> He himself insists on

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<sup>87</sup> The text is used to educate the twins in the form of a version of *The Tempest* abridged by Charles and Mary Lamb (Roy 1997: 59). It is interesting to note Baby Kochamma's propensity to refer to *The Tempest* in order to impress her English relatives. The text is often cited to illustrate the slave's appropriation of the master's imposed language to undermine the latter's powers. For example, Caliban, the persecuted slave, says to Prospero: "You taught me language; and my profit on't/ Is, I know how to curse." As Jenny Sharpe (1989: 146) argues, however, the text reminds us that the binary opposition between colonizer and colonized is not easily reversed because of the hegemonic power structure in spite of the latter's refusal to remain silent and docile. Sharpe points out that Prospero's curses alone have the power to produce the desired effects of pain and torture. Baby Kochamma is a good example for that.

<sup>88</sup> Comrade Pillai's unsolicited contribution to the bottle label of Mammachi's pickle and preserve is his literal English translation of *Ruchi lokathinde Rajavu* into *Emperors of the Realm of Taste* (Roy 1997: 46).

speaking to Oxford-educated Chacko in English. He is proud of his six-year-old son Lenin<sup>89</sup> who parrots Antonio's lines in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* without understanding a word of what he is saying. And his teenage niece Latha recites a poem by Sir Walter Scott "like an East German swimmer" who has her mind set on Olympic gold (Roy 1997: 273). On Chacko's watch, the Indian children are implicitly forced to accept the ideological messages contained in the canonical English literary works. But their glib references to the English literary canon reflect the inverted relations with their former colonial masters. Their knowledge and internalization of the English culture contrast sharply with the British schoolgirl Sophie's obvious ignorance of Ariel in *The Tempest*.

The thoughts and behaviour of these Indian characters represent the cultural ideology and societal beliefs embedded in them in 1969. As Chari (1994: 22) argues, the perceived superiority of the English language and Western culture reinforces "the impotence of the colonized," so "the subjectivity of the race and culture" is in danger of being "denied." Baby Kochamma's English language education and regulation of desire do not intend the twins to be able to stand up to the harmful effects of Anglophilia or promote the rights for the marginalized. Rather, she denies local identity, language, culture, and history and even has the presumption to delimit the 'clean and proper' body. Her colonized mind and positional superiority sanction colonial pedagogy and her ignorance of local culture and people. In a situation where their identity, culture, language and body are considered as inadequate or inferior, the seven-year-old twins are constrained and made vulnerable by an unrealistic, ethnocentric ideal of Western ego which is valorized or

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<sup>89</sup> In childhood both Rahel and Lenin go to see the same doctor for the same complaint: foreign objects stuck up their noses (Roy 1997: 132). They also go together to watch the Kathakali dance at the temple. In adulthood, Rahel, the granddaughter of an imperial entomologist, and Lenin, the son of a Marxist Party worker, could not have been more different from each other. After he grows up, Lenin alters his politically charged name to Levin and becomes a comprador class of middlemen. Comrade Pillai is proud that his son works as a services contractor for German and Dutch embassies in Delhi (Roy 1997: 128).

reinforced by Baby Kochamma, her Australian missionary friend Miss Mitten, *The Sound of Music*, and their nine-year-old cousin Sophie, the daughter of the Anglophile Chacko and his English ex-wife Margaret. The twins' forced mimicry of the ideal shows how they are marked as racial others as they are increasingly exposed to the gospel of the West. The Lacanian triad of the Imaginary-Symbolic-Real is useful to explain this predicament. *The Sound of Music*, a trope of sprawling imperial cultural power, draws attention to a binary contrast between the Western-ego ideal and racialized others in reality. As Thormann (2003: 302) argues, the Western movie's idealized scenes and images underline "the ideal's falsity as well as the Indian children's fragile security, the precariousness of the love they receive from their single mother and her extended family."

As it turns out, the Hollywood movie represents a sense of dislocation between postcolonial reality and hegemonic culture. Unlike the idealized movie, the twins' childhood is not a time of play, an asexual and peaceful existence. The ugly reality that they experience looms over the ideal image of a Western movie, highlighting the disjunction between what they see and what they are supposed to know. The grotesque physical body plays a role in illustrating such a disparity. Baby Kochamma's formidable thighs come into sharp focus at a dirty theater toilet as they miss the magnificent opening scene of *The Sound of Music*. The abject body of Murlidharan who is naked except for a plastic bag fitted on his head is also metaphoric of harsh postcolonial reality. The interjection of "the level-crossing lunatic" (Roy 1997: 62)—whose arms were blown off in Singapore during World War II and balls and penis dangle down upon the traffic sign—portends a series of ominous events which happen to the twins before and after the arrival of their English relatives. Going to watch *The Sound of Music* prior to the arrival of their English



cousin and aunt turns out to be more than what Chacko (Roy 1997: 55) describes as “an extended exercise in Anglophilia.”

The twins are subjected to the hegemonic spatial distribution of panoptical surveillance in the theatre. Inside, *The Sound of Music* offers a sweet version of the world, but Estha has to get out soon because he cannot help singing along. He is made conscious of the invisible audience. The boy is not safe outside as a pervert, looking like an ordinary person, does a terrible thing for him. In broad daylight he is coerced into masturbating the vendor at the refreshment stand in the lobby. Estha has to watch his own suffering while he is reduced to a consumed sexual object behind the counter, the object of the jouissance of the vendor. His anxieties become explicit when the vendor makes a veiled threat to harm his mother and sister whom he has to protect. Here, the sexual violence is figured as a family under siege. Such siege mentality puts so much strain on Estha that he decides to prepare for escape for fear that the vendor should seek him out. The child abuse serves as an analogy to how children suffer under the gaze of bullies or henchmen like the vendor and Baby Kochamma. The sadistic way Baby Kochamma rubs “the thick, frothy bitterness” out of a cucumber “with an air of barely concealed triumph” (Roy 1997: 20) earlier in the novel echoes a perverse metaphor for little Estha’s forced masturbation of the vendor. Baby Kochamma later cheats Estha into betraying Velutha to save his mother.

The molestation operates to deepen a feeling of alienation and racial inferiority. After Estha returns to the theatre, he asks a few nervous silent questions, one of them being: “Oh Captain von Trapp...could you love the little fellow with the orange in the smelly auditorium?... And his sister?” (Roy 1997: 106). The cinema is a place where the “clean, white” bodies of Von Trapp’s children are naturalized and set against the brown-skinned, contaminated bodies of the native children. The movie ingrains a distorted negative image of them, representing skin colour

as the ontological boundary par excellence. The inferiority feeling is reinforced when Margaret and Sophie, armed with an ideology of Western racial superiority, arrive at what they call the Heart of Darkness:

Littleangels were beach-coloured and wore bellbottoms.  
 Littledemons were mudbrown in Airport Fairy frocks with forehead bumps that  
 might turn into horns. With Fountains in Love-in-Tokyos. And backward-reading  
 habits.  
 And if you cared to look, you could see Satan in their eyes. (Roy 1997: 179)

The first description that Kochu Maria makes of the just arrived Sophie for her almost blind grandmother is: “She has her mother’s colour.” However, she is hybrid from mixed marriage and is well aware of it: “You are both whole wogs, and I am a half one” (Roy 1997: 16). Nevertheless, the virtues of the white skin are enumerated and affirmed, presenting erroneous ideas of what is beautiful and refined. The light-skinned Sophie is praised as a “little angel” and is “loved from the beginning” in contrast to her brown-skinned Indian cousins who are perceived to be the symbol of sin and evil in the eyes of Baby Kochamma and later Margaret and Chacko after their daughter’s accidental death. Such power differential in colour is also troped in a binary contrast between Sophie’s foreign toy presents for the twins and Velutha’s native wooden toys. Velutha’s hand-made wooden toys, the symbol of local small wonders, are juxtaposed against Sophie’s colourful Western toys such as London pens with their double-decker buses, people, and palaces trapped in water. Besides, Velutha’s name ironically means ‘white’ in Malayalam because he is so black. Unlike the English pederast whose nickname ‘Black Sahib’ implies the crossing of identity lines due to his degenerative mimicry, Velutha’s name is not a signifier of jumbled identity, but it represents a contradictory social situation.

To take a cue from Fanon (2008: 82), the experience of racialization erodes the locals’ self-esteem, sealing them into a “crushing objecthood” because they are made to feel inferior.

However, Rahel and Estha are not powerless victims of the conditions of life such as English education, child abuse, and racialization. With adult hindsight, Rahel recognizes the importance of Velutha's presence among them. The grown man, albeit a lower caste servant, does not treat children as the object of power and knowledge. Rather, he gladly takes part in the children's silly game of make-believe:

It is only now, these years later, that Rahel with adult hindsight recognized the sweetness of that gesture. A grown man entertaining three raccoons, treating them like real ladies. Instinctively colluding in the conspiracy of their fiction, taking care not to decimate it with adult carelessness. Or affection... To let it be, to travel with it as Velutha did, is much the harder thing to do. (Roy 1997: 190)

Velutha's little mud hut has no spatial hierarchy unlike the Ayemenem House located upriver where the tempest of violence and conflict reigns. Those who welcome the children are Velutha's sleeping paralyzed brother Kuttappen and a surly hen, and they receive a little wooden spoon. The hut's horizontal environment contrasts sharply with the Ayemenem House where the hegemonic discourse of patriarchy and Western culture determines centre/periphery human relations. The hut and its natural setting are a reminder that the concern of Velutha and the twins is not what Tagore (2001: 244) describes as "the conflict and strife to dominate," which is "the principal theme of *The Tempest*," Baby Kochamma's favourite literary canon. The topics of Velutha's conversation focus on native nature: the weather, the river, and dwindling coconut trees in Ayemenem. His genuine concern and empathy raise the possibility of coexistence and harmony between man and nature, reframing the hierarchy of power from a lower rung. It is little wonder that the twins, his beloved allies, refuse to obey the authorities which try to subjugate them. In the form of counter-enunciation as children and transgressive sex as adults, they continually interrogate and challenge the juridical formulation of power and the hegemonic order

from a position of disadvantage. By doing so, they are able to reverse the master narrative of official history and uncover buried histories to present an alternative story of family and society.

Their daily struggle raises the possibility of rebellion and subversion against discursive practices. Although Baby Kochamma enforces the mandatory rules of the English language, the little twins are selective in their response to her pedagogy. Rahel's simple refusal to respond to Margaret's schoolteacher way of saying hello is only a one-off event. In everyday conversation the twins appropriate the characteristics of the vernacular Malayalam<sup>90</sup> to defy the linguistic order or domination imposed by the Anglophile grandaunt. They communicate with each other in an uncanny manner by reading or speaking backwards, thereby refusing to be interpellated and indoctrinated into the dominance of hegemonic literacy:

The red sign on the red and white arm said STOP in white.  
 'POTS,' Rahel said.  
 A yellow hoarding said BE INDIAN, BUY INDIAN in red.  
 'NAIDNI YUB, NAIDNI EB,' Estha said. (Roy 1997: 58)

As Paranjape (2010: 91) argues, this kind of "vernacularizing is an enabling way of righting the asymmetrical balances of power between English and other Indian languages."<sup>91</sup> The backward reading of English and the interpolation of native words invert the hegemonic modes of enunciation. The twins' appropriation of the palindromic nature of the vernacular language is significant because it empowers them to destabilize the authority of the dominant language and challenge the order of things. This counter-hegemonic hybrid linguistic practice serves as a vital strategy for countermanding the power and knowledge of the pedagogue who was briefly trained at a Catholic convent and studied at the University of Rochester in America. The ability to read

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<sup>90</sup> As Rushdie (1991: 216) says, "...Kerala [is] for speakers of Malayalam, the only palindromically named language on earth..."

<sup>91</sup> Paranjape's argument is reminiscent of Chakrabarty's project of decentering the centre, named 'provincializing Europe.' But his argument focuses on the use of vernacular languages in a concrete manner to correct the problem of what Chakrabarty calls "asymmetric ignorance." Paranjape suggests that it "involves a conscious process of intervention which translation enables..."

or speak not only straight but backwards has the effect of denting her ‘civilizing mission’ as well as mocking her pretentious pronunciation and diction. As Roy’s writing style and narrative method appropriate, transgress and transform the steadfast rules of ‘proper’ English, so the twins overstep and push the limits of language through rebellious enunciative practices.

The violation of the laws of standard English usage and proper pronunciation do not simply mark the twins as ‘other,’ or ‘bad subject.’ It turns out that such transgression empowers them to resist being shaped as ‘other.’ As Butler (1997: 115) argues, Althusser links the problem of “turning back upon oneself”—i.e. “turning toward the law”—with “learning how to speak properly.” The twins’ refusal to ‘speak properly’ on terms that the laws of language allow and their idiosyncratic interpolation of the hegemonic language with vernacular vocabulary demonstrate the inversion of Althusser’s concept of interpellation<sup>92</sup>. As Thormann (2003: 301) points out with regard to interpolation, the twins’ idiosyncratic, shared speech enables them to “protect their world and escape adult surveillance.” When Miss Mitten, Baby Kochamma’s Australian missionary friend, offends the twins who are precocious with their reading by giving them a baby book, *The Adventures of Susie Squirrel*, they counter by reading the book backwards. Ignorant of the existence or nature of Malayalam, Miss Mitten informs Baby Kochamma that she had seen “Satan” in their eyes when they read backwards (Roy 1997: 60), and the twins are forced to write *In future we will not read backwards* one hundred times as

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<sup>92</sup> Althusser’s notion of interpellation in which police’s hailing leads to the formation of human subject supposes that the subject, who resides in expectation of the ideological call and answers it, becomes ready for the call. Here, ideology serves to address or claim people as its subjects, who then accept that subject position and internalize and rationalize the power of hegemonic ideology as well. This process of promoting false consciousness and making individuals accept relations of domination as ‘natural’ is called ‘interpellation.’ Peter Barry (2008: 165) explains that the ‘trick’ whereby we are made to feel that we are choosing when really we have no choice is called by Althusser, interpellation. In practice, however, since subjectivity is rethought as a product of language and signification, the route to change is also considered to be through language and signification, and agency is rethought in linguistic terms.

punishment. Miss Mitten's later death by a reversing milk van is a satirical, comical way of signifying the power of reading backwards.

