

# **A Pool of Anglepoised Light:**

## **The legacy of colonialism in three Indian novels written in English**

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by

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**This thesis is dedicated to the memory of**

Terrence Michael Rogers (1947-1988)

## Abstract

This thesis examines the work of three major Indian novelists belonging to consecutive generations whose responses to the legacy of colonialism emerges from and signals important historical shifts in postcolonial India. Focusing on three novels, the first written in the period immediately preceding independence, the last in the late 1990s, the thesis demonstrates that the colonial legacy is a dynamic force informing and shaping the consciousness of the Indian novelist writing in English. The similarities and differences between Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938), Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) demonstrate that the residual effects of colonialism remain forcefully felt but the responses to those effects are so various as to undermine the notion that there is a single, stable colonial legacy. This thesis, focusing on three novels in particular, is not concerned with postcolonialism as a global condition but with the changes that have occurred within Indian writing in English.

## Chapter One: Introduction

Each of the three novels discussed in this thesis – *Kanthapura* (1938), *Midnight's Children* (1981), and *The God of Small Things* (1997) – responds in particular ways to the legacy of colonialism. In this introductory chapter, I will describe the historical and literary contexts from which these novels emerge, and the moments to which they respond. The following three chapters, each devoted to a particular novel, will examine specifically how these novels respond to this colonial legacy. This legacy is, of course, a particular colonial legacy which is changing and unstable, and as Makarand Paranjape argues, “[t]he cultural richness and variety of India, not to speak of its population and size, is so large that any notion of postcoloniality is insufficient to come to terms with it.”<sup>1</sup>

Born in 1909, Raja Rao belongs to a generation of writers who have been described as the “founding fathers”<sup>2</sup> of the Indian novel written in English. This particular generation, which includes major novelists such as Mulk Raj Anand (b.1905), R.K. Narayan (b.1907), and G.V. Desani (b.1909), were the last generation of Indians to experience both formal British rule and the celebrations of independence in 1947. Between them, Anand, Narayan and Rao published five novels within four years (1935-38), and constitute the beginnings of a significant literary tradition. William Walsh even goes as far as to suggest that these novelists were “the inaugurators of the form itself since it was they who defined the area in which the Indian novel in English was to operate, drew the first models of its characters and themes and elaborated its particular logic.”<sup>3</sup> However, even though this generation of writers played a crucial role in the emergence of the Indian novel in English, these writers

did not exist in a creative vacuum, and the origin of the Indian novel written in English can be traced further back than the late twenties and thirties.

Although the novel can be a suitable form for the adaptation and preservation of indigenous oral traditions, Indian culture lacked such a form until the British arrived in India.<sup>4</sup> With the introduction of capitalist production techniques, and in particular the impact of print culture providing Indian novelists access to a means of cultural mass production, Indian stories could be altered and transferred into the novel form. While the stories might only be altered in a minor or insignificant way to accommodate its new form, the experience of the story itself is radically changed. The translation that occurs between an oral mode and a literary genre is a shift from a popular form to an elitist one, excluding a huge population of illiterates. Once introduced to Indian culture, the novel developed more quickly in its regional languages, such as Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, Kannada, and Malayalam, than it did in English. As Meenakshi Mukherjee demonstrates, this development generally occurred in the following stages, regardless of the language of expression: historical romances; social realist novels; novels concerned with the individual's psychology.<sup>5</sup> In 1857, Bhudeva Chandra Mukherjee published his novel written in Bengali, *Anguriya Binimoy*. Another talented Bengali novelist, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, wrote only a single novel in English, *Rajmohan's Wife* (serialised in 1864), before abandoning English as his preferred literary language.<sup>6</sup> In Hindi, Kishorilal Goswami published *Labangalata* in 1891, and in 1890 the Marathi novelist, Hari Narayan Apte, published *Maisorcha Wagh*. While these novels written in various Indian languages had been published since the middle of the nineteenth century, the first historical novels written in English were considerably later; S.K. Grose and M.K. Mitra both published in 1909, as did K.S. Venkatramani in 1927.<sup>7</sup>

Despite its slow development as an Indian literary language, English had been used by a small number of important Indians for about one hundred years. Its rise as a significant language used by Indians was propagated in the specific laws passed by the British government in India during the nineteenth century. In an effort to attain a higher level of social stability and political order, the British government sought to increase the Indian investment in the Raj by employing Indians as civil servants. In order to maximise bureaucratic efficiency and to prolong the duration of imperial rule, Macaulay's 1835 Minute on Education called for Indians to be taught both the English language and the English literary tradition.<sup>8</sup> This strategy resembles the practice of early missionaries who taught English as a means of asserting the authority of the *Holy Bible*, but lies in direct contrast to the first European traders who initially learnt Indian languages in order to trade. Though from an administrative viewpoint it seemed practical to teach English as an official means of communication, the privileging of English literature as being superior in quality to Indian literatures simply equates to the assertion of cultural hegemony.<sup>9</sup> It is ironic that while educating Indians in English was intended to increase bureaucratic efficiency and stability, it became a major factor contributing to the demise of Britain's formal rule over India. In any case, Britain's dominance over Indian culture enabled a few, elite Indians to gain a high level of proficiency in the English language, allowing Indian culture to absorb this language as one of its own. As a consequence of being employed as the official administrative, judicial and educational language of India, English emerged as an Indian literary language.

Literature written in English has several implications that signal its difference from that which is written in India's regional counterparts. Since English is a major world language, the audience addressed by Indian writing in English is considerably

more extensive than those in regional languages, providing an opportunity for the wider circulation of the literary work, and potentially increasing the status of the novelist. The emergence of a widespread cosmopolitan audience constitutes an important part of what Stuart Murray has recently called a postcolonial world order.<sup>10</sup> It is from within this new world order built in the wreckage of imperial decline that nations or communities emerge to assert new forms of influence and authority. This spread of English as a global language can be attributed to the legacy of British imperial expansion and colonisation, as well as to the cultural dominance of the United States after the Second World War.<sup>11</sup> These two forces are not, however, completely separate entities; while America is a former British colony, it now exerts a significant economic, political, and cultural influence over Britain. English, then, enables some Indian novelists to communicate with this wider, international English-speaking world. Even though English is the language of the former coloniser, it does not divide Indians according to their geographic, regional roots. Since English has the ability to cross these linguistic divisions, it is a pan-Indian language that unites India by allowing those from different regions to communicate with each other in a neutral language.<sup>12</sup> In this respect, Indian novelists who write in English do so in a trans-regional language. Furthermore, since the English language was absorbed by Indian culture during the British Raj, it can express a distinctively postcolonial Indian sensibility, whereas the indigenous languages that have their origins before colonialism do not register this change to the same degree. In other words, because the development of English as an Indian literary language obviously occurred after the colonial encounter, it conveys an Indian sensibility after the impact of colonialism had significantly altered the general consciousness of the subcontinent.



The rise of the first generation of Indian novelists writing in English occurred relatively late, especially considering that the novel was not the first literary form to be employed by Indians who wrote in English. Instead, Indians wrote either poetry or brief tracts of prose in English, and as poetry has always been a highly regarded genre within the Indian tradition, it afforded these writers the opportunity to imitate the poetry written by the English masters, such as Shakespeare, Byron and Tennyson.<sup>13</sup> Though the emergence of the Indian novel in English may have been somewhat retarded in comparison to its counterparts in regional languages and constitutes only a small part of India's extensive cultural tradition, it is now the form to which world-wide audiences have the most access. As an originally western form used in an Indian context, the emergence and development of the Indian novel in English also demonstrates the ongoing negotiation between Indian and British culture, and presents a changing Indian identity. While the spread of the novel to India can be seen as an extension of empire, it is also an extension that enables the Indian novelist to convey their impression of an Indian experience, to employ variations of indigenous narrative methods, and to narrate from a distinctively Indian point of view.<sup>14</sup> However, employing this western form expressed in the former colonial language as a means of asserting an Indian national identity may seem somewhat problematic, even undermined by its compliance with the colonial culture. The emergence of the first major Indian novelists writing in English during a period of intense anti-imperialist nationalism therefore appears problematic, contradictory, and unpatriotic as it suggests a degree of cultural complicity with the British while attempting to assert an Indian nationalism.

The same contradiction lies at the heart of the Indian nationalist movement. The origin of nationalism has been traced back to late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-

century Europe, and the concept of the nation state was important in terms of increasing the possessions of those expanding European states; colonialism was an attempt to secure and consolidate such possessions.<sup>15</sup> European imperialism, therefore, made Indian nationalism possible by providing an originally European model of organised community, and enabling the assertion of a collective Indian identity that was united by its common opposition to the colonial authority. As Trivedi observes, “[t]he European imperialist, expansive-exploitative nationalism of the nineteenth century, often euphemistically projected abroad as a model of internationalism and universalism, met its counterpart in the twentieth century in a nationalism of an anti-colonial, resistant and mythopoeic variety.”<sup>16</sup> It is precisely this blend of the non-western *natio*, in this case the indigenous Hindu community, and the European framework of the nation state, which has caused much of the concern that Indian nationalism will only repeat the structures and mimic the discourse of the former empire.<sup>17</sup> However, the success of the Indian nationalist movement demonstrates that during the 1930s and early ‘40s, resentment towards the empire, and the British Raj in particular, exceeded racial, religious and social divisions among Indians. Moreover, as India has assimilated, modified, and expanded the idea of the nation for its own purposes, it subverts the notion that the persistence of imperial-derived ideas necessarily signals an oppressive and ongoing neo-colonial dominance. Even though the ‘nation’ is a predominately European invention, its use by India’s western-educated intellectual and political elite reveals ideological traces of colonialism, and demonstrates that, like the novel, it is a form through which postcolonial Indian identity can be expressed.