Such a failure of interpellation highlights the agency on the part of the addressees, making it possible to contravene the presupposed superior position of Baby Kochamma and turn her into nothing but Macaulay's English-medium misfit. As Ashcroft (2001: 47-48) points out, this process shows that such 'interpellated' subjects are "not passive ciphers of discursive practices" because they have access to a counter-discursive agency like "the capacity to interpose, to intervene, to interject a wide range of counter-discursive tactics into the dominant discourse." The argument demonstrates that interpellation is not only violating and disempowering but enabling as well. Nevertheless, the twins as children are not capable enough to counteract the hegemonic discourse of adults. They are coerced into participating in politics dominated and managed by adults which constrict and disempower them. Following Ammu's scandal and Sophie's drowning, Baby Kochamma employs the techniques to bully them into obedience and silence. Her demand for respectability and discipline combines with the corrupt police's interpellation to entrap the children. She schemes to save the name of her family by excluding or sacrificing othered members like Ammu and her children. To that end, she thwarts Estha's efforts to save Ammu by making him betray Velutha then breaking up his family. The removal of Estha and Ammu from the family house illustrates her machinations of power and knowledge aimed at eliminating impurities and anomalies.

The twins' collaborative linguistic agency stops functioning after they are separated. Probably the traumatized twins—especially Estha—are not allowed to become full adults as their childhood comes to an abrupt end. The situation seems to require the twins to respond in a more drastic manner when they return as adults. Estha's resistance is characterized by silence, a refusal

to talk at all. Although there is no pinpointing exactly when he stops talking, his rejection of speech is apparently related to the incident of his inadvertent complicity in Velutha's death by "saying yes" to the police when he was forced to identify him as the abductor. Baby Kochamma chose Estha, "knowing him to be the more practical of the two. The more tractable. The more farsighted. The more responsible" (Roy 1997: 319). Estha could not say no or avert his gaze because he had to lie in order to save his mother. His complicity in Velutha's abject death at the hands of police made him an "unwilling participant in the injustice that the novel's narrator calls History" (Thormann 2003: 303). Since the incident Estha refuses to participate in social exchange activities. Traumatized by abuse and guilt, he refuses to speak at all. After he is sent to his father he withdraws from the world into a cocoon of silence, growing "accustomed to the uneasy octopus that lived inside him and squirted its inky tranquilizer on his past" (Roy 1997: 12). When he returns to the family house controlled by Baby Kochamma, he occupies "very little space in the world" and refuses to engage in the hegemonic discourse of language or meet the gaze of the symbolic order, the main shapers of human subjectivity. When his twin sister makes her appearance for the first time in more than two decades, he does not even look at her and instead "retreated into further stillness. As though his body had the power to snatch its senses inwards...into some deeper more inaccessible recess" (Roy 1997: 93).

I appropriate the Lacanian theory of subject formation to explain Estha's self-imposed isolation and rejection of speech and gaze. The forced compliance with Baby Kochamma's scheme in the death of Velutha makes Estha the object of the symbolic order's demand and punishment, posing an obstacle to his formation as subject of desire. His refusal to be visible or to speak—thereby avoiding absorption into the hegemonic order or gaze—is a reminder of Velutha who "left no footprints in sand, no ripples in the water, no image in mirrors" (Roy 1997:

265) so as not to be noticed by a discriminatory society rather than following traditional customs. Such absolute refusal is different from Pappachi's sullen refusal to talk to Mammachi after Chacko stops him from beating her. Rather, Estha explores the possibility of going beyond the constraints of language through the practice of silence. Such a strategic move empowers him to challenge the symbolic order and demand 'See me for what I am' rather than asking the probing and nervous question, *Che vuoi?*: 'What do you want from me?' In this regard, his resort to silence and invisibility is not meant to endorse the omnipresent power of his abusers like Baby Kochamma and the theater vendor, or to condone them. Such a position is directed toward a calibrated strategy for preparing to 'speak back' or 'return the gaze' to the oppressive authorities. This is why Estha's refusal to relate to the world cannot be seen as a total failure.

Silence and invisibility are Estha's crucial strategy for breaking out of hegemonic discourse and surveillance which threaten to imprison him in the family house. His refusal to speak might be an extension of the twins' joint resistance to proper speech imposed by Baby Kochamma. But it also reflects a subaltern consciousness, i.e. his desire to achieve the seemingly impossible job of restoring 'pure language,' a language which allows a space for cultural others rather than seeking to constrain them. To appropriate Sontag's words (1969: 32), Estha's silence as the body's language is not for the "incineration of consciousness," but a critical gesture toward resolving the "pollution of language" given that the resistance in childhood did not sufficiently contravene Baby Kochamma's hegemonic discourse and epistemic violence. Silence and invisibility are no loss for him because voice and presence do not guarantee his existence in the dominant structure. Rather, the situation exposes the oppressive social contexts and contradictions, speaking volumes about the condition of possibility for change and transformation:



Estha's silence was never awkward. Never intrusive. Never noisy. It wasn't an accusing, protesting silence as much as a sort of aestivation, a dormancy, the psychological equivalent of what lungfish do to get themselves through the dry season... Over time he had acquired the ability to blend into the background of wherever he was – into bookshelves, gardens, curtains, doorways, streets – to appear inanimate, almost invisible to the untrained eye. It usually took strangers a while to notice him... It took them even longer to notice that he never spoke. (Roy 1997: 10-11)

However, his will to ignorance or undoing knowledge turns out to be a radical interrogation of the adverse circumstances, underlining the critical and disruptive potential of agency or anticipatory element in his daily life. Metaphorically speaking, the impossibility of speech and gaze is utilized as a counter-hegemonic way of preparing to break his silence, confidently shout 'no' to the authorities and reverse the panoptic operation of the gaze, so that he can not only redeem his submission as a child to the interpellation of the vendor, Baby Kochamma, and the police, but he can also transform the ugly reality for a better future.

How does Estha do that? His quotidian activities of keeping his room tidy and washing his clothes illustrate a coping way of living amidst the ugly reality of the filthy family house and the polluted natural environment. When he was sent to live with his father and stepmother after Sophie's funeral he began to do the housework in order to earn his keep. Besides, he developed the habit of walking alone for hours on end, which continues even after he returns to Ayemenem. Although his obsessive upkeep of his mother's old room appears to be "the only positive sign of volition from him" (Roy 1997: 91), I argue that his daily practice of cleaning, washing, ironing, etc. holds much more significance than it may appear. They do not merely challenge the gender norms of domesticity and household chore or wipe away a sense of shame and guilt from molestation and betrayal of Velutha. As de Certeau (1984: 108-9) suggests, the mundane daily work shows how important it is to make spatial practices against the order. His ascetic daily practice, which takes place within the family house full of grief, decay and death, exposes the

failure of a “game warden” like Baby Kochamma to discipline and regulate him, thereby impugning the hegemonic control of speech and gaze. Such everyday practice of the self is a significant way of empowering him while he bides his time to tackle such thorny issues as the trauma of childhood and the continuing effects of the past. After all, silence has the ironical effect of making his voice heard while invisibility accents his movement within and beyond the house.

Given that Estha prepares for the time when his agency returns, it is important to examine the ways in which such a critical moment arrives and is met. It happens on discursive and material planes. When Rahel returns home some two decades later she brings back the sound of the past together as if to make Estha respond to it. As Lanone (2002: 143) points out, such fragments of language are the keys to the past and their reunion, like the esoteric greeting which Rahel whispers to the self-conscious silent subject: *Esthapappychen Kuttappen Peter Mon*, a password which still works. The creative insertion of a rune-like playful greeting challenges the hegemonic discourse in a metonymic way, producing the effect of bringing back childhood reminiscence and association. To borrow words from Ashcroft (2001: 48), the act of interpolation is the initial and essential movement in the process of transformation. Floating signifiers in general and refrains in particular raise the dialogic possibility of their minimal voice despite Baby Kochamma’s ubiquitous presence and surveillance. The interpolation of the dominant discourse with those untranslated words has the effect of resisting discursive wholeness or totality together with Estha’s daily practice of nonconforming silence. The twins’ incestuous lovemaking—which occurs after they together watch the traditional Indian dance performance<sup>93</sup>—should be placed against this context because the physical experience highlights

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<sup>93</sup> They watch *Mahabharata* performed by traditional dancers in a shrine (Roy 1997: 234-235). Bhima avenges the epic heroine Draupadi’s honour by brutally killing Dushasana then letting her wash her hair in his blood. Coming

the importance of restoring a dialogic relationship. One of the expected effects of their sexual transgression is that Estha recovers his forgotten voice and reclaims his speaking subject, so that he can return as agent to be heard and seen. Such a transformative moment would empower him to undo the effects of the choices he was compelled to make as a child as well as subvert the laws he couldn't refuse to obey. Then, he might be able to emerge stronger from the shell of silence and invisibility to 'speak back' and 'return the gaze' to the authorities, reasserting his place in the family and society.

### **Madness**

Like Estha and Rahel, Cyrus and Virus in Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* are two-egg twins. But Rushdie uses them as a metaphor for two divided selves seen as Jekyll-and-Hyde sides of the same coin, a theme also found in other works like *Shame* and *The Satanic Verses*. Cyrus suffers child abuse and a putative mental disorder but he cannot expect help from his twin brother. His youngest brother Ormus becomes a famous musician, but he is criticized for being at the service of, or complicit with, the West. Without any sibling help, Cyrus implements strategy and tactics which challenge and subvert the hegemonic order on his own terms. In the face of the Law of Father and disciplinary education, he shows clear signs of being a disturbed child, which helps explain his becoming a psychopathic murderer. However, the process of his transformation into a mad killer interrogates and inverts the discursive notion of insanity in the postcolonial context. The text shows how the concept of madness can be appropriated to disprove the hegemonic construction of certainty and normalcy. The counter-hegemonic discourse of madness enables Cyrus to escape constraints and oppression. In this context,

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ahead of the climax of the novel, the scene provides a glimpse into the twins' attitude to the police and authorities which killed Velutha and caused their mother's miserable death.

madness is a trope for resistance and subversion on the path to individuation in a world where failures and contradictions challenge normal, rational, and self-contained values. It is a transgressive form of refusing to accept the discourse of dominant values while opposing the hegemonic construction of reality.

Like sexuality, madness is a construct of discourse which can be used to deny the path to autonomy by subjecting individuals to dominant values and ideas. It is interesting to see how the binary dichotomy of madness and normalcy is created and reinforced as a category of human identity by the hegemonic discourse. Foucault (1988: ix-xii) describes the creation of mental illness as a process of ‘othering’ in European society where the mad are confined and silenced in order to define the normative, rational self. In this process, the hegemonic discourse of madness is exploited to privilege particular identities and desires while excluding or suppressing other possibilities. Rushdie’s *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* seems to have a radical political purpose: counter-discursivizing a set of beliefs and values held by the symbolic order. Cyrus as a child is a trope of a split identity stemming from the gap between the Anglophile Parsi heritage<sup>94</sup> from his father and the reality of being a despised postcolonial. Because of his father’s obsession with purity and discipline, he suffers the dilemma about whether to wear the straitjacket of a good Parsi boy or step free from such constraints to risk being othered.

It is interesting to explore the ways in which hegemonic institutions like family and school administer disciplinary rules that construct Cyrus’s subjectivity in connection with such

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<sup>94</sup> Stephen Hay (1988: 87) points out that when the British colonized India, the Parsis had very little to lose as a marginalized religious minority and were therefore very willing to do business, acting as liaisons between the colonizers and the Indians. They became influential players during the British Raj. Since many of them identified with Western or British culture, they viewed the issue of independence with mixed feelings. In *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, the character of Darius reflects the Anglocentric milieu: “Anyway, Bombay isn’t India. The British built her and the Parsis gave her her character. Let them have their independence elsewhere if they must, but leave us our Bombay under beneficent Parsi-British rule” (Rushdie 2000: 49).

issues as colonial rule, Anglophilia, and India's independence. His oedipal conflict in childhood creates confusion about what is an appropriate childhood or autonomy. The ten-year-old boy's failed smothering of the favoured brother Ormus makes his parents banish him to a disciplinary boarding school whose teaching methods are based upon "the tried and true British principles of cold baths, bad food, regular beatings and high-quality academic instruction, and which helped him to develop into the full-blooded psychopath he afterwards became" (Rushdie 2000: 47). To put a gloss on the Lacanian theory, Cyrus's subjectivity takes shape in the law and gaze of his parents, which he cannot fully fathom or understand. Therefore, the request that he can make of the authorities is not to see him for what he is, but rather the nervous question, *Che vuoi?*: "What do you want from me?" To live up to his parents' expectations, he trains athletically and excels in studies. As a result of harsh training and corporal punishment, he learns to build up the façade of restraint and self-control. His stellar performance in school is the outcome of his trying to become what he thinks he is in the eyes of the Other, or what Lacanian scholars term the gaze of the symbolic order. He does his best to fulfill what is expected of him, and develops conventional masculine requirements such as aggression, dominance, and a sense of adventure. In other words, he becomes the object of the desire of the symbolic order.<sup>95</sup> His abjection in childhood is compounded by the postcolonial circumstances. Sir Darius, his Anglophile father, rues the end of British colonial rule which he believes had contributed to producing "ideal Parsi youth." He delivers a tirade on the decline of the intellect of Parsi children when Cyrus tops the

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<sup>95</sup> As Lacan says, we become what we think we are in the eyes of the Other; therefore, we are bound to be a subject of radical doubt and uncertainty because we cannot fully fathom or understand the symbolic order, the Other's gaze or desire. Slavoj Žižek argues that this uncertainty defines the subject and suspends it between an anxiety and desire. The answer to this dilemma is what Žižek (2003: 76-77) terms anticipatory identification—"an attempt to provide in advance an answer to 'what I am for the Other' and thus to assuage anxiety that pertains to the desire of the Other." Instead of waiting anxiously for a symbolic mandate to arrive—to be hailed and thus become subject as in Althusser's notion of interpellation doing justice to the moment of retroactivity—human subjects can make a preemptive strike in anticipation. The madness or bipolar disorder of Cyrus and Sufiya can be understood in this framework, albeit in a different context.

class, and he heaps scorn on his competitors when Cyrus returns with trophies. For the drug-addicted Anglophile deprived of the elitist status and privilege, the British colonial rule is a fantasy to pine for in postcolonial India. After his death, his wife Spenta goes “husband hunting” in England after the suspected machinations with the English colonialist Methwold (Rushdie 2000: 270). She later becomes Lady Methwold, the sole beneficiary of the Englishman’s will. Her response to Methwold’s invitation to Britain speaks volumes about the colonial legacy:

...she was not in as much pain as she had expected; that after the years of Darius’s decline, his death felt almost like blessed relief...; that having refused for half a lifetime to share her husband’s English dream, she now found that the prospect of an English winter was filling her with excitement, anticipation, even joy; and that it would be very nice to see William Methwold again after all these years, very nice indeed... An interested male party with a fortune is a boon to the spirits. Lady Methwold, Spenta murmured, and then had the decency to blush, and think of her sons. (Rushdie 2000: 200-201)

This familial and societal situation seems to perpetuate a social structure in which Cyrus is thrust into a subject position that mandates the fulfillment of the traditional requirements of a male Parsi child. Cyrus does not have much room to negotiate his identity shaped and enforced by the hegemonic values of the symbolic order. In this cage-like situation he refuses to be defined, confined, moralized, or exploited in a drastic manner. He becomes a psychopathic serial killer known as Pillowboy or Pillowman who is “as intellectually brilliant and physically strong as his father longed for all young Parsi men to be” (Rushdie 2000: 136). As a ‘bad subject’ suffering from a putative bipolar disorder, he challenges the binary opposition of good and evil and therefore refuses to be interpellated and controlled. His mass murder coincides with India’s independence from Britain in 1947 when he is 15 years old, as if signifying his independence from outside constraints. Cyrus’s mental illness might be a ‘sane’ response when it is contextualized against oppression or abjection in the family and society. In this regard, Cyrus and Sufiya in *Shame* are on the same page. Both of them, who are believed to be suffering from

bipolar disorder, are disowned by family and society, and they use violence to create new identities as a strategic response. Madness and violence produce a mode of self-management and agency for them.

Cyrus's practice of the self presents a different level of transformation. His Jekyll-and-Hyde alterity—highlighted by his confinement to the institutions of family, school, and prison—symbolizes postcolonial ambivalence. Bipolar disorder empowers him to transgress the limits of boundaries, raising the possibility of freedom from essentialist roots. More importantly, a genuine redemptive moment comes when he embraces the double-sidedness of his identity: destruction and renewal, rather than being either a collaborator or a radical nativist. He murders his father and is thrown into a maximum-security prison, but he matures to be a renowned philosopher there. He speaks back to the centre by raising the call for resistance to cultural imperialism and colonialism. Ironically, it is Cyrus, the patricide, who revives his family tradition of mastering the ancient languages and books. His emphasis on localism lies in the strategic use of history, unlike his father who was simply interested in discovering the parallels between the myths of ancient Greece and the Sanskrit myths of Vedic India. Such a strategic position contrasts sharply with the family's downfall stemming from his Anglophile father's dissolution, Virus's retardedness, Ormus's emigration, and their mother's remarriage to an English imperialist. Cyrus accuses Ormus of being an international star who hates his own kind at the service of the American hegemony of mass culture, but he finally forgives him. Madonna Sangria, an American pop columnist, who falls in love with Cyrus, disavows the American way of life and promotes his philosophy over Ormus's sensational rock and roll phenomenon. She makes a marriage proposal to bring him to America, but he declines and chooses to stay in prison. The use of reading and writing as meditative, soul-searching techniques in prison enables him to

be free from the hegemonic discourse of madness and colonization. “His body is in prison but his spirit...is a bird’s joyous song...” (Rushdie 2000: 556).

### **Accidental Family**

Contingent parentage or family ties are one of the common features in the texts of Mistry, Roy, and Rushdie. Changelings, substitute parents, and family by circumstance play a significant role in the construction and deconstruction of human ties. As Coetzee (2002: 210) notes, Rushdie is well known to celebrate “bastardy, mongrelhood and hybridity.” There are more than one mother or father in parenting or family arrangements. For example, Omar has three mothers in *Shame*. Confusion over parentage and anxiety about sexuality or masculinity contribute to searching for a new identity in rebellion against smothering parental intrusions and the entangled networks of family in *Midnight’s Children* and *The Moor’s Last Sigh*. Saleem, a changeling sired by an imperial Englishman, and Moraes, possibly an illegitimate descendent of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, constantly look for alternative fathers and mothers and ‘give birth to’ them when necessary. In *The God of Small Things*, Rahel and Estha are open to the idea of a substitute father as the father figure is elusive for them. Their biological father is absent since their parents’ divorce, and he emigrates to Australia later. Velutha, their mother’s secret lover, is a strong candidate. But he is killed by the police. Even their uncle Chacko is welcomed as a surrogate father. When a Communist demonstrator opens the car door and makes sarcastic remarks, Rahel is “pleased to have Chacko mistaken for her father. Like a normal family” (Roy 1997: 79). But Chacko does not turn out to be a compassionate patriarch. Sophie’s death makes Chacko separate the twins and force their mother to leave the family home. The inheritor of all family property and business, Chacko emigrates to Canada.



Such nature of family ties fits Butler's argument (2004: 158) that kinship is a contingent social practice as opposed to—or in relation to—the normative, which challenges the essentialist and bounded concept of family. Textual examples show that family is often what Benedict Anderson describes as 'imagined community' where ties can be made, unmade, and remade regardless of blood ties or lineage. However, the idea of imagined community is problematic in postcolonial contexts because Anderson's institutionalized notion pays so much attention to who is included that it is prone to fail to consider those who are excluded, marginalized, or ignored. As Bhabha (2004: 8, 227, 231) argues, the idea Anderson proposes is rooted in a "homogeneous [serial] empty time" of modernity and progress, abandoning the "meanwhile" and failing to locate the "alienating time" of the arbitrary sign in his naturalized, nationalized space of the imagined community. Such determinism of a grand narrative is feared to suppress possibilities for alternative narratives. For example, as Natarajan (1994: 84) cautions, the analogy of nation as family in the Indian context could lead to the appropriation and invisibility of minority groups in the hegemonic Hindu national discourse because such homogenization normalizes or dismisses alterity or otherness. The examples show how the reality of minorities constantly challenges the hegemonic idea of family, community, or nation as homogenous.

Dina's patchwork quilt in *A Fine Balance* is a prominent example to debunk the hegemonic concept of imagined community or the essentialist nationalist discourse of a pure, homogeneous India. The quilt, the product of cloth leftovers, operates in a symbolic manner to uncover the problems of the hegemonic discourse, suggesting that belonging can be invented and reinvented. It represents the resilience of a minority imagined community—particularly in view of Dina's cohabitation with Ishvar, Om and Maneck—against the hegemonic control over space and time. The composition of the fragments of various fabrics, colours and patterns suggests that

the quilt does not disregard a ‘meanwhile’ story or ‘alienating time’ as it represents a medium of varied human experiences: “The tightly knit family of patches” contains “the abundance of events” (Mistry 1997: 573). And its movement from Dina to Ishvar over a long period of time retells and reconstructs the story of the experiences that the four main characters have gone through as one family: ‘parents’ and ‘children.’ The accidental family forged by circumstance can also be seen as a discursive device to critique postcolonial reality. The process of the formation of such family is not a simple reflection or extension of the power of the state, but it is a counter-discursive allegory of postcolonial nationhood. The fact that the four characters come to live under the same roof on an equal footing shows how Dina’s flat becomes a space of inclusive imagined community to inhabit, not an exclusive one like the Indian nation state.

However, accidental family might be a misnomer because its making and unmaking are the outcome of social, economic, and political circumstances in postcolonial India. The family reflects a wider social reality, which is allegorized in typical postcolonial fashion. The political economic situation following India’s independence from Britain contributes to the main characters’ gathering in a city, having an impact on their lives. All of them are driven to achieve social mobility. Maneck is sent to study in the city while Om and Ishvar, trained as tailors instead of working with leather, have to leave their home province to look for a job in the city. More specifically, the discourse of development economics plays a crucial role in bringing Maneck, Om, and Ishvar together under Dina’s roof. Tokaryk (2005: 28) offers historical data suggesting that the World Bank is responsible for the kinds of development initiatives described in the novel.<sup>96</sup> The construction of roads and luxury hotels ruins the environment and affects the socio-economic life of Maneck’s family and community:

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<sup>96</sup> Tokaryk explains that the Industrial Credit and Investment Corporation of India (ICICI), which the World Bank created in 1955 to facilitate investment in India, promotes the development of private industry. In *The God of*

It started with roads... These were to be modern roads, they promised, roads that would hum with the swift passage of modern traffic. Roads, wide and heavy-duty, to replace scenic mountain paths too narrow for the broad vision of nation-builders and World Bank officials... Then the promised rewards began rolling up the road into the mountains... Service stations and eating places sprouted along the routes to provide for the machines and their men. And developers began to build luxury hotels. (Mistry 1997: 215-216)

Maneck's father Farokh, whose flourishing business had been broken up across the border after India's independence, is disillusioned with the misguided development economic policy and the intrusion of global capitalism.<sup>97</sup> He refuses to sell the rights to giant corporations or compete with them, dismissing Maneck's business proposal as "absolutely undignified. Like begging" (Mistry 1997: 220). Kohlah's Cola, the family's traditional soft drink brand popularly known as Kaycee, languishes due to big brands' forays into its territory. He does not want Maneck to inherit and develop the family business, instead forcing him to study refrigeration in the city. A similar model of predatory development economics forces Ishvar and Om to migrate to the city in search of work. The cobblers-turned-tailors initially succeed in evading the political oppression of caste determinism in their village, but they lose their family in a political revenge massacre. As large factories in cities begin to manufacture ready-made clothes for sales at local shops, they lose customers and have little work left to do. The migration to the city results in their unemployment, homelessness, cripples, and begging on the streets. The forced migration of Maneck and Om shows how their childhood vision of family, community, and entrepreneurship gets stymied because of the logic of political economic discourse.

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*Small Things*, Roy also suggests that the pesticides bought with World Bank loans to boost agricultural production have the adverse effect of ruining the environment in general and the river in particular.

<sup>97</sup> Farokh Kohlah, once a prosperous Paris businessman under British rule in the Subcontinent, is also a victim of British colonialism: "A foreigner drew a magic line on a map and called it the new border; it became a river of blood upon the earth. And the orchards, fields, factories, businesses, all on the wrong side of that line, vanished with a wave of the pale conjuror's wand" (Mistry 1997: 205)

In this situation, Dina's flat turns into a locus where the protagonists from different backgrounds manage to establish familial ties and even solidarity in spite of—or due to—a series of misfortunes wreaked by family, society, and government. It is the narrative hub within the urban setting, a “domestic space of occupation: a home the Parsi widow Dina fiercely protects from a rapacious landlord” (Ball 1999: 235). Harassed by the landlord's rent collector, Dina tries to save her flat by telling him that Ishvar is her husband, and the two boys are their sons. After the landlord's thugs damage the sewing machines and cloth Dina goes outside for help only to bring along the malodour. The stench follows her inside the flat, and they discover that the smell comes from the brown mess from her shoe sole: “She had stepped in something on the pavement. She went outside, scraped off the brown mess from the sole, and washed it” (Mistry 1997: 439). The anecdote symbolizes how the private arena and the public orbit become closely linked and interact as what Dina dismisses as “government problems—games played by people in power” (Mistry 1997: 75) start to affect them.

Where the public and private are interwoven the foursome develops what Bhabha (2004: 19) calls an interstitial “intimacy.” In particular, the spatial movement from Dina's flat to the kitchen in Nusswan's house highlights how ‘unhomely’ interstitial spaces produce transformative social ties and effects. Such ties are sharply set against the Family Planning, the euphemism of state-led forced sterilization policy aimed at emulating a modern Western disciplinary society. They face the danger of their community's disintegration, but their survival serves as a trope to suggest that a family cannot be ‘planned’ to be homogeneous or seamless as the authority of the nation state wishes to. Accidental family is a place of restoration and regeneration, rather than that of loss or damage as shown in the essentialist or deterministic institution pushing for homogeneous identities. The resilience of such family suggests that a

space of autonomous rights can be created without suppressing possibilities or disavowing unresolved contradictions. It becomes an alternative space of community where they come to realize the real meaning of family by forming a united front against institutional violence and rampant corruption outside.

The way they raise kittens together is an analogy to how breeding and claim count a lot more than biological ties. Although the kittens get food and shelter from them, they are not under ownership or control and defy the confinement of boundaries. They are not treated like tethered household pets, nor are they expected to please, to play cute, or to show off their accomplishments. Such ideal nurture suggests how Dina and Ishvar are supposed to play the role of surrogate parents for Om and Maneck. The cats' practice of habitation—sudden disappearance and return—appears to symbolize their community's contingency. However, such contingency does not explain the full scale of impact of family-like ties upon its members. The kittens' sudden appearance and reappearance make Dina worry: "Ingratitude is not uncommon in the world. One day, you too will forget me—all of you. When you go your own way and settle down, you will not know me" (Mistry 1997: 465). The disappearance and return of the tailors and Maneck illustrate how human social ties are formed, deconstructed, and renewed differently from the cats. Dina's coldness and accusation in her reunion with the grown-up Maneck reflects the complexities of human ties.

Even accidental family cannot be free from the ideology of family as well as the grounding effects of human relations. In spite of the contingent nature of their ties, Maneck and Om cannot avoid the hegemonic discourse which tries to discipline and tame them into docile or 'desirable' bodies. On behalf of their parents, Dina and Ishvar try to mold the teenagers into what is regarded as the ideal representation of childhood or young adulthood. As Ball (1999: 236)

points out, class-conscious Dina is initially strict and exploitative in her dealings with the Hindu Untouchables-turned-tailors. She sees to it that Maneck, a Parsi boy, does not spend too much time with them. She puts them all under her surveillance in the flat. She locks the door from outside when she goes out on business or asks Maneck to monitor the tailors in her absence. Maneck thinks that Dina is “too bossy. Even Mummy never controlled his life the way Dina Aunty was trying to” (Mistry 1997: 294). The boundaries set across the lines of class and caste become blurred gradually as they increasingly realize the need to nurse each other’s wounds from the past and overcome the growing danger together. After Dina opens up to the tailors, she embraces her role as a nurturer for Om too, no longer as a work supervisor who enforces the rules. Interestingly, her care is focused on Om’s body. She rubs ointment on Om’s arm to relieve his pain. She rids him of lice by making him have kerosene on his head and purchases vermifuge as a wedding gift to help remove worms from his stomach. She also takes charge of educating Maneck and Om about the manners of respecting women’s rights, including “No shouting or screaming or beating” (Mistry 1997: 476). Still, the representation of adolescent sexuality is prone to the logic and dynamics of the normative, serving the interests of the hegemonic discourse. This foregrounds the conditions with which Maneck and Om, same-age teenagers, have to come to grips together.

### **Sexual Game**

When it comes to the formation of adolescent sexuality, it is necessary to explore how the sexual subjectivity of Maneck and Om is shaped in a different family background. A relatively well-to-do Parsi boy, Maneck’s child sexuality is shaped through a distorting lens of stiff upper lip parents’ moral discourse. The issue of his autonomy and rights as a sexual being is

sidestepped and overruled. His father controls and regulates his body. Farokh's approach to sexual knowledge is about protecting innocence through ignorance because his son is thought to be vulnerable. The fact that he equates innocence with sexual ignorance demonstrates Stevi Jackson's argument (1982: 77): "Children's actions are interpreted through the filter of adult sexual knowledge and experience." After discovering Maneck's growing interest in Suraiya's body and their secret sexual game, Farokh decides to send him to a boys' boarding school. He wants to guard Maneck from his own desire as well as others' because sexuality is believed to pose a threat to his son's well-being. Farokh believes that it is right and proper to send his young son away to study, so that he can fulfill what is expected of him.