This link between the state of the nation and the form of the novel is not as arbitrary as it might at first appear to be. Timothy Brennan explains that the rise of

the European nation state coincided with the rise of a print culture, which itself facilitated the rise of the novel.<sup>18</sup> The identity of the nation state is often re-inscribed by the literature that the nation produces, while some of that literature responds to important social, economic, political, and intellectual changes that contribute to the establishment of the nation; it is a complex reciprocal process. Nationalism exists in many forms, ranging from a late eighteenth-century European nationalism that sought unification and expansion, to the postcolonial nationalism that emerged in opposition to those European empires, and back to Europe in the late twentieth century to a nationalism that emerges from within a pre-existing nation but is founded on strong religious division and social fractures; three examples of these very different kinds of nationalism are Britain, India, and Yugoslavia, respectively. In fact, there are many more forms of nationalism than there are nations. In accordance with the various forms nationalism takes, the novel reveals its chameleon essence by assuming different functions. Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938), for example, articulates a nationalism that opposes British colonialism in India. The creation of the nation-state through a collective imagination and the writing of it into existence are issues self-consciously explored in *Midnight's Children* (1981). However, just because novels are about nations, does not necessarily mean that they are nationalistic.<sup>19</sup> While Rushdie celebrates the mixture, pluralism, and hybridity of postcolonial India, he is careful to not ignore the deficiencies of India's own political machinery. Literature, especially the novel, can provide useful insights into the establishment of new nations as well as into their complex development.



*Kanthapura* responds to the legacy of colonialism in terms of India's subordination to the British Raj. Rather than focusing on India's industrial modernisation, such as the

expansion of its railway networks, the development of its large-scale coal-mines, and the introduction of more efficient irrigation techniques, this novel focuses upon the negative impact that colonialism had upon India. In particular, the novel registers the impact of colonialism in its portrayal of the plantation, and the inequalities involved in this colonial transaction, depicting the exploitation of Indian labour as a symptom of British colonialism. This description of the exploitation of both natural resources and large quantities of indigenous labourers on the colonial plantation is a message targeted at Rao's contemporaries, illustrating that British commercial interests inform colonialism. Rao's novel, then, addresses a pan-Indian concern with which Indians could identify themselves during the 1930s by emphasising colonialism's negative impact on India.

Not only is *Kanthapura* a novel produced by the tensions of its time, but it is also one that interacts with its historical context. The novel's action unfolds during Gandhi's civil disobedience campaign, and in particular, during his salt-march of 1930, locating the narrative in the novelist's recent past and informing it with a particular anti-imperial nationalism. This nationalist movement, despite the rivalry between a Hindu majority and a large Muslim minority, was a more sustained and consolidated effort aimed at Indian self-government than had been previously asserted. One reason for this was the emergence of three strong-willed leaders with vision and westernised education; Muhammad Jinnah, Jawaharlah Nehru, and Mohandas Gandhi played important though different roles in attaining Indian independence, and in establishing new nations out of the old British Raj. While the Indian National Congress claimed to represent the masses, including peasants and Untouchables,<sup>20</sup> the figure of Mahatma Gandhi, as a leader who personified the rejection of both the British government and of western civilisation's dominance over

India, provided a focal point for this Indian cause. Gandhi's non-violent civil disobedience campaign, which included a number of hunger-strikes, his symbolic defiance of British law during the 1930s salt-march, and his visit to the British Monarchy wearing only a khadi cloth, provides a contrast to the repressive responses of the British Raj. This contrast, between General Dyer's 'massacre' at Amritsar in 1919 and Gandhi's satyagra philosophy (the method of non-violent non-cooperation, or peaceful resistance, such as protest marches, hunger strikes, and the boycott of British-made goods), undermines the imperial conscience that asserts its civility and moral superiority, and might well have been the source of the cultural dichotomies employed in *Kanthapura*.

A change of Indian attitudes toward the empire may have been prompted by India's involvement as Britain's ally in the First World War. As Spear explains:

No longer were [the British imperialists] seen as the possessors of a culture which was morally as well as technically superior to their own. Their moral prestige vanished in conflict, and they were now regarded at best as more powerful, the possessors of useful machines and processes, and the inventors of some useful institutions such as British law and democratic machinery. Previously it was thought that Europeans in the main held together like the members of some loose confederacy. Now it was seen [by Indians] that they were as divided as themselves.... The war in Europe came to be regarded as a suicidal strife of Western civilisation; thus, as war proceeded, enthusiasm for the allied cause turned to disgust at the general behaviour.<sup>21</sup>

Two decades later, *Kanthapura* articulates this type of sentiment by illustrating India's poverty and the country's continuing grievances with the British Raj. Through its reflection of contemporary concerns and conflicts, this novel situates itself squarely in the prevailing anti-colonial ideology of its time. Furthermore, the anti-colonial stance demonstrated by Moorthy articulates a specific type of response to that particular moment of struggle for independence. By presenting the realities of the rural poverty in colonial India and the general inequalities of previous colonial

transactions in a novel indebted to indigenous myth, *Kanthapura* can be read alongside other pro-independence sentiment published during this time of increasing resentment and hostility toward the Raj. Among this generation of novelists who, as Robin Lewis puts it, “sought to accomplish in literature what Gandhi had achieved in the realm of social and political action,”<sup>22</sup> Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable* (1935) sets out to re-construct Indian national identity by focusing on those who have had their humanity denied by traditional Hindu society. In doing so, Anand’s novel signals the parallel between the low castes and the more general colonial subject. By describing the negative impact of the colonial legacy in India, *Kanthapura* seeks to participate in the historical moment from which it emerges by appealing to the Indian intellectual who reads novels in English, unlike Gandhi who appealed to India’s illiterate peasantry. In his novel, Rao articulates a nationalism that opposes the legitimacy and authority of the British Raj, and in doing so, writes a kind of foundational text for postcolonial India.

Abdul R. JanMohamed explains in the following extract that colonialist literature was often a function of European empire building:

While the covert purpose [of colonialism] is to exploit the colony’s natural resources thoroughly and ruthlessly through the various imperialist material practises, the overt aim, as articulated by colonialist discourse, is to “civilize” the savage, to introduce him to all the benefits of western cultures.... If such literature can demonstrate that the barbarism of the native is irrevocable, or at least very deeply ingrained, then the European’s attempt to civilize him can continue indefinitely, the exploitation of his resources can proceed without hindrance, and the European can persist in enjoying a position of moral superiority.<sup>23</sup>

That is to say, in order for the colonial project to continue, the native must be characterised in the general imperial consciousness as evil, worthless, untrustworthy, and threatening, illuminating the white settler’s so-called humane mission in the furthest reaches of the empire. By inverting this ‘manichean’ duality, by

characterising the coloniser as a malevolent master and the indigenous village subject as morally superior, Rao challenges and contests this basic imperialist assumption, and adopts the Gandhian strategy of rejecting the glitter of western civilisation and its values. In doing so, *Kanthapura* – to use Salman Rushdie’s phrase<sup>24</sup> – is part of the ‘empire [that] writes back’ to its imperial centre, relying heavily on traditional, pre-colonial forms of Indian culture, such as songs, stories, and local as well pan-Indian myth. While it may be the case that all postcolonial literature with indigenous roots but is written in English inevitably ‘writes back’ to the imperial centre, revealing the residual effects of colonialism through the artistic means of expression, a postcolonial writer can employ this linguistic relationship in a politically radical way to ‘write back’ in an aggressive manner, producing a literary work that resists the easy assumptions of the colonial master and of the imperials at home in the metropolis. Rather than using English to endorse the colonial project, Rao subverts both the English language and the western form of the novel precisely because he uses these to confront British readers with a series of horrifying scenes of abuse, exploitation, and oppression, illustrating this terrible side of colonial history. The novelist’s attitude, then, exemplifies one concept of ‘postcolonialism’ as it fits into the basic paradigm of the centre-periphery relationship, in which the colonial subject responds to the imperial master with a type of ‘resistance literature.’

However, as *Kanthapura* was written and published in the decade preceding formal independence, along with Anand’s *Untouchable*, and Narayan’s *Swami and Friends* (1935), it also problematises the concept of ‘postcolonialism.’ These novels demonstrate that ‘ideology’ is as important as chronological demarcation in defining ‘postcolonialism,’ enabling us to expand our notion of this term to include literary works that defy strict chronological categorisation.<sup>25</sup> In particular, the prefix in

'postcolonial' is problematised by these novels if this term is taken to signal a general historical epoch *after* formal colonialism, implying an ideological movement that interrogates the motivation, the responsibility, and the impact of the colonial impulse. Yet, as this prefix denotes a time after the formal demise of colonial rule, it also disregards the persistence of various colonial structures that remain and are often referred to as being 'neo-colonial.' So while the 'post' may imply a formal, abrupt, and specific demarcation between the colonised society and its colonial-parent culture, it fails to emphasise the various continuities that exist, and tends to exclude novels like *Kanthapura* that were written before formal independence. Besides, the variations and differences among the postcolonial global condition further problematise any attempt to locate a specific moment when the 'postcolonial' began, whereas indicating the origin of particular postcolonial communities is perhaps a more feasible ambition.