However, Farokh's panic response has less to do with protecting Maneck's interests than with maintaining traditional attitudes and practices like social order. To borrow Angelides's words (2004: 101), his excuse and rhetoric of child protection "function less as a way of protecting children...than as a way of protecting *adults* from the more deep-seated anxieties about childhood sexuality we are loathe to revisit." In other words, it is Farokh's morality or ideology, not his son's vulnerability, that is being protected. Maneck's desire to be in the company of servant-class people also alarms Farokh. Suraiya and her father Bhanu are deemed to be the source of 'inappropriate' knowledge for Maneck. She, the same age as Maneck, excites his sexual curiosity, and her father teaches him the things Farokh does not know. The control of the servants' influence on Maneck seems as important to Farokh as the protection of his son's innocence and sexuality. Relations between Maneck and Suraiya are immediately placed under surveillance as the sexuality of the class other is believed to pose a threat to his son. Farokh seeks to nip in the bud a kind of perversion or subversion. Schooling is a critical moral intervention for protection from—or antidote to—the sexual excesses to which Maneck is feared

to be exposed. It is a way of keeping him 'childlike,' subjecting him to a regime of control or disciplinary measures. It is also a means of making Maneck achieve what Farokh himself had failed to do after India's independence from Britain. Maneck is sent to boarding school and then a college in the city. However, his subsequent travails show that clinging to the widely accepted hegemonic view of sexuality might be the main source of a disparity between reality and ideal. Ironically, Maneck is sexually harassed or assaulted in school, which is the microcosm of postcolonial society. Viewing his parents' decision as a betrayal, he becomes increasingly alienated from his biological family.

Unlike Maneck, Om has little conflict with his father over family legacy and education. His biological family ties are stronger than those of Maneck whose relations with his parents and relatives are loose at best or even bothersome. Om even chastises Maneck for holding a grudge against his father. The cobbler-turned-tailor Narayan, Om's father, refuses to deny outcaste identity in spite of successful caste transgression and flourishing business. Om is closely integrated into the working and social life of the outcaste community in his hometown. After his immediate family is slaughtered by Thakur Dharamsi and his thugs, however, he is entrusted to his uncle Ishvar. Their power relations are mostly reciprocal and consensual. In a joke seen as friendship, Om chucks Ishvar under the chin as if their roles were reversed. Om's formation of sexual subjectivity is owed to his uncle who is his mentor and business partner. Sex is not a taboo for Om's bachelor uncle, who tolerates his nephew's precocious behaviour of a kind that would be completely unacceptable for Maneck's father. He does not constrain Om when it comes to sexual matters, giving him the benefit of the doubt. He turns a blind eye to Om's masturbation and growing interest in sex, which rather acts as a signal for him to hurry to carry out the duty of arranging his nephew's marriage, a legitimate form of sexual liaison. Ishvar's



open discussion of and insistence on his marriage epitomize how Om's sexuality is constructed. Ishvar's relaxed attitude "boys will be boys" extends to an amused acceptance of Om's sexual escapades. This environment encourages him to develop masculine characteristics. He is cheeky, sulky, insolent, and insubordinate, but his ego is flexible and open to others. Given that he is treated as a fully sexual being, his sexuality is not considered premature or precocious as an introduction to adult sexuality. His childhood is not simply separated from adulthood by sexuality. Had it not been for his forced castration this environment would have facilitated a smooth transition from one period to another.

Here, we find that innocence is a problematic concept because the ideology of innocence and vulnerability can be exploited to curtail the freedom of children and maintain the hegemonic structure. As an aspect of control and power the protective discourse of innocence prospers at the expense of child sexuality itself. It is not merely a thinly veiled oppression or a subtle form of oppression. A social structure is profoundly anti-children, and childhood is supposed to have a subordinate social status. As adults' values judge children, the latter are supposed to be powerless, asexual, apolitical, vulnerable, dependent, and incapable of taking part in serious adult pursuits. As a child Maneck is excluded from many aspects of social life where human experiences take place. His father does not want him to inherit the dying family business, a vestige of his huge success during the British colonial period. The disjunction between Maneck's desire and the normative discourse to which he is coerced into submitting destabilizes his subject position. He is often positioned in a double or multiple bind between patriarchal, class, and moral discourses. The discourse of protection or innocence only increases his vulnerability, exacerbating the predicament rather than helping enable him to better grapple with such a situation. Maneck's parents' fixation with his innocence and better future conflicts with realities

in school and society. The fact that he shuts himself off emotionally from his parents is due in large part to the imposed separation and migration by them. After moving to Dina's flat, he is placed in the protectionist care of Dina, his mother's old school friend, who insists on his calling her Aunty, not Mrs. Dalal.

In this context, it is important to explore the ways in which Maneck is empowered to counter a culture of protective moral discourse and undo its damaging effects to achieve a new self. The respite from the protectionist discourse comes when he meets Om who has little inferiority complex over his Untouchable background and tragic family history. Both 17 years old, they engage in sexual escapades together and share experiences and feelings. The clandestine and subversive contexts of antics, games, innuendo, and jokes play a significant role in the interrogation, negotiation and subversion of the hegemonic discourse of class and sexuality. Therefore, the teenagers' sexual shenanigans should not be trivialized or discounted as simple sexual play or experimentation because they open up an alternative discursive space for what Angelides (2007: 358) calls "the articulation of a range of adolescent subjectivities." Their sexual adventures ought to be taken seriously because such desires and experiences help reinscribe the discourse of innocence and sexuality in a counter-hegemonic manner.

Om is presented as 'knowing and precocious,' Maneck as 'innocent and vulnerable. Maneck appears to enter the period of adolescence to a large extent sexually ignorant, and he is expected to emerge from it sexually mature. However, such binary labeling does not work when the two boys mingle. The binary opposition of sexual precocity and purity is interrogated and challenged. Readers soon know that Maneck is not sexually innocent and Om is not a sexual predator. They are neither 'angel' nor 'devil.' As Maneck demonstrates by lacing his fingers tight together, "Good and bad are joined like that" (Mistry 1997: 311). Shenanigans form a bond

between them, which countervails the disempowering effects of their being cast as either innocent or precocious and by implication lacking in capacity for self-reflexivity. Encouraged by Om's sexual fantasies, Maneck invents a racy story based on his experience on the train. They take turns taking a peek at female bodies at a tailor's shop. Such bonding not only builds their masculinity through sexual adventurism. It is also a healing process, which empowers Maneck and Om to overcome the wounds from the past and come to grips with the present as competent subjects. As Maneck and Om share and interpret sexual knowledge and experiences, they can also better understand related political and social issues. Om's immediate family was slaughtered by the high caste landlord's thugs. In particular, his father Narayan who had defied caste rules and rebelled against the landlord in elections, was brutally tortured and castrated before he was killed:

...burning coals were held to the three men's genitals, then stuffed into their mouths. Their screams were heard through the village until their lips and tongues melted away. The still, silent bodies were taken down from the tree. When they begin to stir, the ropes were transferred from their ankles to their necks, and the three were hanged. The bodies were displayed in the village square. (Mistry 1997: 146)

Narayan's disfigured and unrecognizable body symbolizes how the power of authority is inscribed on the body. (Later, Om escapes death but suffers horrible dismembering and change in his body as a result.) Om's plight and travails as the Untouchable subaltern give Maneck a wider perspective of life. Likewise, Om discovers that the well-off Maneck was a victim of sexual harassment and abuse at the boys' boarding school and a college hostel. Their 'delinquent' activities do not just display the culture of machismo, but illustrate the possibility of creating a space of maturity by challenging the hegemonic order. Such bonding and affiliation empower them to make their own decisions about their bodies and lives. As they live together in Dina's

flat, they learn together how to exercise rights, take responsibility, and make decisions as social beings.

However, there is a difference between the teenagers over how to treat Dina, the only woman in their flat. A willing participant in any possible relationship with Dina, Maneck's feelings and emotions for her need to be contextualized in intersubjective relations, rather than being appropriated as a means to sexual relationship. He assumes the role of protector instead of exploiting the fresh-faced widow, unlike Om:

There were six days of vacation left before college reopened, and Om had an idea for more fun. He knew that age and moisture had distorted the bathroom door and its frame, leaving a sizeable gap when shut. He said they could take turns peeking while Dina bathed. (Mistry 1997: 424)

But Maneck refuses to spy on her body while she bathes. He even uses physical force to thwart Om's peeping because he wants to protect Dina's chastity. Their different attitude signals that Dina might be Maneck's love interest while she can be a plaything for Om. Maneck is willing to engage in intergenerational relationship only if Dina agrees regardless of age and other barriers. This attitude challenges the purported assumption of young male sexuality and codes of masculinity. For Maneck, sex with a woman would not be a conquest, a badge of honour or a sign of masculine sexual prowess.

The boys' 'penis-fencing' with her homemade patch sanitary pads<sup>98</sup> inserted at their crotches like phallus is a crucial occasion of transgressing the boundaries of moral discourse. Dina's discovery of homosocial camaraderie causes a moral panic as well as a sense of shame. Such a transgressive act can be construed as displaying sexual ambiguity implying situational homosexuality outside the control of the heteronormative system. But I pay more attention to

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<sup>98</sup> According to a recent report by market research group AC Nielsen, only 12 percent of India's 355 million menstruating women use sanitary napkins. More than 88 percent of them turn to alternatives including ashes, newspapers, and dried leaves (Straits Times 25 December 2012).

how the shenanigan has the implications of disclosing the sexual tension between Maneck and Dina, not just seemingly violating her modesty. In spite of her disgust and reprimand, the incident serves to liberate Maneck from the normative constraints of “good Parsi boy,” the mantra of discourse on innocence. The playful element does not undercut the seriousness of intersubjective ties, and the escapade enables the transgression of the threshold of moral discourse. That night, Maneck feels strong sexual desire for Dina when he sees “the fuzz in her armpits” (Mistry 1997: 289). The fact that they start to come closer to each other as sexual beings since the incident demonstrates that that kind of sexual game achieves more effect than it suggests.

The highlight comes in the form of sexually implicit needlework between Maneck and Dina following the penis-fencing incident. Maneck’s view of Dina as Mummy’s friend and her parent-like duty to take care of him make them skirt around ‘incest’ each time they show furtive sexual interest in each other. But it is obvious that Dina and Maneck’s needlework consummates their relationship in a highly symbolic manner. The simulacrum is a way of obviating taboo on intergenerational sex. Their work together to finish making dresses, due to the unexpected absence of the tailors, comes to embody Om’s sexual riddle about the needle and thread: “Listen, a riddle for you: to make it stiff and stand up straight, she rubs it; to make it slick and slide it in, she licks it. What is she doing?” (Mistry 1997: 424). The answer is threading the eye of a needle. It turns out that the joke leads to the symbolic power to transform mundane work into an intersubjective practice. With Dina’s consent, Maneck takes the initiative in threading the eye of a needle for her. Maneck is eager to lead the widow in the simulated act of sex during the performance of needlework:

He moistened the thread between his lips and passed it through the needle. Finding the holes in the button from the blind side took a bit of poking around

with the needle. But he managed to finish in fair time, and snipped the threads, triumphant. (Mistry 1997: 337-338)

The way they symbolically transgress the hegemonic moral discourse of sexuality illustrates the strategic usefulness of performativity although it lacks corporeal materiality. The process of metaphoric embodiment contrasts with Dina's abortive physical relationship with Fredoon earlier in the novel when, despite his best intentions utilizing inventive sexual gadgets, he fails to assuage Dina's guilty feelings about Rustom, her late husband.

However, their pseudo-sexual relationship is only partially successful as it fails to develop into a concrete material reality. The simulacrum is not enough to subvert the hegemonic discourse. It is clear that Maneck's presence in Dina's lonely life is a welcome change. She quickly embraces her role as surrogate mother for him. However, she cannot transgress the moral view of Maneck as her charge and old friend's son in spite of her furtive sexual interest in the 17-year-old boy's muscular body: "And such a handsome body. Then she blushed confusedly...young enough to be my son" (Mistry 1997: 200). The parent-like duty and age gap dissuade her from accepting or grooming him as the subject of love interest. Such moral discourse occludes the possibility of cross-generational relationship. Dina is sexually attractive at 42, but not active anymore. She is desirable, but unattainable for Maneck. In this situation Maneck's desire and passion cannot be recognized or reciprocated. Instead, the regulatory norm of sexuality imposes the line or marker dividing between childhood and adulthood. As Dina and Maneck, mistaken as a couple, wait outside her brother's office Nusswan wishes that her companion is at least 30 years old. When Maneck enters the office, however, Nusswan becomes "pale with visions of shame and scandal in the community" (Mistry 1997: 370). The alienating binary demarcation of childhood and adulthood shows that Maneck's adolescence inhabits a strange in-between world. Neither dependent nor independent, he is told to grow up but denied

the opportunity to participate except in the form of simulacrum or semblance. Its effects interfere with his smooth transition from child and adolescent to adult, putting his identity in crisis.

Such disjunction is well reflected during a brief encounter between Maneck, 25, and Dina, 50, after he returns from the Middle East. When they meet again they reassess each other. But his return as a masculine-looking man eight years later only confirms a distance between them, failing to generate a feeling of expected affection. Maneck's thick beard signifies a full adulthood, a departure from what he used to be when he lived together with her and the tailors. However, his appearance has the effect of alienating Dina, Om, and Ishvar. In particular, it stands in sharp relief to Om's feminized body stemming from the side effects of castration. It also contrasts starkly with Dina's decrepitude from her near blindness and aging body. She even has difficulties in recognizing him, not just because of her bad eyesight but also because of his masculine look:

The stick-wristed figure looked nothing like the Dina Auntie he had left eight years ago... Her eyes were pinpoints through lenses twice as thick as he remembered them. The grey in her hair had thoroughly subjugated the black... "Yes. You've grown a beard"... "That beard. You should shave it off. Makes you look like a toilet brush." (Mistry 1997: 604-605)

Although his manly features imply that he is fully ready to engage in relationship with her on an equal footing as adults, the absence of her reciprocation gives the impression that he is rejected. In spite of his return as a masculine being, the lack of due recognition makes his manhood—coupled with several years of alienation in the harsh world of the Middle East—no less abject than Om's castration and feminization, Dina's loss of sexual charm, and Ishvar's amputated body. He cannot even say hello to Om and Ishvar, let alone join their carnivalesque gathering where they enjoy Dina's food at her small kitchen. His alienation from biological and accidental families might help explain why he takes his own life after all. However, we will soon find out

that his sense of rootlessness and attendant despair is only an aspect of the bigger picture of his suicide.

### **Suicide & Rebirth of Community**

“From *The Suicide*, a play by the Russian writer Nikolai Erdman: ‘Only the dead can say what the living are thinking.’” (Rushdie 1995: 239)

Maneck and Avinash, college friends, have different experiences in postcolonial India in terms of class, religion, race, and ideology. Avinash’s father is a hardscrabble factory worker while Maneck’s father is a Parsi businessman. Such family background drives Avinash to study hard for scholarship then engage in leftist student activism whereas Maneck is not interested in studies or politics. Avinash’s young sisters commit suicide together to spare their poor parents the burden of dowries. Avinash is killed on the railroad after he was tortured in police custody, and Maneck chooses to kill himself on the railway after he returns from Dubai. The novel shows that this process of repetition and difference creates the moment of indeterminacy for agency’s return, raising the likelihood of transforming the dominant structure. Maneck’s appropriation and reinscription of Avinash’s death and his sisters’ suicide raise hopes that the repetition is not a “circulation of nullity, the endless slippage of the signifier” (Bhabha 2004: 351). The difference of the same produces the effects which are unintended yet strategically essential given that they are not subordinated to the same or identical, eluding resemblance and achieving “a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha 2004: 122). Maneck’s initiative to seek death proves to be something more than suicide in view of what happens afterwards. The post-suicide scene of genuine human experiences in a community suggests that the return of suicide or death on the railway is a new point of departure rather than arrival or end, and it is not a frivolous endless cycle of repetition without transformation.



The retroactive interpretation of Maneck's suicide in view of childhood or adolescent events might justify it as nothing but deferred action. His description of the hometown house evokes "a house with suicidal tendencies" (Mistry 1997: 237). Despairing of harsh reality after the tailors' arrest by the police, Maneck as a teenager is doubtful about the prospect of life, thinking that nothing will be changed unless he loses his mind or commits suicide (Mistry 1997: 336). However, such assumption about deferred action toward closure is deterministic and essentializing, which is problematic. In fact, we cannot know what decision Maneck will make until the last moment because the text portrays his life as a battlefield of pessimism and optimism. Since his death does not stem from a single event but happens in association with a series of events and their ruptures and reinscriptions, it is a non-teleological process. Therefore, the dynamic interplay between events and periods needs to be privileged over the linear and sequential movement. Contrary to the novel's chapter XVI's title "The Circle Is Completed," the circle is not finished or completed, and yet another story begins after all.

In the final section of this chapter, I argue that Maneck's return as an adult and his suicide are appropriated metaphors for questioning the existing system and values in postcolonial India, thereby opening up a possibility of an alternative discursive space for the downtrodden and marginalized. The significance of Maneck's suicide goes well beyond his physical death. He does not end his life simply because of his unfulfilled desire for Dina or because of his disillusion with postcolonial reality after he returns to India amid the raging riots following the assassination of Indira Gandhi. I draw attention to the fact that the post-suicide carnivalesque gathering of his friends in Dina's kitchen serves as a powerful trope of transgression and transformation of the hegemonic order in postcolonial India. The scene suggests that subalterns are able to convert their abjection into a mode of agency as long as there is a chance of making a

better arrangement in their everyday lives. The kitchen's transformation into a liberating space makes it necessary to explore how abject subjects challenge and transform the centre from the minority position. Contrary to Eli Sorensen's argument (2008: 355), Maneck's suicide—the product of his lived experience and epiphany—is not a “strange, awkward (rather than tragic) and somewhat unresolved denouement of the novel.” When he returns eight years after he left the country and seven years after the State of Emergency officially ended, it is not too late to answer the urgent call for action in an irreversible political manner, which raises the prospect of interrogation, resistance and subversion from the margins of society. While reading the newspaper story on Avinash's three teenage sisters' suicide, he finds himself admiring their courage:

What strength it must have taken, he thought, to unwind those saris from their bodies, to ties the knots around their necks. Or perhaps it had been easy, once the act acquired the beauty of logic and the weight of sensibleness. (Mistry 1997: 594)

In the structure of the novel, Maneck's suicide, which comes in the circulatory and relational process of death on the railway, works metaphorically as a viable strategy for resisting and transforming the hegemonic master narrative of history. Below, I demonstrate that his suicide based on “the beauty of logic and the weight of sensibleness” does not mean to succumb to the oppressive structure but produces the effect of transforming the dominant structure, expanding a horizon of possibility for those living on the periphery.

To comprehend the significance of Maneck's suicide, the focus should be on its context and effects rather than mere physical undoing. His problems are not what Robert Ross (1999: 243) describes as “self-imposed or the result of his over-drawn sensitivity.” For Parsi Zoroastrians, suicide<sup>99</sup> is a grave sin. Biological existence is supposed to consist with religious

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<sup>99</sup> Indian law stipulates that suicide is a criminal act an individual commits on to him/herself. Attempted suicide is an offense punishable under Section 309 of the Indian Penal code. The Section reads: “Whoever attempts to

existence. Dina is even against the mention of the word: "I don't want such a subject at dinnertime. Not even as a joke. You shouldn't even say the word" (Mistry 1997: 396). Her worry applies to a non-Parsi person too. When she overhears that Rajaram wants to renounce the world, she says, "... as a Parsi, my belief makes me say this: suicide is wrong, human beings are not meant to select their time of death. For then they would also be allowed to pick the moment of birth" (Mistry 1997: 477). But Maneck's choice of time does not bring stigma or suffering for his family or friends. Rather, his violation of taboo on self-inflicted death extends the meaning of his biological, religious existence to that of social existence. His suicide leads to a critical moment when the personal death is elevated to the intersubjective realm where the painful historical experiences of oppression, castration, and amputation are assuaged and subverted in a carnivalesque manner. In particular, I explore the way in which the circularity of Avinash's death and Maneck's suicide over a span of nine years highlights the recursive framework of social protest and transgression. The possibility of agency in oppression or abjection is embodied in everyday practices, which result in the reassertion of place as well as the reinscription of the hegemonic discourse of time.

Set in the mid 1970s, the novel suggests that violence is an important aspect of daily life in postcolonial India. The bodily inscriptions of history materialize at the individual level. Individual characters suffer unthinkable violence. They are subjected to abuse, torture, mutilation, or castration. The body is often rendered grotesque and abject by political forces that try to subjugate it and by economic forces that make it a perverse analogue of the system of development economics. Dina's brother Nusswan and Mrs. Gupta, Dina's employer managing Au Revoir Exports, are both portrayed as members of the oppressor group, and they are fervent

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commit suicide and does any act towards the commission of such offence, shall be punished with simple imprisonment for a term which may extend to one year or with fine, or with both."

supporters of the State of Emergency's empty promises and the state-led development economics. They seize every opportunity to take advantage of the marginalized and downtrodden to promote their personal political and economic interests. The Beggarmaster's drawing titled "Spirit of Collaboration" (Mistry 1997: 437) paradoxically says a lot about the mechanism of institutional power in which coercive violence is committed and experienced. It symbolizes how subalterns can endure unthinkable sufferings and counter the hegemonic discourse of coercive government policy such as forced sterilization and neoliberal economics. The spirit of collaboration and friendship in which a blind beggar carries a cripple on his shoulders is a symbolic counter-discourse of the Indian government-led Family Planning aimed at regulating private sexual life and its neoliberal economic policy in the mid 1970s.

The nature of the relationship between political oppression, development economics, and the abjection is probably best explained by looking at the novel's representation of main characters such as Maneck, Dina, Om, and Ishvar. The protagonists die or suffer bodily harm as a result of their resistance to the authorities. In particular, the act of returning appears to be a potential figure of disaster or undoing. As Sorensen (2008: 355) points out, the tailors' return to their village, Dina's return to her brother's house, and Maneck's return to the city appear to bring about their disastrous undoings. Dina, who refuses to live the life of a typical Parsi woman as her brother forces, ends up being a drudge in his house after losing her apartment. Her loss of sexual charm and near-blind spinsterhood shock Maneck when he returns; Om's rebellion against Thakur Dharamsi who had slaughtered his immediate family in retaliation for defying the caste system brings about his castration; Ishvar has to have his legs amputated after a state-imposed vasectomy causes side effects; and Maneck witnesses the madness of anti-Sikh riots and the misery of his friends before killing himself by throwing his body in front of an oncoming train.

However, the act of returning represents more than just failure or undoing in the text. As Bhabha (2004: 274) notes, the return of the subject suggests that there is “an agency that seeks revision and reinscription,” which is “the attempt to renegotiate...the intersubjective realm” for unity and solidarity based on alterity. Maneck’s return and suicide, along with Om’s castration and Ishvar’s amputation after their return to hometown, is a primary example of the nation state’s failure to administer life. Their failure to be integrated into normative life is the failure of postcolonial India’s biopolitics. However, the very failure to govern individual bodies ironically raises the possibility of a strategic response to an increasingly disciplinary power because such a failure signifies the limits of oppressive power. To borrow Foucault’s words (1998: 139), Maneck’s suicide affirms “the individual and private right to die,” or the “determination to die,” which is “one of the astonishments of a society in which political power had assigned itself the task of administering life.”

In a postcolonial context where the juridical politics of death is still more powerful than biopolitics, Maneck’s transgressive act of suicide needs to be interpreted as a radical strategy of usurping the power of ruling. On the way to the city the young Maneck meets Mr. Valmik on the train and asks him: “Wouldn’t it be better to respond honestly instead of hiding it? Maybe if everyone in the country was angry or upset, it might change things, force the politicians to behave properly” (Mistry 1997: 229). From this counter-discursive perspective, suicide can be appropriated as a metaphor for intensifying the determination to survive and repossess power. On the last page of the novel, Om whose body is fat and feminized due to the side effects of castration pulls a cart like an ox for his uncle who had suffered the phantom limb syndrome. This scene of co-suffering and cooperation is a parodic enactment of the spirit of collaboration envisaged by the Beggarmaster earlier in the novel. Om and Ishvar celebrate the bodily

differences of their abjection in a spirit of cooperation and unity. The carnivalesque parody of the Beggarmaster's eerie drawing works metaphorically to reassert social ties and rights in the intersubjective realm. The novel's last scene tells a subversive story of how abject bodies can be regenerated and transformed into what Butler (1993: 16) calls "bodies that matter" in everyday practices, demonstrating that the abjection or oppression holds the potential to become transgression, resistance, or subversion rather than resignation, despair, or fatalism.

The message of Maneck's suicide to the Indian government is loud and clear: He refuses to be governed in that manner. By refusing to play the existing form of 'power game,' he demands a reformulation of power relations from what Lacanian scholars call the symbolic order: authorities, dominant discourses, social conventions, etc. On the surface, Maneck's suicide appears to fit Emile Durkheim's concept of altruistic suicide because of his perceived sacrifice for community or society. However, his suicide should be differentiated from Durkheim's categorization of suicide<sup>100</sup>. Given Steven Stack's argument (2004: 12) that altruistic suicides occur in social groups where a low value is placed on the life of an individual, the concept of altruistic suicide is problematic. In fact, Durkheim's notion of suicide focuses on a modern Western society as opposed to a less developed colonial society, so such dichotomy does not work in the postcolonial context. Moreover, it is hard to accept such Eurocentric argument that the value of life is higher in Western societies, especially in consideration of the prevailing structuralist idea that people are merely the products of their circumstances as opposed to the Cartesian notion of individuality.

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<sup>100</sup> Durkheim classifies suicide into egoistic suicide, altruistic suicide, and anomic suicide. Egoistic suicide is marked by apathetic emotional detachment such as indifference and skepticism; altruistic suicide is characterized by energy and resolve, and it breaks down into obligatory, optional, and acute forms; and anomic suicide is performed with agitated irritation, anger, disappointment, disgust, and disillusionment. Whereas the egoistic suicide ends life since he or she has no purpose because of wearing of life marked by melancholy, the altruistic suicide ends life with a great enthusiasm for entering the world beyond the grave (Durkheim 1966: 225).

Maneck's value of life is not lower than that of any other in the novel. The only son of a former wealthy Parsi businessman, he is best equipped to succeed economically among the foursome and returns from the Middle East after making a fortune. His suicide is not merely driven by the characteristics of altruistic suicide such as individual's subordination to group, loss of a sense of individuality, public opinion, and collective benefits. Rather, his suicide stems from politically motivated individual agency in the postcolonial context. Instead of capitulating to the venality of the Indian government, Maneck comes to harbour a sense of political consciousness against oppressive power at the moment of his suicide. His witness of the abjection of Om, Ishvar, and Dina, all of whose bodies have become 'impoverished,' serves to arouse his consciousness of the brutal reality of the present. Maneck's awakening of political consciousness and subsequent will to death impugn the usual assumption of nihilistic self-annihilation or lack of agency in relation to suicide. Contrary to John Ball's argument (1999: 237), Maneck decides to take a stand against "the messy injustices" of postcolonial India by shedding his political apathy or "apolitical detachment." The implications of his suicide suggest that the novel's attempt at the postcolonial representation of abject subjects does not stop at a mere promise of their physical survival or will to live. Rather, his suicide shows how—to borrow Bhabha's words (2004: 93)—"the limits of the social" are pushed so that it is possible to "rediscover a sense of political and personal agency through the unthought." Maneck's suicide, whose radical political nature undermines the boundaries between self and other, is a political act of resistance for the sake of others. His suicide produces the metaphoric effects to suggest that it is not his final undoing, but rather his final doing for his friends.

I appropriate the Bakhtinian concept of the carnivalesque as an analytic framework to explain the post-suicide subversion of hierarchy and boundary in everyday practices. The kitchen

of Dina's family house is a secret rendezvous for daily carnival and buffoonery in the sense of transgression, parody, spectacle, and pleasure, where subaltern characters share food, care about each other, and laugh together. Even if there is not much time left before Dina's brother and his wife return, Om and Ishvar feast on leftover food and crack jokes. Such insuppressible sense of humour is instrumental in helping them overcome eviction, police brutality, forced labour, sterilization, and dismembering. The two make Dina "laugh every day. Like Maneck used to, once" (Mistry 1997: 614). It is not a vain attempt to lighten her mood. The laughter is not simply an individual reaction to their comic behaviour, but it is a form of Bakhtin's "carnival laughter" (1984: 11), the laughter of all. They partake in counter-hegemonic practice in her small kitchen at 1 pm every weekday when Nusswan and his wife are absent. It is not a simple everyday event, but a dialogic mode of resistance and transformation. Such social acts as eating, joking, and laughing make it possible to strip away the mundane façade and foster an intersubjective social realm in a liberating space where subaltern others can celebrate togetherness or unity by obviating the symbolic order. Then, this kind of daily "carnival" is virtually a "public event involving ritual spectacles, parodies of authoritarian discourse, the celebration of the grotesque body, free and familiar contact..." (Tokaryk 2005: 18).