*Kanthapura*, then, emerges from a widely circulating and deeply felt anti-imperial nationalism. In this novel, Rao articulates some of these prevalent attitudes towards the Raj, reminding his intellectual contemporaries of India's colonial past by describing those colonial atrocities committed against India's peasantry. The novel responds to its colonial legacy by presenting India as a site of British exploitation and imperial ruin. A prominent member of the first generation of Indian novelists writing in English, Rao's experiments with the novel form and the English language built a formidable platform for following generations of writers. The literature written by this generation, in particular the novels of Rao, Narayan, Anand, and to a lesser extent, Desani, was also the focal point of the first wave of literary criticism of the Indian novel in English; that Rao, Narayan, and Anand are considered major novelists is illustrated by the fact that their literary works have attracted significantly more



attention than their contemporaries'.<sup>26</sup> The emergence of this new critical discourse during the 1960s is signalled by the publication of a succession of influential studies by Spencer, Iyengar, Derrett, and C.D. Narasimhaiah.<sup>27</sup> This emerging discourse is also registered by the rise of a number of significant literary journals, from India as well as the United States and England, which also devote specific attention to the Indian novel in English. Meanwhile, papers given at a number of important conferences concerned with this literature were also published in book form.<sup>28</sup> The 1970s witnessed an extension of this tradition of literary criticism, with important contributions by Meenakshi Mukherjee, Klaus Steinvorth, and S.C. Harrex. It was during this time that a shift in nomenclature from 'commonwealth literature' to 'postcolonial literatures' occurred, seeking to emphasise the politics of oppression and struggle rather than sustaining the cultural hegemony of imperialism.<sup>29</sup> This first generation of Indian novelists writing in English, then, are important in terms of pioneering the literary models for future generations of writers, and as material that Indian academics trained in literary criticism could discuss.

By the 1970s and '80s, this particular tradition had matured beyond the early experimental decades of the '30s and '40s, and Indian writing in English no longer required detailed and persuasive explanations from the author, or lengthy justifications from the critic. During this time, members of the previous generation were still actively publishing, and were thus strengthening their claims as important Indian novelists. Not only do the second generation of Indian novelists writing in English experience a different India to that of their predecessors, but they also have the benefit of the novels written by Anand, Narayan, Rao and Desani to use as literary models, and as the beginnings of a literary tradition on which they could build. In terms of international reputations, the generation to which Salman Rushdie

(b.1946) belongs seems to have exceeded those pioneering literary models. For example, a contemporary of Rushdie, Anita Desai (b.1937) has at least three-times been short-listed for the prestigious Booker-McConnell Prize. Rushdie not only won the prize in 1981, but was also given the honour of winning the 'Booker of Bookers' in 1993. Ranking beside Tagore's writing as India's major contribution to twentieth-century world literature, *Midnight's Children* (1981) has frequently been used as a touchstone to measure the achievements of the following generation of Indian novelists. In addition to the recognition of his literary achievement and the vast amounts of literary criticism that his novels have generated, Rushdie also gained world-wide fame (or notoriety) that extends beyond the literary world after the Ayatollah Khomeini declared *The Satanic Verses* (1988) blasphemous to Islam, Allah, and Mohammad, and issued a Fatwa on its author.

Rushdie's generation differs from Rao's precisely because it never experienced first-hand colonialism. Instead, Rushdie's generation grew up during Nehru's Five Year Plans, faced China's threatening advances into Northern India, experienced the bloody partition of Bangladesh, endured the suspension of civil rights, and either suffered or witnessed the suffering of Rajiv Gandhi's mass-vasectomy campaign. Like *Kanthapura*, *Midnight's Children* responds to the historical context from which it emerges. In his novel, Rushdie confronts the aftermath of British colonialism in India by writing about the emergence of the modern Indian nation, the initial optimism surrounding the exciting possibilities and potential offered by new nationhood, and the later dissatisfaction, growing despair and general disillusionment. The novel describes the exact moment of Indian independence, using the life of the narrator whose fate is inextricably bound to the destiny of his country as a means of registering the changing Indian nation between 1947 and 1977. Saleem's birth occurs

while Viceroy Mountbatten transfers India's executive authority on 15th August 1947 to two new British dominions; Saleem's family celebrates the birth of their child as India celebrates the British government's withdrawal. Subsequently, the subcontinent is divided into two distinct states – India and Pakistan – the former holding a strong Hindu majority, the latter predominately Muslim. This newly formed Indian government set about to reconstruct the state sector with Nehru at its head and backed by a Congress party majority. Through its Five Year Plans, this government addressed Indian concerns on behalf of the Indian population, as opposed to the previous ninety years when a British government initiated policies that reflected British interests. No longer were Indians the subjects of foreign rulers, and for better or for worse, India's future was now firmly in the hands of Indians. The political freedom sought by Rao's generation had finally been achieved during the time at which Rushdie's generation emerged.

However, the celebrations surrounding independence were undermined in a number of ways. Firstly, the division of the subcontinent into two new nation states resulted in a massive demographic shift in which more than ten million people migrated between Pakistan and India, with ten-percent of these dying in transit. One historian comments that “[t]he horrors of the episode and the size of the migrations embittered the relations of the two countries and left a deep scar on the consciousness of both.”<sup>30</sup> Secondly, a variety of difficulties were encountered during the formal dismantling of the Raj. The division of the Raj's assets, for instance, into 82.5% and 17.5% proportions for Hindu and Muslim authorities respectively, was problematic, as was the dismantling of the administration system, the railway networks, the armed forces, and the police. Wolpert describes the situation: “In one month the accumulated possessions of centuries of imperial hoarding, building and creating

were torn apart, severed as though by Caesarean section to permit two nations to be born.”<sup>31</sup> So while India celebrated its self-rule, it was also a nation born in the blood of its internal conflicts.

In addition to representing this traumatic moment, Rushdie’s novel responds to the changing postcolonial Indian identity, now a complex fusion of indigenous traditional culture and the legacy of British imperialism. In this novel, India is presented as a dynamic, hybrid culture that contains elements of British (and American) culture, rather than the ‘pure’ indigenous Indian characters who compete against British imperialism in *Kanthapura*. By not presenting explicit cultural scapegoats, such as a malevolent colonial master, this novel implies that during its first forty years, India has moved from a confident assertion of self-rule to a state dangerously close to self-ruin. It demonstrates that binaries are less meaningful in discussing postcolonial Indian identity because complex cultural, social, commercial, and political transactions have blurred these diametrical distinctions. The novel’s promotion of hybridity and its demonstration of these reciprocal cultural transactions reflect Rushdie’s position as a ‘postcolonial’ novelist. A Muslim born in Bombay, Rushdie is part of a minority group in India that situates him towards the periphery of Indian society. In addition to this, as a migrant in England, Rushdie is a culturally liminal figure. As a Cambridge-educated Indian living in London, writing about India in the English language, Rushdie – like his narrator who is also an awkward spokesman for India because of his varied lineage and mixed heritage – blurs the distinction between British and Indian cultures, questioning the validity of employing geographic boundaries as a means of determining and classifying postcolonial literature.<sup>32</sup> As literary migrant, Rushdie is a highly visible (despite now being in hiding) reminder of the widespread Indian Diaspora around the world, especially in

post-war Britain, and of their cultural displacement and alienation. Writing about India from the post-imperial metropolitan centre, Rushdie illustrates that a 'postcolonial' novel can be written outside the postcolonial nation. At times, Rushdie seems deeply critical of both the British Raj and its former subject, illustrating that the legacy of colonialism and its residual effects are still felt, but also that postcolonial India now has its own responsibilities. Yet, because he criticises the former colonial subject and Indira Gandhi's government from within the imperial centre, Rushdie has been marked off by some in the Islamic world as a traitor of sorts, a writer who has 'sold-out' to become complicit with the cultural tastes and dominating desires of the former colonial power.<sup>33</sup> Here, then, *Midnight's Children* 'writes back' both to the imperial centre and to the postcolonial nation as Rushdie is critical of Indians as well as the British, and his precarious position between Indian and British cultures introduces additional complexities into our notion of postcolonial by dissolving cultural dichotomies, and illustrates the deficiencies of employing geographical boundaries as a means of classifying postcolonial literature.

In *Imaginary Homelands* (1991), Rushdie asserts that writers of fiction and politicians "are natural rivals. Both groups try to make the world in their own images; they fight for the same territory. And the novel is one way of denying the official, politicians' version of truth."<sup>34</sup> While Rushdie's fiction might compete against India's own political machine, his novel also responds to the legacy of colonialism by seeking to restore an Indian-derived self-image, rather than to depict India and its history from an imperialist vantage point. As Saleem writes his autobiography, *Midnight's Children* rewrites and thereby reclaims postcolonial Indian history in the imagination of its readers. This rewriting of India's history is, like *Kanthapura*, a type of 'resistance' literature because it seeks to assert its own

authority on behalf of those Indians who experienced over ninety years of their past dictated by the terms imposed by the British Raj. Moreover, this reclamation is attempted through a language that was once the imperial voice, but has by the 1970s and '80s become an indigenous tongue. Reflecting a post-modern urge to present 'History' as a heterogeneous, multifaceted, and temporally disjointed collage of stories, rather than a single monolithic narrative, Rushdie's digressive narrative strategy also infuses an Indian element into his novel. This element derived from India's extensive oral tradition, its long history of story telling, seeks to disrupt conventional forms of western historiography and challenges the notion of an absolute and stable 'Truth' with the notions of subjectivity and provisionality. Yet, it is not that Rushdie asserts that he is the authoritative truth-maker, but that he offers an alternative source, a variation to the standard, official public account of the past.

If at least some of the literary success enjoyed by Rushdie's generation can be attributed to the experimental novels written by that pioneering generation to which Raja Rao belongs, then the success of a third generation of Indian novelists writing in English has been built on the work of the previous two generations, and can be understood in terms of novelists who acknowledge their position in an emerging consumer-orientated global culture. In fact, to describe this current literary trend as a flourishing artistic 'boom' period is not to overstate the situation. Of this emerging generation of contemporary Indian novelists, which includes Vikram Seth, I. Alan Sealy, Shashi Tharoor, and Kiran Desai (Anita Desai's daughter), perhaps Arundhati Roy (b.1961) is the most readily visible. Roy was awarded the Booker Prize in 1997 at a time when the world's gaze focused upon India celebrating its fifty years of independence from the British Raj, and her novel takes advantage of this situation by presenting India as an exhibit, as a spectacle for the English-speaking audience to

observe. Her rich prose and her unusual metaphors increase the novel's attractiveness to the cosmopolitan reader, as does the exotic content of the novel.