It is important to note that the site of carnival in the novel moves more and more to the periphery, to a small kitchen in the end. The spatial transition from Dina's flat to the kitchen—with the flat's verandah serving as an interstice—illustrates the way in which boundaries are transgressed and transformed to reflect a liminal process of agency, which is taking place as a whole. The verandah turns out to be more than an attachment to her flat. It used to be an open gallery and had been converted into a playroom when Dina's late husband was a child. Ever since she allows the tailors to stay on the verandah, her view of them as strangers or outcasts



migrant workers changes. She makes it a proviso “only until they find themselves a place,” (Mistry 1997: 386), but the line drawn is no longer precise. The verandah is to be home for Om, his future wife, and Ishvar. Dina even goes so far as to accept her role as ‘mother-in-law.’ After the tailors leave for Om’s wedding in their village, she partitions the verandah with a patchwork curtain. As Ashcroft (2001: 194) notes, the metaphoric meaning of verandah is “the space of transition, and consequently of transformation.” The possibility of inhabiting minimal space in such a liminal way helps explain why Dina’s loss of her flat and the tailors’ return as beggars do not lead to displacement or the collapse of their community. Rather, their reassertion of a place in Dina’s family house occupied by her patriarchal brother symbolically transforms the traditional edifice into a carnivalesque alternative space which they inhabit as subjects of their experience and history.

However, it is debatable whether the practice of this kind of carnival can be more than an ostentatious form of temporary protest permitted by the symbolic order. Can it be more than a mutation in the already given order? Or is the carnivalesque kitchen scene merely what Terry Eagleton (1981: 148) describes as a “*licensed* affair,” a permissible rupture of hegemony, or a contained popular blow-off? As Stallybrass and White (1986: 14) argue, carnival is a “vehicle for social protest and the method for disciplining that protest” in consideration of its “Janus-faced” nature. Then, what matters is whether a carnival opens the stage for continued transgressive everyday practices, holding out the possibility of transforming a sanctioned space into a liberating one. The surviving characters in the novel might have learned the wisdom of pretending to compromise or accept the benefits of complicity, but they are not simply those who have decided to “work with the system, not against it” as Ian Almond (2004: 211) argues. Dina, Om, and Ishvar successfully carve out an alternative discursive space within the limiting

circumstances. In this context, Dina's kitchen is a liminal, minimal space where those living on the cusp of society can reaffirm a sense of self and a sense of place in daily lived life. This practice of habitation leads to what Ashcroft (2001: 174) calls "a process of inhabiting power" which promotes the appropriation, interpolation and transformation of power. This kind of freedom sphere within the patriarchal family house is a subversive metaphor for resistance to and transformation of the governing space by Dina's brother. It strongly suggests that the collapse of their apartment community should be construed in a positive, redemptive manner, not as an indication of the text's fatalism. Contrary to Laura Moss's argument (2000: 160), Mistry's novel does not conclude with the collapse of the apartment community which, in turn, leads to "Dina's loss of independence, Ishvar's loss of his legs, Om's loss of his 'manhood' and Maneck's loss of life." Rather, the carnivalesque gathering in Dina's kitchen works as a figure of the return of their horizontal community, which, in turn, raises the prospect of the symbolic rebirth of Maneck.

Temporally, Maneck's return and death on the railway subvert a linear and sequential model of progress. The meandering circulatory nature of railway is a crucial trope to suggest that progress is not a *fait accompli* in the postcolonial context. As McClintock (1992: 96) argues, "Even if the owl of Minerva has taken flight, there is widespread uncertainty whether it will return." This metaphor for contingency or non-linearity debunks the Hegelian dialectic decree that progress in the realm of history is possible because it has already been accomplished in the realm of truth. The haphazard, contingent circularity ahead of a critical moment of agency's return in the form of suicide subverts a linear and sequential model of time, just as the respective return of the twins and their mother and her lover in *The God of Small Things* reverses such a model through sexual transgression. Both novels refuse to be closed-ended within the governing space of family house. Although it is difficult to predict which developmental path the narrative

will take after such decisive events as suicide and incest, the texts' resistance to narrative closure suggests multiple interpretations. In both cases, the prospect of an alternative history is strategically grounded in the past events and yet defies the 'timeless sameness' of the present, raising the possibility of projecting into a better future open to change, rather than being locked in the past or clinging to the present.

It is significant that Avinash and Maneck, the new generation of postcolonial India, both die on the railway.<sup>101</sup> The death on the railway comes full circle in little more than nine years, albeit in different fashion. Maneck's jump into the path of the oncoming train gives us a rude awakening that the unnamed person who is killed on the railroad in the beginning of the novel is none other than Avinash, one of the few characters who actively take up a fight against the injustice of Indira Gandhi's regime. To appropriate Bhabha's words (2004: 90), the juxtaposition is a "painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present." Maneck's oblivion of his connection to brutal reality is reinscribed in a politically symbolic process of *re-membering*. In college days Maneck refuses to be a member of the student council and reproaches the student leader Avinash for no longer finding time to play chess or study because of his involvement in political activities. But Avinash's answer is: "Everything I do is chess" (Mistry 1997: 245). Maneck does not realize the symbolic meaning of Avinash's words until he decides to kill himself at the train station.

It turns out that the circulatory process of death symbolized by the railway suggests more than Bhabha's idea of: "a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present." The repetition is not a simple experience of *déjà vu*. In fact, the return of death

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<sup>101</sup> There are thousands of railroad deaths in Bombay (now Mumbai) a year. Although the novel does not specify Bombay as its setting, "the city by the sea" is definitely Bombay in the 1970s. According to railway figures (Straits Times 25 April 2012), "Some 4,000 people die every year on Mumbai's rail tracks—killed while crossing the tracks, traveling atop trains or in other accidents."

on the railroad illustrates how the past can be revalorized and rewritten in a counter-hegemonic manner. The ‘history lesson’ of Avinash’s death serves to show the condition of possibility for the return of Maneck’s agency. As Deleuze (2006: 89) explains in connection with Foucault’s rediscovery of Heidegger, memory is not to be contrasted with forgetting itself but with the forgetting of how to reconstruct or reinscribe it. At one point of adolescence Maneck becomes pessimistic:

“Memories were permanent. Sorrowful ones remained sad even with the passing of time, yet happy ones could never be recreated—not with the same joy. Remembering bred its own peculiar sorrow. It seemed so unfair: that time should render both sadness and happiness into a source of pain.” (Mistry 1997: 336)

However, the political agency of inhabiting and reconstructing memory enables the grown-up Maneck to recognize the possibility of interrogation, resistance, and subversion—rather than despair of irretrievability, human failure, and futility as Sorensen (2008: 354) argues. The interpolation and transformation of the past marks a new point of departure for Maneck to act in a different way so as to resist and subvert the hegemonic discourse of history which imposes regulatory norms. The subversion of the problem-ridden present with memory raises the possibility of reinscribing the past and creating new memories for the future.

Maneck’s awakening of political consciousness is a legacy of his friendship with Avinash, a destitute student leader. The symbolic meaning of their friendship is embodied at the moment when Maneck remembers Avinash’s words and commits suicide. Here, it is important to note that Avinash’s chess set serves as a kind of thematic scaffolding holding the narrative together. The disposable object haunts the novel, connecting Maneck and other characters in time and space, and it serves to open up a possibility of transformation attached to a string of forgetting and remembering. Recurring throughout the novel, the chess set shows the way in which the past relives in the present. As a college student Maneck borrows it from Avinash and forgets to give it

back. He forgets to return it to Avinash's parents after his death and leaves it in Dina's apartment before he goes back to his hometown. When he returns from Dubai eight years later Dina gives it back to him, but he forgets it in a restaurant before the waiter gets it for him. Each time he forgets it, it returns to him. This circular movement suggests that Maneck's act of forgetting is actually a process of realizing that Avinash's chess set has always been meant for him. It is no wonder that the last thought that crosses Maneck's mind before he jumps into the path of the oncoming train is: "He still had Avinash's chessmen" (Mistry 1997: 612).

The process demonstrates that the chess set is not a simple reified object, but is rather a discursive tool of agency for inhabiting and reconstructing memory, which contributes to the irreducible moment of Maneck's awakened political consciousness. More than just creating a physical trail of circuit, the chess set fosters a revitalized memory of what places and spaces stand for. Walking, observing, eating in the city serve as compelling reminders of his journey and help to tie past, present, and future together. Confronted with the 'checkmate' of postcolonial reality, Maneck must ask what conditions of life are worth fighting for and what he can and must do in order to create the conditions which make life worthwhile. He resolves to repossess Avinash's chess set in a way that enables him to explore the possibility of reformulating power relations in a simulacrum of chess game. The symbolic consequences of his suicide illustrate that Maneck must have realized that the game is not supposed to come to an end with checkmate or stalemate. He decides to accept the active role of agent, which he had avoided by leaving the college hostel, then the country, in despair. The implications of his suicide suggest that the return of agency needs to be understood differently from the pessimistic interpretation of the Nietzschean concept of the eternal return of the same, which might degenerate into the Sisyphean repetition. Indeed, death on the railway is repeated and yet produces different results.

The novel also shows how Maneck's practice of the self transforms abstract truth into a concrete act. Maneck's return and suicide achieve the effect of concretizing Mr. Valmik's abstract idea of dialogue and storytelling in the political context. Before he decides to take his own life, Maneck juggles Mr. Valmik's self-evident maxim of balance and Avinash's concrete action. Mr. Valmik, who preaches the truth of striking "a fine balance between hope and despair" (Mistry 1997: 231), is the grand narrative master of abstract truth or theory. Mr. Valmik, the advocate of equilibrium, is the counterpoint to Avinash, the champion of activism and practice. Maneck, not entirely following Mr. Valmik's line of reasoning, wonders in their two separate meetings how the act of suppressing "normal behaviour" can make it possible "to carry on" and the act of "shar[ing] [a] story redeems everything" (Mistry 1997: 229, 604). His suicide suggests that what he really wants to achieve is not a 'fine balance' for personal survival or self-preservation by sharing the knowledge of the world with others. Rather, the kind of hope to balance despair that he would like to see materialize is to destabilize and subvert the essentialist hegemonic concept of "timeless balance," which is "closer to a rigidly enforced set of social strata than to any harmonious equilibrium of opposing forces" (Almond 2004: 208).

After all, the novel demonstrates that differences can be translated into social solidarity which is forged in the Bakhtinian dialogics of difference—rather than the Hegelian dialectics of identity. The final scene following Maneck's self-inflicted death illustrates how the marginalized and downtrodden can articulate differences in a spirit of unity within a society by inhabiting a minimal space. Dina's patchwork quilt is troped as the fabric of such integration. The product of 'unnatural' rags during their one-year stay together at her flat symbolizes the insertion of the self into the world of others. The intertwined, contingent social ties raise the possibility of a cultural conglomerate whose seams are spaces of mutual recognition and solidarity, but not reified in

what Bhabha (2004: 273) denounces as “the liberal vision of human togetherness.” Such metaphoric coexistence of the self and other bodies shows that their human ties are horizontal, not colonial or hierarchical. The metaphor suggests that as Tokaryk (2005: 20) notes in connection with Bakhtin’s theory, Maneck’s death as an individual has “implicit within it a rebirth of the community as a whole.” The abject bodies of Dina, Om, and Ishvar are figured as “interwoven not only with the cosmic but also with the social, utopian and historic theme...the renewal of culture” (Bakhtin 1984: 325).

The patchwork quilt initially appears to be one of the fetishized objects upon which Mistry’s text dwells. As Tokaryk (2005: 16) argues, the novel puts a lot of emphasis on individual objects “in an effort to explore the ‘systems’ of which the objects are a part.” However, the metaphoric movement of the quilt—like that of the chess set—shows that it is a tool of agency for exploring the likelihood of de-fetishized forms of human experience. The quilt keeps returning and serves to connect Maneck and other characters in time and space. The difference from the chess set is that the quilt is appropriated as a metaphor for the four characters to hark back to the past together so that they can interrogate and transform the ugly reality of the present for a better future. To borrow Bhabha’s words (2004: xx), the quilt works as a trope for “turning the abjection of [postcolonial] history into the productive and creative history of the minority as a social agent.” Originally intended for Om’s wedding gift from Dina with Maneck’s help, it is in tatters in the end serving as a cushion for Ishvar’s amputated body. The threadbare, resilient quilt symbolizes the abject bodies of Dina, Om, and Ishvar. However, it turns out that their suffering or abjection is not an excess or a waste like the leftovers of fabric or a thread unraveling from the patchwork quilt. Dina readily provides a needle for reworking when its seam comes undone. The figuration of patchwork sewing highlights the capacity of those living on the

periphery to cooperate in creating an alternative discursive space. The palimpsestic possibility of the quilt is a metaphor for a vibrant liminal space to inhabit where their social ties are restitched and renewed. It is embodied in Dina's kitchen, a minimal liberating space where their everyday experiences are reinscribed with a new meaning.

Maneck's suicide epitomizes victory or self-affirmation through defeat or self-destruction in the postcolonial context, which materializes in the form of an alternative discursive space of community for the marginalized and downtrodden. Maneck's will to death—albeit the product of the recursive structure of protest and transgression—is significant as social agency, shining the spotlight on the will to live and revel in their position on the margins of society on the part of Dina, Ishvar, and Om. His jump into the path of the oncoming train, following his refusal to recognize Om and Ishvar, can be said to be voluntary *dis*-membering to reaffirm the daily struggle of living by the cohort of subalterns, so that he can be *re*-membered and reclaimed in a revitalized community of his friends. The post-suicide return of the community of Dina, Om, and Ishvar opens up possibilities of a new beginning as well as freedom from oppression and domination. In this context, Maneck's suicide can be construed as raising the hope of the rebirth of an interhuman space where subalterns are empowered to convert oppression or abjection into the capacity to reassert social ties, bear the unbearable, and survive in everyday life. The novel's epilogue embodies what Bakhtin (1984: 50) calls the "time of carnival" involving moments of death and revival simultaneously in which the minoritarian will is signified in a spirit of unity and solidarity despite differences of abjection. After all, Maneck's suicide and the return of community redefine "what qualifies as bodies that matter, ways of living that count as 'life'" (Butler 1993: 16). Intersubjective ties—symbolized by the patchwork quilt and the chess set—raise the prospect of interrogating, denaturalizing, and subverting the hegemonic structure of



political and economic discourses that deny them subjecthood and livable life, thereby making it possible to transcend the boundaries of self and other in everyday practices.

Throughout this chapter, I have focused on how young characters can be enabled to interrogate and subvert the hegemonic constraints of language, sexuality, sanity, family and society in postcolonial contexts. Rather than taking a deterministic view of identity, the chapter aimed to illustrate the ways in which the characters transgress and resist the blanket normative assumptions about childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Just because adults are physically stronger or discursively more powerful does not mean that they monopolize power and children lack it. Putting a gloss on the Foucaultian concept of power, I explored how the twins in *The God of Small Things*, Cyrus in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, and Maneck and Om in *A Fine Balance* exercise power in a counter-hegemonic manner as children or adolescents, especially when they are at the risk of being marginalized or banished. The instances show that they are able to utilize even the adverse situation to their advantage because dominance and submission are not fixed positions determined by the presence or absence of power. The twins challenge the hegemonic English language with the help of the local language; Cyrus the notion of uprightness with insanity and murder; and Maneck and Om the dominant discourse of innocence and sexuality with sexual shenanigans. The chapter demonstrated that such transgressive acts should not be dismissed simply as premature, playful, experimental, or irresponsible.