*The God of Small Things* (1997) describes India during the 1960s in order to remind its contemporary audience that various age-old problems with Indian society still persist. During the first of Nehru's Five Year Plans (1951-1956), a number of major law changes sought to reform Indian society: for example, the Untouchability (offences) Act of 1955 was intended to protect low-caste Hindus from discrimination by providing penalties (as a means of deterrent), as well as a number of affirmative action-type programs, which included the implementation of university scholarships and the reservation of civil service vacancies for Untouchables. Just as these measures aimed to dismantle existing hierarchies in Indian society, women's rights were established in order to correct gender inequalities and laws were also passed to protect them. The Hindu Marriage Validating Act of 1949, for instance, made inter-caste marriages legally acceptable, and in 1955 women were granted the right to divorce.<sup>35</sup> Roy's depiction of 1960s Ayemenem draws a parallel with her contemporary India, implying the various social problems that these law reforms sought to address have in fact continued to confront India. By demonstrating the persistence of these inequalities and the ineffectiveness of certain law reforms, the novel identifies specific social problems and gender-related issues that Roy's contemporary society can readdress.

Even though Roy's novel is set during a time when Communism was entrenched in parts of India and Indo-Sino relations were deteriorating, it does not focus on these important national events. Instead, *The God of Small Things* pursues the personal narrative of the normally unrecorded past of the individual. Focusing on minor and seemingly trivial details, this novel explores the extent of a personal tragedy, rather

than the fate of a village community, or even the destiny of the entire nation state. Whereas *Kanthapura* presents India in a way that attracts sympathy for exploited Indians and seeks to educate the empire of its atrocities committed under the guise of colonialism, Roy's narrative is devoid of such inter-cultural politics, despite being set in the imperial ruins and wreckage of India after colonialism. Like Rushdie, Roy explores India after independence; yet, rather than demonstrating the dissolution of an Indian / British dichotomy as Rushdie does, she exploits these binaries by selling a nostalgic image of India to an international English-speaking audience. Hence, Roy's position is reminiscent of India's early trading relationship with Britain, revealing similarities between pre-colonial and postcolonial relationships; just as seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Indians sold their valuable spices to British merchant-ships, *The God of Small Things* presents a narrative that combines erotic action with an exotic location. By addressing concerns that are particular to India, such as the maintenance of caste divisions, Roy demonstrates that Indian novelists have a subject of their own, and that they do not always rely solely upon colonial culture for its subject or its artistic inspiration. In other words, the novel is an example of what Arun Mukherjee describes as a "cultural production... created in response to our own needs and we have many more needs than constantly to "parody" the imperialists."<sup>36</sup> Yet, this strategy of focusing primarily on Indian concerns is complicated by the obvious fact that the novel is written in English, and contains a number of overt references to works in the English literary canon.



In *Post-Colonial Literatures in English* (1998), Dennis Walder suggests that Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992) might represent a movement beyond conventional notions of postcolonialism. Walder writes that:



If there is an 'after' post-colonial space, maybe it is constructed like Ondaatje's patient's copy of the writings of Herodotus, 'the father of history': as a self-referential mosaic of moments in the present and past – a structure repeatedly reinforced in the narrative by the images of Italian frescoes and other forms of fragmentary or ruined art – yet a structure interfered with by personal memories and historical events, in short by the changing world.<sup>37</sup>

In addition to resembling *The English Patient* at a technical level – both novels include personal memories within grand historic narratives, and both have a fractured narrative which is split between the past and the present – *The God of Small Things* also registers a similar 'post-postcolonial' shift by acknowledging its position in this postcolonial world order. There is a sense in which by registering the cultural hegemony exerted by American popular culture emerging after 1945, or thereabouts, *The God of Small Things* manipulates the foreign cultural forces at work in postcolonial India. Rather than merely acknowledging and interrogating them, this increased self-awareness in presenting India as a spectacle for the foreign gaze represents a possible movement by *The God of Small Things* toward a 'post-postcolonial' phase of writing.

While these three Indian novels written in English disrupt notions of 'postcolonialism,' showing that 'postcolonial' literature can emerge from before formal independence, from beyond the postcolonial nation's geographic borders, and engage at an ideological level more sophisticated than 'resistance' literature by focusing on non-colonial related concerns, these novels also expand our notion of 'postcolonialism,' providing deeper insights into the range of complexities inherent in the postcolonial Indian condition. In corollary with these novelists' responses to the dynamic legacy of colonialism, postcolonialism can also be meaningfully understood as a series of stances taken in relation to the idea of the nation. Just as these three Indian novelists from consecutive generations demonstrate the continuing force of the

colonial legacy, they signal a series of transitional responses to Indian nationalism, which is, like the colonial legacy, continually redefining itself in terms of changing historical vantage-points and of the various positions occupied by each novelists within Indian society.

The term 'postcolonialism' has been the subject of many recent debates among various literary critics who deal with the literature produced under its auspices. In the introduction to *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin identify similarities between the various societies affected by colonialism, describing postcolonialism as a global condition. Ashcroft et al. explain:

[W]e use the term 'post-colonial', however, to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonisation to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression.... In this sense this book is concerned with the world as it exists during and after the period of European imperial domination and the effects of this on contemporary literatures.<sup>38</sup>

Recently, however, this kind of description has come under increasing scrutiny as a number of academics have focused upon the apparent differences among the various postcolonial contexts, illustrating the problematic task of defining such a broad term.

Ella Shohatt argues that the term 'postcolonial' collapses the asymmetrical experiences of the so-called 'colonised' and 'coloniser' into a common monolithic experience. Among various other concerns, Shohatt claims that 'post-colonial' does not distinguish between the colonial-settler's attitudes directed at the indigenous subjects both before and after formal independence, and disregards the neo-colonial dominance of these first-world settler societies.<sup>39</sup> In addition to this blurring of distinctions between imperialism and indigenous cultures with pre-colonial roots, Arun Mukherjee claims that 'postcolonialism' fails to differentiate between the various experiences of the 'colonised.'<sup>40</sup> In this respect, all the indigenous groups

that have been involved in different colonial encounters have their experiences conflated into a single conceptual term, just as the diverse experiences and negotiations that occur within a single social hierarchy are also elided. In reality, the experiences of a Maori in New Zealand differ from that of an Aborigine in Australia. Likewise, in India, the colonial experience of an Untouchable is a long way from that of a high caste Brahmin.

Furthermore, Paranjape argues that the very terms, and in fact the entire discursive field used to discuss postcolonial literature, have been derived from the western academy. Paranjape suggests that the common link among the various postcolonial literatures has less to do with a 'shared experience' than it does with the legacy of the English language. Moreover, as a critical medium English is inadequate for exploring and discussing the literature produced in a multicultural, multilingual country such as India.<sup>41</sup> For Paranjape, the postcolonial is that which is discussed in classrooms, and is the subject of essays and critical studies; it is a project tainted with old imperial concerns that seeks to satisfy the western academy's desire to discuss foreign cultural 'Otherness.' The change, moreover, in critical terminology from 'commonwealth literature' to 'postcolonial literatures' does not so much emphasise the position of the former colonial subject as to register the global shift of cultural imperialism from the former British empire to the United States. In this sense, postcolonial studies is more about who assumes control of the new empire of the English language rather than about exerting political dominance over the remains of the former British empire.<sup>42</sup>

Although the rise of this postcolonial discourse within the western academy during the last two or three decades does bring certain texts to the attention of a potentially larger audience and market for these novelists, it also, however, possesses

the potential to strip this writing of its political urgency and to obscure and corrode much of the seriousness of the context from which this writing emerges. Ania Loomba, for instance, expresses her displeasure at the ease with which the term 'postcolonial' can be conflated with other terms, such as 'ethnic,' and that when discussed within a western-orientated context, postcolonial literatures can be reduced to trendy objects and postcolonial theory to fashionable ideas.<sup>43</sup> This kind of boutique appreciation, which Loomba identifies, has serious implications if literary critics and theorists begin to over-value writing that self-consciously resists colonialism, or that celebrates representations of successful independence and decolonialisation movements. Not only does this term possess the potential to compromise the political urgency of some postcolonial literary works, reducing their currency as a medium of serious social expression to a pleasant diversion, but it also has the potential to covertly promote a reading strategy that obscures other issues addressed by the author, equally important but not directly related to colonialism. By focusing on 'resistance' literatures, for example, these same critics and theorists are also vulnerable to neglecting important literary works that also deal with the dismantling of empire, but from an post-imperial perspective. In other words, by the nature of its subject, 'postcolonialism' implicitly contains and encourages certain prejudices. Moreover, it is this kind of discourse that champions and celebrates particular novels as crucial 'postcolonial' literary achievements, such as *Midnight's Children* and *The God of Small Things*, at the expense of all the non-English literature produced in the same 'postcolonial' context. This exclusion of vast amounts of literature written in indigenous languages during the aftermath of colonialism, dismisses a number of well-established and flourishing traditions which, as Harish Trivedi speculates, contain some of the most important texts written by

Indians in recent years.<sup>44</sup> Literature written in English is thus given priority over the literatures produced in regional languages. While English allows access to the literature produced in a variety of different postcolonial situations, including Maori, African, Indian, and West Indian literatures, it does so only to that which is written in English; the access to postcolonial literatures that English provides is, therefore, only partial, fractured, and provisional.

In a general sense, the literature that can be understood as being ‘postcolonial’ includes works written by post-imperial authors as well as that written by authors emerging from within the aftermath of empire. It also includes the various literatures that respond to and contest the social and political structures within these former colonies, the products of the so-called ‘decolonisation’ movements. It can also incorporate situations where Third World intellectuals, such as Salman Rushdie, write from within a First World environment. At its most encompassing, as Boehmer suggests, ‘postcolonialism’ could relate to all western culture after the fall of the Roman Empire.<sup>45</sup> On the one hand, then, when ‘postcolonialism’ is understood as a fluid, inclusive and encompassing term, which addresses multiple concerns and an extensive number of themes, it becomes too broad to be pragmatically meaningful. On the other hand, however, as a heterogeneous discourse, ‘postcolonialism’ also embraces both the commonalities and the differences between the literature produced by those individuals affected by colonialism and its decline. Thus, the problems inherent in the term itself signal the very issues that this subject seeks to explore, revealing its multiple complexities and its diverse range. In this very general sense, the term ‘postcolonialism’ therefore retains an important function in the circulating academic discourse.<sup>46</sup> In this thesis, ‘postcolonialism’ is concerned with the series of stances taken by three Indian novelists who belong to consecutive generations in

regard to both Indian nationalism and the legacy of colonialism. By exploring different versions of India, these three novels demonstrate that the colonial legacy is an important dynamic force in the consciousness of the Indian novelist writing in English. The negotiations that occur in postcolonial India among the indigenous cultures with pre-colonial roots, the culture of the former British Raj, and other powerful forces from abroad, are so complex that it suggests postcolonial Indian identity, whether it be individual or collective, is largely fictional and perpetually self-renovating. 'Postcolonialism' is one means of attempting to understand the incredible complexities involved in the continual unfolding of identity.



Rushdie has already commented on the impossible task of accurately summarising fifty years of literature written by four generations of writers, "especially when it hails from that huge crowd of a country (close to a billion people at last count), that vast, metamorphic, continent-sized culture that feels, to Indians and visitors alike, like a non-stop assault on the senses, the emotions, the imagination, and the spirit."<sup>47</sup> Therefore, rather than attempt to describe and analyse the entire tradition of the Indian novel written in English, this thesis examines only three novels. These novels, written by authors who belong to different but consecutive generations, and who emerge from different historical moments within a single postcolonial culture, articulate changing responses to a dynamic and unstable colonial legacy. Since Rao, Rushdie, and Roy each adapts the western form of the novel, using the language of the former empire in order to explore particular Indian concerns and issues, their works can illuminate our understanding of 'postcolonialism' because these novels are by-products of British colonialism in India, signalling the ongoing transactions occurring between Britain and India.

However, the similarities between these novels can also undermine this generation-based approach as there is a certain amount of overlap in the particular moments described by these three novels. Although both *Kanthapura* and *Midnight's Children* deal with the period immediately preceding independence, they do so for different purposes, in contrasting tone, and from different historical vantage-points. Whereas Rao describes the thirties as a time of Indian non-violent protest and nation-building, Rushdie satirically ascribes the term 'optimism epidemic,' alluding to the over-eager expectations that led later to mass bewilderment and disappointment. A similar overlap occurs between *Midnight's Children* and *The God of Small Things* as both deal with India during the early 1960s. Indian novelists who belong to the first generation are publishing fiction during a period when Rushdie, Desai, and others from the second generation of Indian novelist writing in English are cementing their positions as important contemporary authors. Rao, for example, published a novel, *The Chessmaster and His Moves* (1988) in the same year that Rushdie published *The Satanic Verses*, and in 1990, Narayan published *The World of Nagaraj*. This was less than a decade before both Roy and Seth made their debut in the mid-1990s, signalling the emergence of a third generation of Indian novelists writing in English.

Moreover, as an emerging genre, the Indian novel written in English is not a strict, monolithic tradition in which subsequent authors respond only to their 'great' literary precursors and predecessors. Although Rushdie might respond to Rao's novel – or more specifically to Desani's *All About H. Hatterr* (1948) – and Roy might equally respond to Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, these novels emerge from different moments in Indian history, and respond in different ways to the legacy of colonialism. The work written by the generations to which Rushdie and Roy belong register the significant rise of other powerful forces from abroad that influence,

inform, and shape postcolonial India. Rushdie even perceives himself as belonging to an international literary generation that is “unEnglish,” and includes Timothy Mo, Martin Amis, and Angela Carter.<sup>48</sup> However, while Indian writing in English is more than a dialogue between British and Indian cultural negotiations and interaction, this nexus is an important one in these three novels. Moreover, while Indian writing in English foregrounds the relationship between the (former) empire and the (former) colonial subject, it is important to remember that pre-colonial Indian culture was not strictly ‘pure’ before the profound impact of British imperialism. This is a point that Rushdie articulates:

The rest of us understand that the very essence of Indian culture is that we possess a mixed tradition, a *melange* of elements as disparate as ancient Mughul and contemporary Coca-Cola America. To say nothing of Muslim, Buddhist, Jain, Christian, Jewish, British, French, Portuguese, Marxist, Maoist, Trotskyist, Vietnamese, capitalist, and of course Hindu elements. Eclecticism, the ability to take from the world what seems fitting and to leave the rest, has always been a hallmark of the Indian tradition.<sup>49</sup>

In fact, the very concepts informing the current study of 'postcolonialism' emphasise hybridity, reveal hidden or previously concealed narratives, and focus upon multiplicity, plurality, and diversity. Rather than responding merely to important literary predecessors, these three novelists engage with a mixed, continuous, and changing literary tradition and cultural heritage, which includes the colonial legacy. In this sense, there is a marked conceptual difference between the critical study of postcolonial literatures and that of conventional English literary studies. Despite the problems inherent in such a generation-based approach, it is retained because it emphasises the similarities and the differences among the historically contingent responses to the colonial legacy. While it does not seek specifically to elucidate contemporary postcolonial theory, this thesis may be of some theoretical interest because it provides an explorative case study that can be used as a comparison for



tracing the continuing force of the colonial legacy as it appears in novels other than those emerging from India. Each of the following three chapters will be devoted to a single novel and its author's varying response to this complex and ongoing relationship between India and its colonial legacy, examining in particular the various strategies employed by each novelist.

Finally, derived from the narrator's comments in *Midnight's Children*,<sup>50</sup> the title of this thesis draws attention to India's two parent traditions, and to the fact that because the two hundred years of British presence in India cannot simply be erased, part of being an Indian is also being part-British. The implication by extension is that to be an Indian novelist writing in English, one has to acknowledge their debts from the indigenous Indian traditions as well as the inherited colonial legacy. To use Meenakshi Mukherjee's phrase, having two parent cultures, the Indian novel written in English has been "twice born."<sup>51</sup> However, as a student in a western-type university, to read Indian literature written in English is to read outside Rushdie's lamplight, to be bumping around in the shadows. Thus, in addition to indicating India's dual heritage, this title also has an implication for the author of the present study because the darkness surrounding the pool of light symbolises the significance of what is lost or not understood due to my own cultural position. In other words, I am aware that I am unaware of a number of culturally specific meanings that evade my own European-derived reading practises and strategies.

## Chapter Two: Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938)

Raja Rao rejects British imperialism and his British heritage by positioning *Kanthapura* in the Indian oral tradition. In this novel, he employs cultural dichotomies in order to construct an Indian identity. In particular, the traditional Indian villagers are portrayed as natural, peaceful unless provoked, and generally benevolent, whereas the British influence in India is represented by aggressively violent agents of the modern world, who generally increase the poverty of the Indian subject. In its simplest sense, these oppositions enable Rao to define an Indian sense of self in contrast to the British Raj and its 'Red-men.' Rao also uses the English language, despite its potential to compromise the anti-imperial ideology that informs much of the narrative, to create what he describes as a new, distinct Indian "dialect."<sup>52</sup> The intense nationalism articulated in *Kanthapura*, which is derived from the political philosophy that Gandhi practised in an attempt to obtain India's political freedom, is problematised, however, both by the inability of the villagers to maintain a strategy of non-violence during their protests and by Moorthy's crisis of consciousness.

Clearly, *Kanthapura* exists in both the Indian and the British cultural traditions as its author was born in India and raised by Indian parents, and the novel is written in English and first published in London. Yet the use of an illiterate narrator, the inclusion of indigenous songs and stories, and the recurrence of Hindu myth in the novel signal its deliberate debt to Indian culture. *Kanthapura*'s first-person narrator elicits sympathy and trust from the reader, particularly as the old, simple village woman repetitively insists "[t]o tell you the truth" (p.13). Even in his foreword, Rao

attempts to establish the authenticity of his narrator when he compares her to “a grandmother [who] might have told you, newcomer, the sad tale of her village” (p.viii). In addition to establishing an intimate relationship between the reader and the narrator, Rao employs this particular narrative device in order to situate his novel within Indian culture. Achakka not only relates the events, but also offers her own interpretations of them.<sup>53</sup> Her idiosyncrasies make this tale unique although merely one within her vast repertoire of stories. Achakka’s naivete allows her to import and mix myth with fact in her narrative,<sup>54</sup> and enables “[t]he reader [to become] privy to village secrets, to things that happened long ago and the things that happened yesterday, to the ways in which the current residents of the village are linked with those long dead.”<sup>55</sup> In other words, the narrative perspective confines the reader to a traditional Indian point of view, where past and present are fused into the daily experiences of the villagers. Achakka’s narrative method is intimate and colloquial, using the incantatory rhythms that one associates with the Indian oral tradition.<sup>56</sup> *Kanthapura*, a village tale emerging from a two-thousand year-old tradition of story-telling which began with the *Ramayana*, is itself an addition to the Indian tradition as it is a sthala-purana (mythical tale attached to a specific location).<sup>57</sup> Yet, by writing this tale as though it were spoken, Rao creates a curious blend of the oral and the literary; *Kanthapura* is thus a kind of a transcript or record that preserves the oral tradition in print rather than in memory. This importation of oral history enhances the novel’s indigenous qualities, enabling it to be instantly recognised as Indian, as opposed to British, through the emphasis of its cultural past.<sup>58</sup>

The recurrence of both the chanting of song and the telling of stories also demonstrates the novel’s debt to India’s oral traditions. The songs sung by the village women and children articulate a particular kind of nationalism, which

celebrates traditional life while revealing a widespread, bitter, and deeply felt anti-British sentiment. For instance, the first song of the novel celebrates the local deity, Kenchamma, and the continuance of their traditional way of life:

Kenchamma, Kenchamma,  
Goddess benign and bounteous,  
Mother of earth, blood of life,  
Harvest-queen, rain-crowned,  
Kenchamma, Kenchamma,  
Goddess benign and bounteous (p.3).