At the core of this chapter was the study of how a circuit of transgression and agency works in the distinct and yet contiguous relations of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, which I argue are neither to be subsumed nor to be disavowed by one another in the circulatory, relational structure of the narrative. Touching on the issues of the twins' reunion and Maneck's suicide, therefore, I scrutinized the possibility of agency's return and attendant transformation. I

stressed the ways in which they return as adults to transgress cultural norms and cope with the adverse circumstances in a more capable and drastic manner. Resistance in childhood or youth might have been insufficient but such experience serves as a lesson to seek alternative options when they return as adults. The twins' resistance evolves from counter-hegemonic linguistic practice in childhood to sexual transgression, while Maneck's childhood visions of family entrepreneurship and class equality transform into his desire to realize a community of social solidarity through his self-inflicted death. Cyrus's bipolar disorder as a disturbed child makes him a serial killer, but he later becomes an anti-colonial philosopher and meditator with a large following in a high-security prison.

The final section of this chapter was devoted to exploring the ways in which Maneck's suicide after his return from Dubai produces the metaphoric effects of creating a dialogic intersubjective community for Om, Ishvar, and Dina. They all pay the price for transgression, but they still long for change and transformation—no matter how minimal or marginal—in society. As in the case of Estha's everyday practice which combines with the transgressive act of incest to challenge the boundaries of language and sexuality, their daily carnivalesque gathering in a minimal space raises the possibility of crossing the limits of self and other by reterritorializing and subverting the discursive realm. Given that these texts end without closure, I tried to listen to what is not being said to explore the possibility of agency and resistance. Among others, the quilt—against the backdrop of Maneck's suicide—is an important defetishized item, which is metaphoric of taking into account multiple and contending realities given that its tapestry can be woven into 'unity' in spite of disruption, difference and incommensurability.

## Conclusion

My aim has been to identify and discuss the types of characters and their transgressive practices in order to demonstrate that transgression and agency have special relevance in the works of Mistry, Roy, and Rushdie. Throughout the dissertation, I viewed transgression as the creative impulse of postcoloniality and explored various ways in which such desire is used as strategy and tactic in practice to raise questions about the dominant structure of hegemony and open up new possibilities for marginalized and silenced characters. Furthermore, I argued that transgression is not simply a subtle message or metaphor for the possibility of transformation, but it is somewhat synonymous with the resistance and agency of postcolonials—particularly subalterns—as a form of social criticism for exploring genuine change in postcolonial society.

Inspired by the ideals of humanism and social justice, Mistry, Roy, and Rushdie<sup>102</sup> all make literary efforts to expand the boundaries of a hybrid tradition of ‘twice born’ Indian English literature. Their virtuosity is a crucial tool for condemning injustice and calling for a change to the status quo. Despite traits of modernist or postmodernist writing, their texts mark the form of realism with a difference: breaking with tradition and creating new possibilities of social criticism.<sup>103</sup> A salient feature of their works is to transgress and reinscribe the dichotomy between centre and periphery, self and other, the East and the West in the form of alternative

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<sup>102</sup> As Rushdie acknowledges, he follows the hilarious, energetic and stylistically exhilarating *All About H. Hatterr* by G. V. Desani: “*Hatterr’s* dazzling, puzzling, leaping prose is the first genuine effort to go beyond the Englishness of the English language... My own writing, too, learned a trick or two from him” (1997: xviii). Rushdie (1982: 8) also says Desani is one of the first Indian writers to make the aesthetic and formal challenge to the novel in English a ‘more global’ phenomenon than European modernism had done.

<sup>103</sup> The traditional perception of the realist novel, according to Edward Said (1994: 58), has been complicit with the creation of both a ‘home’ and an ‘elsewhere’: ‘home’ being Britain and ‘elsewhere’ being the colonies. In colonial discourse, the gradual emergence of a discourse about empire and its overseas territories idealizes the centre of the empire in contrast to the uncivilized and barbaric peripheries. In this situation, the cultural world of the realist novel is a celebration of the stability of the bourgeois European ‘self,’ represented by the main protagonist who is well integrated within his community. The problem is that this implicitly hierarchizes cultural identities in fiction whenever it deals with territories outside Europe. So, the Third World is usually perceived as chaotic and disorganized, in contrast to the organized and stable societies of Western metropolises.

realism.<sup>104</sup> The form empowers cultural others to inhabit centres of the narrative, overturning the celebration of the centre with a focus on social inquiry and cultural concerns. Such an effort to extricate themselves from the conventional form does not impose any kind of objective truth as they are fully aware that there is not one rule or narrative about reality, so that they can create a variety of realities and stories by debunking the foundations of the idealized manner of representation. The discussion of realism was not a concern of this study, but what I was interested in is the fact that in spite of difference in their style, these writers all manage to overcome the limits of the Eurocentric form of writing to produce fiction with social and political relevance, especially by creating the metaphoric effects of transgression. Indeed, this discussion opens the way forward for an exploration of the ways in which the form of novel is transgressed and recreated in various ways to transform the conventional narrative structure and endow it with a postcolonial cultural reality.

Throughout this study I set up a few basic stages of investigation: first, identify and describe the constraints of the hegemonic system; second, scrutinize the abjection and struggle of individual characters; third, comprehend transgression and its impact in a structural manner; fourth, reassess the practice or ethics of the self to explore the possibility of what H. Jung (1998: 99-100) calls “the recognition of the other as a self and the self as an other” in a Bakhtinian sense.

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<sup>104</sup> Rushdie’s well-known postmodern narrative style is called magic(al) realism; Mistry’s naturalistic style of prose is called “Stendhalian realism” (Rushdie 1997: xxi); and Roy does not employ the magic realization of metaphor although they are magical realist moments in the narrative told from the perspective of a child in contrast with the ugly postcolonial world (Bowers 2007: 56). Roy also uses Gothic elements to call into question legacies of colonialism, patriarchy and caste in order to give a voice to the marginalized. Dodiya (2006: 79) argues that Mistry uses “the form of alternative narratives” and even employs “anti-realist modes of narration.” After *A Fine Balance* was shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 1996, Germaine Greer said: “I hate this book... It’s a Canadian book about India.” Mistry (2003: 181) writes back to Greer in *Family Matters* in which a local intellectual character named Vilas criticizes “foreign critics” who “come here for two weeks and become experts,” lamenting: “People are afraid to accept the truth.” Despite his reputation for 19<sup>th</sup>-century classical realism, Mistry tries his hand on alternative realism in Indian contexts. For example, his characters like Peerbhoy Paanwalla in *Such a Long Journey*, the paan seller outside a brothel, Mr. Valmik and the drug peddler in *A Fine Balance* narrate historical and present-day stories in a way that verges on magical realism.

A syncretic approach through a variety of theoretical frameworks provided a dynamic tool for textual analysis with an eye to understanding postcolonial society. The contextualization of theories in concrete events and conflicts was effective and valuable in opening up the fictional world to theoretical engagement. In particular, I explored the relevance of theories to everyday—even mundane—practice in specific contexts, so that postcolonial studies can look afresh at history and improve our problem-ridden present for a better future. I firmly believe that this kind of analysis can play a role in bringing about a transformation of perception about social reality and dominant values, so that possible attendant change on the ground can see to it that many Ammus, Sufiyas, and Boonyis among us can be rescued from silent suffering while many more Rahels, Esthas, Dinas, and Tehmuls emerge from the margins to take centre stage where they become participatory members of a society.

A postcolonial system or society has a host of problems stemming from not only colonial experience but various modes of unequal power structures inside and out. Among others, the discursive representation, a key strategy of the hegemonic system, dismisses some characters as deviant, demonic, or unruly others. As Said (1994: 56) argues, “We live of course in a world not only of commodities but also of representation, and representations—their production, circulation, history, and interpretation—are the very element of culture.” The fact that the politics of representation is problematic means that it is necessary to doubt the value of what we have been taught to uphold. Here, the principal weapon of the three writers examined is interrogation. The act of writing is not just about self-expression and storytelling but also self-reflexive question-asking, albeit not offering a definite answer or promoting a particular campaign for change. As it is impossible to portray social reality exactly as it is, the representation of social reality always needs to be problematized, which is a valid and necessary

part of a fictional process. Their interrogation goes beyond a mere warning as it transforms representation and opens the way for strategies and tactics of challenging and subverting hegemonic constraints.

This dissertation showed that interrogation is an enabling way of expressing concern about the insidious attempt to homogenize society on the part of keepers of caste system, male chauvinism, (neo)colonialism, and even essentialist anti-colonialism. Interrogation is a crucial step toward exploring the possibility of the auto-determinant self in a postcolonial context where individuals are likely to become mere culturally generated automata as products of social reality. In this regard, these three are not simply reactive writers. Given the changing status and nature of postcolonial society and its literature, there is more nuance and ambivalence about how they engage with the world. It might not be possible to step outside such dominant discursive formations as language, marketing and audience, but they manage to negotiate and challenge them in a subversive manner, which is a well-known strategy of writing back. To borrow Said's words (1994: 216), searching for possible sites of resistance and interpolation by participation is "an alternative way of conceiving [literature]" rather than "a reaction to imperialism." The result of such participatory resistance is the transformation and reinvention of not only the language but also ideas. Such a conscious effort is what Said (1993: 216) calls "*the voyage in*" to "enter into the discourse of Europe and the West, to mix with it, transform it, to make it acknowledge marginalized or suppressed or forgotten histories." I demonstrated that the counter-hegemonic use of the English language and literary canon is part of efforts to address the imbalance of power between English and local languages. This spirit of resistance and transformation is also embodied in the counter-hegemonic linguistic practices of individual characters, offering hints of

a constructive solution which is potentially enabling. Their dialogic engagement with the world helps prevent them from being reduced to passive ciphers of discursive practices.

The corollary of constant questioning is uncertainty about the existing hierarchy and order, i.e., what is taken to be natural, irreversible, or eternal. Then there would be no clear lines between good and bad, constructive and destructive, moral and immoral. A broadly poststructuralist approach was instrumental in illustrating and questioning essentialist representational constructs. In a contextualized manner I outlined how such doubt or uncertainty can be utilized to promote the courage or will to improve the postcolonial system and make it a better structure in which to live in. To borrow Bhabha's words (2004: xx), this "minoritarian will to live" emerges "[o]ut of a spirit of resistance and forbearance." They are able to extricate themselves and make their own history only insofar as they are willing to persist and act in the belief that fate is not decreed permanent. But it is not merely willpower that makes postcolonials able to do that. In these texts they endure without giving up and soldier on in order to transform whatever sign of prospect into a realistic strategy in the concrete context. Focusing on the lower end of the social scale, therefore, the study made a thematic approach to demonstrate how certain types of individual characters disowned, ignored, cast out, or marginalized by family, society, or nation are enabled to countermand disciplinary practices imposed upon them, especially upon the body, and transform into subjects or 'significant others' by engaging in various kinds of counter-hegemonic transgression. The metaphoric effects of transgressive practice highlighted the possibility of generating resistance and agency which defy and deconstruct the essentialist discourse or the hegemonic narrative of capital-H History. Such metaphors of consciousness and identity were also set against global or imperial efforts to reify local differences and cultural specificities and turn them into commodities.

However, the postcolonial texts themselves do not offer much hope for change as they portray society as fraught with corruption, pollution, discrimination, misruling, etc. Such ugly reality suggests itself in a scene which haunts Mistry's *A Fine Balance*. Dina, who covers her nose against stench, cannot erase the image for a long time:

One evening...she gazed beyond the railway fence where a stream of black sewer sludge spilled from an underground drain... The workers were trying to unblock the overflowing drain... Then a boy emerged out of the earth, clinging to the end of the rope. He was covered in the slippery sewer sludge, and when he stood up, he shone and shimmered in the sun with a terrible beauty... Behind him, the slum smoke curled towards the sky, and the hellishness of the place was complete. (Mistry 1997: 67)

Such harsh reality suggests that simple transgression or resistance would not bring about the ability to transform the status quo. On the assumption that such reality is only the condition of possibility, this dissertation was devoted to examining various explicit and implicit ways of challenging and subverting the imposed norms or certainties that constrain individual characters as subaltern others. In this regard, I took pains to explore the ways in which they transform even a grain of hope into a realistic prospect with social and political significance on individual and structural levels. This is why I did not view what Ashcroft calls "little more than a nibbling at the edges of history" (2001: 88) as despair or failure. Rather, I took it as a starting point and examined the possibility of appropriating the margins to explore alternative forms of knowledge and power that can survive in the onslaught of capitalist imperialism.

A central goal of this dissertation was finding an answer to Spivak's question: Can the subaltern speak?<sup>105</sup> Various examples of counter-discursive and corporeal practice, especially

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<sup>105</sup> Spivak elaborates on the difficulties that subalterns have in enunciating their position in a complex struggle for domination without their argument being appropriated by one of the dominant groups, or elite intellectuals. Highly critical of postcolonial theory which she argues inadequately addresses or even turns a deaf ear to the agency and resistance of the native, Benita Parry (1987: 34) charges Spivak with being unable to hear the voice of the subaltern and suggests that Spivak's work stems from a "theory assigning absolute power to the hegemonic discourse in constituting and disarticulating the native." As Mongia (2000: 11) suggests in reference to Stuart Hall's



surrounding the body—a crucial site of human experience—suggest that subaltern others might have already spoken, helping transform our understanding of how the body politic and other dominant discourses function. With the help of the authors providing a voice to their marginalized characters through a sympathetic viewpoint, some of them do succeed in making their own choices and speaking for themselves, adding their voice to fictionalized developmental narratives. Violation of the impervious boundaries of society enables them to retrieve a voice and make themselves heard even through silence and invisibility, creating counter-narratives that cannot be ignored. Here, another question immediately arose: What should we do to listen to subalterns' voice inherent in the texts and deliver it? The efforts to listen to what subaltern characters might be already speaking had much to do with the issue of restoring agency to them. As part of efforts to trace and restore their ignored histories, I paid attention to how the ethics of those occupying a privileged position works for those occupying a marginalized one. Among others, two contrasting examples of Tehmul and Sufiya epitomized the importance of compassionate ethics on the part of authority figures when it comes to speaking for subaltern characters so as to “watch out for the continuing construction of the subaltern” (Spivak 1988: 294). If it were not for efforts to assess and represent marginal practices with empathy and compassion, subaltern others might have to resort to a more radical measure. Such nature of relationality suggests that the possibility of achieving freedom cannot be explored without constantly striving to engage and negotiate the limits and constraints of the structure.