The final song in the novel illustrates a fierce anti-British resentment:

And the flame of Jatin,  
And the fire of Bhagat,  
And the love of the Mahatma in all,  
O, lift that flag high,  
Lift the flag high,  
This is the flag of the revolution (p.174).<sup>59</sup>

In addition to these songs, Siddayya's tale reveals an underlying anti-British sentiment:

[T]he *dasara havu* [type of snake] that is so clever that he got into the sahib's drawer and lay there curled up, and how, the other day, when the sahib goes to the bathroom, a lamp in his hand, and opens the drawer to take out some soap, what does he see but our maharaja, nice and clean and shinning with his eyes glittering in the lamplight, and the sahib, he closes the drawer as calmly as prince; but by the time he is back with his pistol, our maharaja has given him the slip (pp.47-8).

Siddayya's tale describes a scenario in which the native out-manoeuvres the coloniser, and in doing so suggests a possible model of resistance for the Indian subject. Furthermore, the public recital of the sastras (sacred texts) by the Harikatha man (village bard) at the temple consolidates the village community, especially during the group discussion and interpretation that follows. *Kanthapura*, then, not only demonstrates the importance of oral culture in traditional village life, but also signals its own debt to and its place within this oral tradition through its use of an illiterate narrator, and its use of indigenous songs and stories throughout the novel.

The pervasive use of Hindu myth also contributes to this novel's debt to the Indian oral tradition. C.D. Narasimhaiah comments that "Kenchamma is in the centre of the village, forms the still-centre of their lives and makes everything meaningful. Marriage, funeral, sickness, death, ploughing, harvesting, arrests, release – all are watched over by Kenchamma."<sup>60</sup> It is the myth of this local deity that lives so vividly in the minds of the Kanthapurians, and which occupies such an important position in the daily routine and overall existence of the village. The inclusion of this local deity should be familiar to the majority of Indian readers because it resembles the kinds of myths one commonly finds in the majority of Indian villages, providing a pan-Indian sub-text.<sup>61</sup> In other words, besides positioning the novel within the Indian tradition, myth also unites the Indian community reading in English, providing a common relationship between literate Indians and the novel.

The novel also uses a more common, nationally prevalent myth to establish and dramatise the polarities between the Indian subject and the British Raj. Discussing the relationship between Gandhi and the mythic figure, Siva the destroyer, Janet Powers Gemmill explains that "[t]he myth of a divine being who slays a demon and brings about order is a familiar pattern in Hinduism. With such a flexible tradition, it is not difficult to substitute a contemporary hero for an older one and to retain the essential mythic pattern. In this way Hinduism has remained 'current' for many centuries and men have been metamorphosed into gods."<sup>62</sup> In *Kanthapura*, ancient myth is used as a means of establishing moral positions, as though myth were a template directly imposed on the contemporary political situation to illustrate the essential difference between the 'evil' British and the 'good' Indian. The story that Jayaramachar tells the villagers casts Gandhi in the role of Krishna who went from "village to village to slay the serpent of foreign rule" (p.12). This story entices the

police to question Jayaramachar before he suspiciously disappears. So while the Harikatha man characterises Gandhi as a mythic figure, the Mahatma becomes in the mind of the narrator a mythical god-like figure<sup>63</sup> whose influence is all the more powerful due to his absence from the text. As they do with Kenchamma, the village worships Gandhi through an iconic figure; Moorthy, not merely a ‘Gandhi-man,’ exists in Kanthapurian minds as the local embodiment of Gandhi’s purity, an extension of his goodness, his beliefs, and his power to resist the colonial master. Range Gowda confides to Moorthy that, “[y]ou are our Gandhi” (p.74). Earlier the narrator explains the relationship between Moorthy and Gandhi:

[F]rom that day we said we shall call the Mahatma “The Mountain,” and we say we are the pilgrims of the Mountain, and whatever thunder may tear through the heavens or the monsoons pour over it, it is always the blue mountain at dusk. “And what shall we call Moorthy?” said Redhamma. “Why, the Small Mountain,” said Rangamma, and we all said “That is it,” and so from that day we knew there were the Small Mountain and the Big Mountain to protect us (pp.122-3).

Here, then, myth plays a central role in the lives of the villagers, enhancing the status of certain characters, and informs the narrative with India’s cultural past while contributing towards the construction of the novel’s cultural binaries. Myth is used in conjunction with other infused elements of India’s indigenous oral traditions, and in doing so *Kanthapura* privileges and promotes Indian culture while rejecting British culture’s previously self-proclaimed hegemonic status.



The impact of British colonialism in India is most overtly registered at the Skeffington Coffee Estate, reminding the reader of Britain’s original intention of using India as a means of increasing its supply of tradeable commodities.<sup>64</sup> Even in the novel’s first paragraph the colonial presence is noted by the narrator: “There, on the blue waters, they say, our carted cardamoms and coffee get into ships the Red-

men bring, and, so they say, they go across the seven oceans into the countries where our rulers live” (p.1). The estate, located outside the village, reminds the Kanthapurians of their possible fate if this progressive exploitation of India continues. In fact, the pre-industrial village and the estate are juxtaposed in order to illuminate the contrast between an agrarian lifestyle, and a modern, colonised existence.<sup>65</sup> As described in *Kanthapura*, the effects of the colonial process registered upon the Indian consciousness are degrading, de-humanising, and bordering on atrocity as “armies of coolies marched past the Kenchamma temple, half-naked, starving, spitting, weeping, vomiting, coughing, shivering, squeaking, shouting, moaning coolies” (p.44). Even the optimism that comes with earning “a four-anna bit for a man and a two-anna bit for a woman” (p.45) and the possibility of each coolie leaving with three hundred rupees soon dissipates. Siddayya, wise with over ten years of experience on the estate “knew that when one came to the Blue Mountain one never left it” (p.54). The money is spent at toddy booths, on marriage ceremonies and as interest payments, rather than being saved or invested for the future. Furthermore, the sahib who, in false charity, offers peppermints to the children and is initially described as “not a bad man” (p.54), physically abuses his workers, and is mostly responsible for their stark poverty and low condition. His replacement is no better, having “this woman and that woman, this daughter and that wife, and every day a new one and never the same two within a week” (pp.54-55). In this sense, colonisation is a process of human degradation and Indian life is commodified in order to increase the wealth of the ‘Red-man.’ The two distinct locales – the village and the estate – are used to demonstrate the inequalities of this relationship, illustrating that colonialism is a one-way transaction, leaving the Indian with little benefit and the victim of an unfair exchange. *Kanthapura* provides little evidence of

any redemptive features to be located in the colonial legacy; rather the colonial presence is a sharp disruption to the more peaceful traditional village lifestyle, leading to the destruction of the village. So for Rao, the legacy of colonialism is a negative force to vehemently be opposed and rejected.

As many literary commentators have already noted,<sup>66</sup> the village of Kanthapura is a microcosmic India; this small community, divided into the quarters of larger Indian society – Brahman, Sudra, and Pariah – registers the far-reaching influence of Gandhi's nationalist campaign upon the general Indian consciousness. The novel focuses on the community, rather than on any specific character(s). In fact, the major characters – Moorthy, Range Gowda, and Bhatta – are absent during the final climatic scene.<sup>67</sup> Within the novel, traditional village life is depicted in natural, innocent, and almost blissful terms; the narrator relates what life was like: "It was beautiful, I tell you – day after day we spent as though the whole village was having a marriage party" (p.8). Upon returning from a clash with the police, the volunteers – who call themselves "Sevika Sangha" (p.105) – can still see "Kanthapura curled like a child on its mother's lap" (p.133). Even the coolies, who represent those excluded from this pseudo-paradise, are initially characterised as cheeky, innocent, and child-like: "[T]he sahib fetched a few more peppermints and the children all ran to him and the women came running behind them, *and the men put their hands shyly between the hands of the women*, and at that the maistri grew so furious again that he beat them on the back" (pp.46-47, my emphasise added). Yet at the end of the novel the village lies in ruins after being besieged by the British, and later razed by the villagers. The only character who remains in the aftermath is the concubine Chinna, "to lift her leg to new customers" (p.182). However, the villagers' relocation to the neighbouring Kashipura illustrates that village life continues, implying that the sacrifice of



Kanthapura enables the preservation of traditional ways of living, despite the personal cost: “[N]othing can ever be the same again. You will say we have lost this, you will say we have lost that. Kenchamma forgive us, but there is something that has entered our hearts” (p.180). Traditional village life is thus flexible, dynamic, responsive, and mobile, possessing the ability to both resist and absorb the negative impact of colonialism.<sup>68</sup>

Just as the tyranny and the exploitation of the estate illuminates the sanctity and the purity of traditional village life, the malevolent Bade Khan and money-lending Bhatta contrast the benevolent Moorthy and the impoverished Gandhi. From an Indian viewpoint, the British are the culturally alienated ‘Other,’ onto which the Indian can project their own undesired attributes and malevolent qualities. Even though Bhatta is a Brahman of the highest order, he is corrupted by the lure of wealth and financial security through his attachment to the British. Bhatta acts as the village moneylender, acquiring lands from those Kanthapurians unable to settle their outstanding debts. As Bhatta has the most to lose by the disintegration of the traditional caste system and the expulsion of the British government, he positions himself in opposition to Gandhi and the Congress, confesses his displeasure at “this Gandhi vagabondage” (p.26) and increases his interest charges to those who have joined the Congress party in order to make his stance clear, and to dissuade villagers from joining this anti-government campaign. Yet even “this poor Bhatta, well-wisher of cows and men” (p.30) is not wholly evil, revealing some redeeming characteristics by sending Fig-treehouse Ramu to the city to pursue higher studies. The narrator offers her ill-informed assessment of the moneylender: “I tell you, he was not a bad man, was Bhatta” (p.25). In doing so, Achakka presents an example of India’s elite who were easily corrupted by the British Raj.