In a Foucaultian sense, the practice or ethics of the self is individuals' effort to explore the possibility of overcoming panoptical surveillance or gaze in order to fulfill the desire to choose a better structure to be subjected to or identify with a preferred version of what they want

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“wonderfully nuanced” notion of identity, however, the negotiation between essentialist and poststructuralist formations can offer a viable answer to the possibility of the subaltern's agency.

to be.<sup>106</sup> After all, the freedom of choice cannot be thought of separately from the structure.<sup>107</sup> Then, freedom is not the opposite of domination, but rather a condition of possibility of domination. In spite of this bleak view of human freedom, however, such viable practices as engagement and transgression hold out the prospect of transforming the cage-like structure of the world. As Custer (1998: 139-141) argues, if freedom is a condition of possibility of power relations then all power relations are open to being displaced in practice. As William Faulkner (2004: 151) says, “We must be free not because we claim freedom, but because we practice it.” Sufiya, in *Shame*, literally obliterates the male-dominated system, but the question remains what she should do with the freedom she has achieved. My profuse use of transgressive examples might prompt moral concerns especially with regard to what are the limits to transgression, but what I am advocating is not an indiscriminate valorization of every transgression as an essential value. Transgression can be privileged in specific contexts only insofar as it enables a challenge to proscriptive moral systems, so that it can be strategically valuable for a guide of alternative practice or conduct of life.

When we traced and examined transgressive impulse in the narrative, we found that rebellious historical experience does not automatically lead the way for a better prospect. Baby Kochamma is an apt example of transgression’s failure. Her return home does not generate transformative agency or resistance. Rather, she becomes the custodian of tradition and

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<sup>106</sup> In spite of Foucault’s emphasis on transgression’s relationality with the limits (1977: 33-34), he does not deny the possibility of human freedom. As I stated in Introduction, my study pays attention to the possibility of resistance and agency in the later Foucault’s emphasis on the practice of the self. He (1984: 44) argues that the freedom of the individual from the government of individualization is not grounded in meta-narratives of justice or morality but must take the form of a principle of permanent self-critique and experimentation.

<sup>107</sup> Despite his advocate for freedom to reject or offend, Rushdie does not deny the existence of the limits which transgression tests and pushes, giving rise to a new thought lying outside the normative: “How is freedom gained? It is taken: never given... What is freedom of expression? Without the freedom to offend it ceases to exist. Without the freedom to challenge, even to satirise, all orthodoxies, even religious orthodoxies, it ceases to exist. Language and imagination cannot be imprisoned, or art will die, and with it, a little of what makes us human” (1992: 396). Rushdie’s emphasis on “the freedom to offend” causes a debate on the role of transgression in literary critique. He asks, “Who wants safe books?... I wouldn’t read one—wouldn’t want to write one” (Chauhan 2001: 160).

oppressor of transgressors, creating a highly morally charged environment of suffering and injustice. I used her case to raise a fundamental question about the efficacy of transgression because her experience and resistance as a teenager turn out to be an excuse for internalizing hegemonic Western values and ideas. She is concerned about only herself, not others, in a stark contrast with the subversive unions of Ammu and Velutha, and Estha and Rahel, whose transgressive desire helps construct meaning from different experiences and awaken a new sense of socio-political consciousness about postcolonial reality. In a seemingly unrelated but linked story of oppression in postcolonial India, Maneck's reawakened social consciousness and the symbolic effects of his suicide demonstrate the value of transgression.

Well aware of the limits of the Foucaultian or poststructuralist view of subject formation, I deliberately stressed the ethics of the self which creates self-reflexive capacity on the part of women and marginalized sections of postcolonial society to become subject *of* power, not subject *to* power. Here, an abiding question was whether, and how much, such practice of the self is politically useful and even subversive. With this question in mind, I explored anticipatory or voluntary elements inherent in everyday practice of transgression and its metaphoric effects, rather than dismissing it as mundane or reformulating theories which Eagleton (1987: 48) argues are "vacuously apocalyptic" in "voluntarist, essentialist or existential guise." Since it is impossible to eliminate individuals' experiences (they never completely submit to control or domination), the elusiveness of the self does not mean that we should dismiss all the possibility of agency and resistance. The concept of mimicry was used to illustrate this point. Whereas the mere act of mimicking Westerners or natives may not yield the promise of alternative space or moment, I demonstrated that counter-discursive practice still raises the prospect that the power of hybridity or ambivalence can be appropriated as an enabling way of eluding control and power.

Among other identified structures of power and knowledge, I focused on the dynamics of repetition and difference to show how the three types of subaltern characters are enabled to engage and negotiate the given structure to re-establish human relations in a different manner. In the Introduction, I made it one of the priorities to demonstrate how established power relations and boundaries are challenged and even subverted in the recursive narrative structure—rather than circulated in the same manner—opening the way for transforming oppression or abjection into agency. The point is that the unjust system might be repeated, but it does not work in a predetermined way. Dominance and oppression might be a repeat of what came before in the narrative, but it is not an endless return. The reiteration which is not entirely formulaic can be appropriated as a new point of beginning which offers hope and another opportunity to fulfill the promises and resolutions that were never realized before. Such a structure facilitates a challenge to the boundaries of centre and margin, self and other, making it possible to invert the essentialist discourse which prevents other positions from emerging. Identified outside the hegemonic centre of their fellow humans, subaltern characters struggle to carve out alternative spaces and moments for not only themselves but others within and even beyond the given structure. Their subject position as doubly, triply marginalized provides different perspectives to the status quo, calling into question what really others them. Transgression represents their refusal to be confined within the problematic structure. In this regard, the dissertation looked at how transgression does not only transform the dominant structure, but also creates a new structure of life experience. The practices and lived experiences of transgression operate to produce a regenerative structure of intersubjective agency and recognition, reflecting change in the exterior and interior life of individual characters.

In this way we found that the dialogic structure of repetition and difference offers lessons to learn in the here and now, which can be appropriated for a strategy of survival and renewal in postcolonial contexts. Indeed, the characters appropriate historical experiences in the repetitive structure of transgression so as to create an alternative discursive space. The texts show that history is far from being a straight line dictated by Father Time. Specifically, telling the story in a nonlinear fashion works to subvert hegemonic ‘History,’ a deterministic and inevitable force. Since history is not fixed but fluctuating and at times reversible in the flow of time, I demonstrated how smaller histories of suffering and loss, beneath the surface of official history, can be recovered and revalorized in a counter-hegemonic manner. As a methodology, I appropriated a Foucaultian genealogical analysis to show that the persistent (counter-)return of transgression—albeit fractured, fissured, or discontinuous—builds up some grounding for a new point of beginning, a renewed and recurrent effort to prevent the endless repetition of oppression and make that process a part of transformation. Repetition does not proceed in an unbroken line from a fixed origin. More importantly, a repeat of transgression is an unsteady, contingent succession, which helps build core identities that are open to change so that they do not have to submit to the kind of oppressive social structure that prevailed in the past.

In order to prove that the return of resistance and agency is not a frivolous cycle of repetition without transformation, I heeded how the counter-hegemonic practice of the self produces effects or foundations around which to challenge and transform the status quo. By doing so, I wanted to demonstrate that in postcolonial contexts repetition is not like the stone of Sisyphus which is constantly pushed up only to be rolled down. Nor is it like the liver of Prometheus which is constantly renewed only to be devoured by insatiable vultures. This is the point where I employed the strategic use of essentialism to prove how transgression grounded in

dynamic material reality contributes to fostering critical moments and spaces of resistance and agency, which, in turn, highlight what needs to be done in the here and now to prevent a repeat of oppression and open up regenerative possibilities. We found that everyday practices are not simple quotidian behaviour emblematic of fractured or fissured subjectivities, but they are instrumental in transforming the daily grind or the abjection into agency. In particular, I focused on the ways in which the body serves as a metaphor for dealing with issues of imperialism, patriarchy, and other social strictures on both discursive and material planes. The study of the body's experiences showed that both corporeality and discursivity are essential components in the making of subjectivity and the production of agency for transformation. Downtrodden or marginalized characters whose bodies are regulated and suffer unthinkable violence negotiate and push the limits or boundaries of what they are able to do by strategically taking a stand against hegemonic constraints in everyday life. This process empowers them to tackle failure and despair in ways that they can awaken to the social consciousness of shared bond or intersubjective unity. At the same time, I also warned against the reckless use of essentialism, well aware of counter-hegemonic discourse's "inevitably normalizing consequences" (McNay 2009: 71). Kari Saipu is the epitome of subjugation and removal due to postcolonials' essentialist appropriation of the rhetoric of colonial discourse to exclude cultural others. The 'reverse-colonizing' process of racialization and sexualization embodies the mistake of reproducing another grand narrative, a totalizing exclusive discourse that the formerly oppressed or colonized had sought to dismantle.

The study of strategic essentialism and difference was ultimately aimed at seeking an answer to the following questions: Is solidarity—albeit transient or brief—possible? If so, how does it come about for the marginalized? Therefore, one of the central issues in this dissertation

was: “How to translate the differences...into a kind of solidarity” (Bhabha 2004: 244). However, it is difficult to go beyond differences into unity or strike a fine balance between them: that is to say, both relevant and out of the box. So a major task of this study was the seemingly impossible job of exploring the possibility of beauty in ugliness or unity in chaos as part of efforts to account for the struggles of various characters and suggest the vision of social change. This kind of sublimation or solidarity never comes easy in textual reality. So I proposed to keep in mind that such a unity can come only when postcolonial agency emerges or returns on the strength of difference, but not a totalization of it. I used incest and carnivalesque transgression as exemplars to explain efforts to reach unity or solidarity in difference by overcoming traumatic postcolonial experiences. Such critical moments of transgression as sibling incest in *The God of Small Things* and suicide in *A Fine Balance* illustrated the possibility of going beyond binary or essentialist constraints toward solidarity in postcolonial contexts. Dina’s threadbare patchwork quilt is a key trope of contingent unity in diversity, offering an implicit subversion of the dominant vision of life. The quilt is a discursive product of irreducible experiences, but since it is open to restitching for coexistence and mutual recognition it can become a coherent whole of social fabric that is greater than the sum of its parts. It implies that although space and time for peripheral postcolonials are minimal and liminal, they are able to inhabit them in a counter-hegemonic manner, raising the possibility of changing reality. On this ground I examined how transgression and agency raised the prospect of transforming hegemonic space and time of oppression and despair into those of promise and hope in postcolonial contexts. Such practice occurs in various places like kitchen, apartment, streets, community, and family house. By exploring how a third space arose from the liminal and minimal rather than a fixed uninterrupted model, I sounded out

the possibility that individual characters can be empowered to “elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of [their] selves” (Bhabha 2004: 56).<sup>108</sup>

To explain the workings of such engagement and transformation in the texts, I found it useful to appropriate the Bakhtinian concept of dialogics, an approach which helps impugn the hegemonic system and revise a view of human relations. The main reason I advocated dialogics rather than dialectics was that the pursuit of comprehending dialogic human relations beyond dialectical ones made it possible to go beyond a single totalizing perspective and demonstrate that difference or diversity can help them grasp the consciousness and lived realities of others, paving the way for genuine coexistence. Here, the rhetoric of difference does not serve the purpose of justifying existing inequality or hierarchy, as implied in the opening line of Rudyard Kipling’s poem written in 1889: “Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet” (Booth 2011: 114). The dialogics which privileges difference that I uphold is dynamic, open-ended, and in a state of flux without causing a catastrophic rupture or a rigorous closure. The metaphorical effects of carnivalesque transgression illustrated that an ethical human community is not dialectical, but dialogical where the opposites remain unresolved but still can come together. The hybrid profusion of dialogic life, called heteroglossia, raises the possibility of crossing the boundaries of self and other and achieving open-ended solidarity. As Spivak (1990: 142) warns, however, heteroglossia and dialogism should not be “words that are used to cover over repressive dominance” in favour of a mere licensed carnival, which is another sign of submission to hegemonic authority. Future productive research on human ethics could eventuate from applying Bakhtin’s ideas to postcolonial literature without being appropriated by the temptation to take up them to justify the singular ruling ideology or discourse.

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<sup>108</sup> As Bhabha (2004: 249) points out, postcolonial critical discourses require forms of dialectical thinking that do not disavow or sublate alterity or otherness. In this regard, I focused on Bakhtin’s open-ended dialogics of difference.



This study might have raised more questions than it has intended to answer, given that the possibilities of transformation made available by counter-hegemonic transgression are not completely free from constraints and can also have their own limits because they can represent yet another boundary which needs to be transgressed or subverted. While it is impossible to explain the vast body of postcolonial literature with the framework of transgression and agency alone, I chose to do so because it can offer a new way of reading postcolonial texts. As it turns out, the use of transgression and agency as a means of postcolonial critique contributed to comprehending and reinterpreting the texts and their overall structure. It also proved valuable when it came to revalorizing marginal practices represented in the texts, holding them up as a mirror for a daily reality within family, society, or nation. In the age of IT, there emerge various sophisticated technologies of the practice of the self. Drawing on the conflation of postcolonialism, cosmopolitanism, and postmodernism, Rushdie's *Fury* shows how new technologies of communication can be used as significant tools for a revolutionary change on an imaginary island. The power of IT technology to effect change opens valuable path to future research aimed at delving into how individuals are capable of actualizing what little transgressive potential they have at a time when digital technology is increasingly used as a device to constrain them.

Various modes of transgression identified and examined here illustrate that the relationship between discourse and practice is not mechanical or determinist, but dynamic, dialogic and transformative. In spite of the devastating effects of colonialism or neocolonialism, postcolonials are not mere products of the processes of subject formation. Since they can engage and negotiate the hegemonic system in a personalized, selective manner they are not robots or rubber stamps of language, discourse or ideology. That the hegemonic institutions and discourses

do not just impede but produce self-reflexive capacity for the marginalized sections of postcolonial society suggests that transgression can be the fulcrum of counter-hegemonic everyday practice for liberatory moments in ironic reversals. Indeed, by turning the strategy used by the system keepers and custodians on its head subaltern others are able to reshape themselves as capable selves in family, society, or nation. Their efforts to find alternative ways within the anti-humanistic system show that marginality can be appropriated as “an unprecedented source of creative energy” (Ashcroft et al. 1989: 12), and such counter-hegemonic practice can open the way for mutual recognition and social ties in a dialogic manner. After all, transgression can be useful and empowering for the marginalized who have to tackle enormous difficulties and make decisions for change in postcolonial reality. If we place pragmatic concerns before philosophical imperatives, it immediately becomes clear that those in power and institutions should open up a little wider and act with just authority, coupled with the ethics of empathy and compassion, not hubris or draconian powers, if they want to prevent the radicalization of disaffected ones and create a virtuous cycle of diverse possibilities. Such efforts to care about the marginalized and even sacrifice for them can be what will make a huge difference in the end, opening up the possibility of making human beings autonomous, not automata. It is a crucial step toward transforming the hegemonic system into a better social structure which is open to negotiation, change, and revision.

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