If Moorthy is the protagonist in *Kanthapura*, then Bade Khan must surely rate as a worthy antagonist; he is a mysterious foreigner to Kanthapura, lives at the Coffee Estate, and is a Muslim employed to protect the property and interests of the British government. "In the Estate he spits and beats everyone" (p.108), and threatens Range Gowda, "[t]he first time I corner you, I shall squash you like a bug" (p.14). His cruelty is not merely reserved for humans, it extends to animals as well: "At the temple square he gave such a reeling kick to the one-eared cur that it went groaning through the Potters' street... till all the dogs began to bark, and all the cocks began to crow, and a donkey somewhere raised a fine welcoming bray" (pp.14-15). Moreover, Bade Khan represents the police force who are without mercy, inflicting indiscriminate beatings on women and children, as the narrator relates, "they lifted the lathis and bang-bang they brought them down on us, and the lathis caught our hair and rebounded from our backs" (p.129). Moreover, whereas Moorthy is often described in light terms, which signify his goodness, his purity and his close relationship with the divine, Khan is regularly portrayed surrounded by darkness, which alludes to both his sinister character and to the self-interested nature of the 'evil' British empire.<sup>69</sup> Clearly, Bade Khan and the brutal police force he represents are juxtaposed with the passive resistance strategies attempted by the villagers.

Described by Achakka as having "gone through life like a noble cow, quiet, generous, serene, deferent and brahmanic, a very prince" (p.5), Moorthy also has the benefit of a city education, and is generally a well-informed honest young man. Following Gandhi's political philosophy, Moorthy crosses traditional caste boundaries by entering all quarters of Kanthapura. His actions, particularly entering a Pariah's home, earn his excommunication by the local swami, the shame of which contributes to the death of his own mother. Yet for Moorthy, men are equal and caste

divisions are to be dissolved in order to unite the Indian community against the British rule: "We are all one, one as the mustard seed in a sack of mustard seeds" (p.9). It seems that the community's needs outweigh any personal sacrifice. He explains the following to a number of people, of which Range Gowda is one:

This is what is to be done. We shall start a Congress group in Kanthapura, and the Congress group of Kanthapura will join the Congress of All India. You just pay four annas or two thousand yards of yarn per year, and that is all you have to do, and then you become a Congress member. And you must vow to speak truth, and wear no cloth but the khadi cloth (p.69).

The first step towards political independence is, from Moorthy's point of view, organised non-violent civil disobedience, and he knows that, if Gowda gives his consent, others will certainly follow. C.D. Narasimhaiah writes:

Like Gandhi, Moorthy is at once the symbolic representation of both vital tradition and revolt against the dead-wood of the past; of the wisdom of the race and the changing needs of a modern society; of the man of learning and the man of action who has in him the qualities that make him the nucleus of regeneration in a decaying society.<sup>70</sup>

This view is especially evident in the following extract in which Moorthy is presented as a kind of romantic hero:

[O]ut against the sky that rises over Karwar, out over the river, there seemed to stand, as one might have said, the supple, firm figure of Moorthy, a Gandhi-cap upon his head and a northern shirt flowing down his waist to the knees. And there was something in his eyes that shone and showed that he had grown even more sorrowful and calm (pp.91-92).

However, despite this heroic description, Moorthy's crisis of consciousness reveals his superficial commitment to Gandhi's political philosophy. Although he preaches caste disintegration and even enters forbidden quarters of the village, Moorthy's religious conscience betrays his belief. This is demonstrated in the following scene where Moorthy discovers that Rachanna is not at home, and accepts a drink of milk from Lingamma after initially refusing:

Moorthy, who had never entered a Pariah house – he had always spoken to the Pariahs from the gutter-slab – Moorthy thinks this is something new, and with one foot to the back and one foot to the fore, he stands trembling and undecided, and then suddenly hurries up the steps and crosses the threshold and squats on the earthen floor. But Rachanna's wife quickly sweeps a corner, and spreads for him a wattle mat, but Moorthy, confused, blurts out, "No, no, no, no," and he looks this side and that and thinks surely there is a carcass in the back yard, and it's surely being skinned, and he smells the stench of hide and the stench of pickled pigs, and the room seems to shake, and all the gods and all the manes of heaven seem to cry out against him... Rachanna's wife has come back with a little milk in a shining brass tumbler, and placing it on the floor with stretched hands, she says, "Accept this from this poor hussy!" and slips back behind the corn-bins; and Moorthy says, "I've just taken Coffee, Lingamma..." but she interrupts him and says, "Touch it, Moorthappa, touch it only as though it were offered to the gods, and we shall be sanctified"; and Moorthy, with many a trembling prayer, touches the tumbler and brings it to his lips, and taking one sip, lays it aside (pp.71-72).<sup>71</sup>

What at first appears to be a struggle that Moorthy overcomes, eventually emerges as the beginning of a deeper realisation which concludes with Moorthy abandoning Gandhi's political philosophy. After visiting Rachanna's wife, Moorthy's conscience forces him to carry out a ritual cleansing, and even to change his clothes:

And Moorthy says he will come back again in the evening, and mopping his forehead, he goes down the steps and along the Pariah street, and going up the promontory, enters the temple, bangs the bell and, performing a circumambulation, asks blessings of the gods, and hurries back home to speak about it all to Rangamma. But as he goes up the steps something in him says, "Nay," and his hair stands on end as he remembers the tumbler of milk and Pariah home, and so he calls out, "Rangamma, Rangamma!" and Rangamma says, "I'm coming," and when she is at the threshold, he says he has for the first time entered a Pariah house and asks if he is permitted to enter; and Rangamma says, "Just come the other way round, Moorthy, and there's still hot water in the cauldron and fresh clothes for the meal." So Moorthy goes by the back yard, and when he has taken his bath and clothed himself, Rangamma says, "Maybe you'd better change your holy thread," but Moorthy says, "Now that I must go there every day, I cannot change my holy thread every day, can I?" and Rangamma says only, "I shall at least give you a little Ganges water, and you can take a spoonful of it each time you've touched them, can't you?" So Moorthy says, "As you will," and taking the Ganges water he feels a fresher breath flowing through him, and lest anyone should ask about his new adventure, he goes to

the riverside after dinner to sit and think and prey. After all a Brahmin is a Brahmin, sister! (p.73).

This scene illustrates that Moorthy is unable completely to evade his Hindu heritage, despite his Gandhian aspirations. So, then, while for the villagers Moorthy remains an icon of the Gandhian belief, his inability to practice the political theory he expounds and his final desertion of this doctrine at the end of the novel, undermines his near-mythical status and seriously problematizes the Indian identity constructed in the novel. Moorthy's personal dilemma is one that confronts the larger Indian community during this period of intense nationalism, illustrating the tense struggle between the traditional orthodox Hindu, and the modern responsive Gandhi man.

In *Kanthapura*, Gandhi is presented as a kind of national sage, struggling on behalf of India for Indians, yet the reader encounters only the image of Gandhi in the text, and never the character. His influence is ubiquitous, motivating characters into seditious activities, and informing Achakka's point of view. As Meenakshi Mukherjee explains, "Gandhi attains a mystic and symbolic significance not attainable by a common man," and by the end of the novel the majority of the villagers worship Gandhi as though he were indeed a god. Rao achieves this effect by employing two symbols: "'the cow' – representing compassion, gentleness, and the ability to give without expectation of return – and of 'the prince,' a superior being whom the common man may admire and hero-worship."<sup>72</sup> Gandhi's attempt to unify India's political identity by encouraging a revolution against the foreign imperial government through satyagra have contributed to his image as a late-twentieth century icon for extreme benevolence in hostile circumstances. Despite unfolding in the background of the novel, Gandhi's salt-march, in which he walked 390 kilometres in order to procure a handful of salt, nevertheless reveals the Mahatma's flagrant disrespect for British law and his personal sacrifice for the benefit of Indians. Here,

then, it is clear that the benevolence of both Moorthy and Gandhi emphasise the malevolence of Khan and Bhatta.

For Gandhi, this contrast was an integral component of his political strategy as the passive resistance techniques he employed prompted British imperialists to re-examine the strength of their own moral position, and thereby destabilised the authority of the British Raj. While religious aspects were incorporated in Gandhi's political philosophy, in *Kanthapura* the peasantry perceives this philosophy as a way of life, a belief system not unlike their local variant of traditional Hinduism. A young inspiring intellectual like Moorthy is able to comprehend the larger political aims of such a non-violent civil disobedience campaign, whereas the villagers see only its impact on their daily existence. Rather than an itinerant saint who was masquerading as a politician, Gandhi was more the politician manipulating the mantle of a saint. While it is important to remember that Gandhi was not solely responsible for India's independence, especially in relation to those powerful global shifts in history – the two World Wars, widespread economic depression, and the general decline of European empires – Gandhi's importance remains in his function as an image, icon, or the personification of an Indian nationalism which sought independence from the British Raj without the vivisection of the subcontinent, the partition of India and Pakistan into two antagonist states. By presenting the dynamics of Gandhi's nationalism in the village of Kanthapura, Rao stands slightly detached from the contemporary fever pitch nationalism in order to register its complexities, to suggest its limitations, but also to acknowledge its value.

However, the villagers undermine the images of peaceful benevolence that surround Gandhi and his non-violent protest techniques. Intellectually as well as

financially impoverished, some of the villagers are unable to overcome the desire to express their rage or fear through violence, as the following passage illustrates:

[A]nd as Moorthy forces himself up, Bade Khan swings round and — bang! — his lathi has hit Moorthy and his hands are on Moorthy's tuft, and Rachanna and Madanna cry out, "At him!" and they all fall on Bade Khan and tearing away the lathi, bang it on his head. And the maistri comes to pull them off and whips them, and the women fall on the maistri and tear his hair, while Moorthy cries out, "No beatings, sisters. No beatings, in the name of the Mahatma." But the women are fierce and they will tear the beard from Bade Khan's face (p.59).

The vicious wife beatings – Redchamma, for example, was beaten when she was seven months pregnant – also subvert the villagers' adopted non-violent strategy. Ratna's advice to a fellow Sevika Sangha reveals that their shared history of domestic servitude has actually equipped these women with the skills necessary to resist police brutality. In particular, the beatings these women receive from the police are similar to those frequently administered by their husbands, and can be endured as such. While this might suggest that Satyagra is best implemented by women who have experienced traditional domestic servitude, some of the more important political aspects of the nationalist struggle are lost to superficial, cosmetic, and fashionable concerns, such as "I shall wear the Dharmawar sari and the diamond hair-flower" and "And I shall wear the sari I wore at Nanjamma's daughter's marriage, that everybody liked so much, and I shall wear the gold belt too" (p.105).

While the various efforts of the villagers to contribute toward Gandhian nationalism are often undermining, it is still important to note women's changing roles in village life. Generally speaking, village men exploit women, making them cook, clean, and wash clothes, consequently denying women their freedom to do as they wish because they are trapped within stereotypical, traditional roles. The practise of Sati (widow burning) is perhaps the most disturbing example of gender inequality. The parallel between the experience of colonial oppression and women's

unequal social position has already been drawn, and in *Kanthapura* the division between colonial exploitation and male dominance dissolves during Najamma's dream, in which her husband transmogrifies into Bade Kahn.<sup>73</sup> Through their participation in Gandhian nationalism, Ratna and Rangamma take important steps towards their sexual emancipation by assuming important roles within the community,<sup>74</sup> such as the recital and the interpretation of important religious tracts. The collective rejection of colonial authority could, therefore, provide the context necessary to ignite a serious critique of a Hindu orthodoxy that condones a wife's complete subordination to her husband. The Gandhian nationalism in which these women participate encourages the dissolution of caste hierarchies and promotes social and sexual equality as a means of destabilising and ousting the British Raj.

Although the Sevika Sanghas initially depend upon male support and protection, they remain consolidated and do not surrender during the apocalyptic climatic scene from which the men are absent. This group provides a focal point around which the village women can identify themselves, and the opportunity to discuss and perpetuate female role models, such as Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi, who became (as Rao's glossary informs us) a martyr for her defiant role in the revolt of 1857.<sup>75</sup> Through their individual and collective resistance to colonialism, these simple village women assume new and important roles in the community, assert new individual identities, and make an important contribution to the national struggle for self-rule. Although the novel's conclusion does not depict any of the villagers as being triumphant – in fact they are either dead, in prison or displaced – there is the beginning of a marked shift towards a proper and full emancipation of the village women.<sup>76</sup> The rejection of the colonial legacy, then, particularly in terms of those passive resistance techniques used to oppose the empire, which resemble the age-old submissive strategies



employed by women, were a determining factor in the establishment of new female identities in the novel.

*Kanthapura* is a staunchly written, deliberately recognisable Indian novel, with its distinctive Indian viewpoint, its array of Indian characters, and its specific Indian concerns and preoccupations. Despite containing a plethora of characters, certain character-types are recognisable: those associated with the British government are generally described in malevolent terms, whereas those who endorse Gandhian nationalism are portrayed as virtuous and benevolent. It is also clear that there are a number of binary oppositions operating within *Kanthapura*. Some of the more easily identified are the following: traditional village / modern colonial estate, virtuous Moorthy / malevolent Bade Kahn, and peaceful satyagra / police violence. These oppositions contribute toward the general dichotomy of the Indian 'Us' versus the British 'Them,' enabling Rao to reject his colonial legacy, and to represent negatively his British heritage. These oppositions also enable the novelist to present the British as the antagonists who function as India's negative projection of the "Other," and as a means of contrasting and constructing an agrarian, mythical, and benevolent Indian identity. By establishing these dichotomies through a traditional point of view, Rao acknowledges his debt to the Indian cultural tradition and signals his rejection of the culture of British imperialism.

It is evident, however, that while these binaries are useful as a means of immediately establishing India's moral superiority within the novel, they are also unsustainable because they are an insufficient means of representing the full complexity of the postcolonial Indian situation. In his novel, Rao demonstrates that these dichotomies are unstable. Reduced to its basic essence, Gandhi's political philosophy is a paradox: in order to achieve nationhood and to become a modern

independent state, India has to revert to traditional values and pre-modern, pre-colonial ways of living. Yet at certain times these traditional modes of living were complicit with the forces of colonialism. Thus, while Gandhian nationalism promotes the consolidation of India's population in collective opposition to the British Raj, it moves to dismantle social hierarchies, and in particular to abolish caste structures and to assert equality for women. Gandhian nationalism is, therefore, not only anti-imperialist, but is also in competition with traditional Hindu orthodoxy. In the novel, Gandhi's political philosophy is both enabled and disabled by the traditional Hindu orthodoxy. I have already mentioned that the gender inequalities inherent in Hindu orthodoxy provided women with certain skills and strategies as a peaceful means of dealing with police violence. In this sense, Hindu orthodoxy is an enabling force in Gandhian nationalism. However, the strict protocol of this orthodoxy disables Gandhian nationalism when, for instance, the festivities planned for Moorthy's release from prison are deliberately upstaged by a marriage ceremony that the villagers attend. Gandhian nationalism is, therefore, in direct conflict with British colonialism, and is at times also in competition with the Hindu orthodoxy, which is itself often complicit with the dominant imperial power. The binary distinction in the novel is thus complicated by this three-way division, and becomes what Anshuman Mondal has recently described as a "tripartite structure of matrices."<sup>77</sup> In other words, there are three major forces at work in Rao's depiction of rural India at the time immediately prior to independence. These forces can be identified separately and individually, but their full meaning becomes clear only once they are considered together in their context, illustrating the tensions that they collectively create in the formation of an Indian identity.

Within the general setting of a small south Indian village during the nationalist insurrection of the 1930s, the novel presents two specific locations that serve as extensions of opposing and competing systems. The juxtaposition of these two locations expose the tension between the conflicting ideologies of imperialism and an Indian nationalism that maintains strong links to its indigenous cultural heritage. Whereas the colonial estate values financial wealth and commercial enterprise, the village predominantly endorses spiritual worth and the preservation of age-old traditions. This is in spite of Moorthy's description as a landowner, which identifies the extent of his ancestral lands as opposed to a direct expression of his wealth in terms of property investment or commercial ventures. These two competing systems, moreover, vest authority in different places. The estate has its imperial laws and courts, just as the village has its local deity and its myths, but while the courts make judgements concerning individual offences, the local deity resides over the entire village community, protecting them from famine or flood. As each system is fully embedded in its respective discrete space, friction occurs on the perimeters of each when one system seeks to destabilise the other. The crimes committed against the workers on the estate, for instance, go unpunished by the 'red-man's' courts, and this, of course, increases discontent, fuelling the outrage circulating among the peasantry. However, as Mondal argues, there is a "circuit of collusion": the colonial regime endorses the traditional Hindu caste hierarchy through legal concessions and material benefits, while the orthodoxy, in turn, legitimises the colonial authority.<sup>78</sup> He goes on to write:

This sense of the two matrices being mirror images is fortified by the fact that both are economic traps for all save those in authority. The coolies of the Estate, lured by the promise of the cash nexus find themselves trapped in an ever-increasing web of ritual and everyday expenses, toddy consumption and finally debt at the hands of either

the planter or Bhatta, as do the villagers for exactly the same reasons.<sup>79</sup>

Yet Mondal claims incorrectly that Gandhian nationalism rejects both the colonial and the orthodox matrices, disrupting this “circuit of collusion.” This is, however, clearly not the case because although traditional Hindu orthodoxy is at times complicit with the British Raj, Gandhi nationalism also relies on Hinduism in order to legitimise itself as being authentically Indian in its origin, in its intent, and in its concerns. As previously mentioned, Hindu myth is used to enhance Gandhi’s status – and Moorthy’s by implication – within their respective Indian communities, and ancient Hindu myths and legends are used to describe the contemporary political situation. Furthermore, Moorthy induces the villagers to make donations to Congress not through an appeal to the political and social conscience of his community, but by citing religious reasons.<sup>80</sup> The following passage illustrates Moorthy using religion, rather than politics, to obtain Gowda’s assistance: Gowda replies to Moorthy, “All I know is that what you told me about the Mahatma is very fine, and the Mahatma is a holy man, and if the Mahatma says what you say, let the Mahatma’s word be the word of God” (p.70). Moreover, during the Toddy-booth pickets the protesters call for prohibition but approach under the guise of a religious ceremony.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, the ideological roots of Gandhi’s nationalism can be traced back to Gandhi’s time in London, where he read Law. Western thinkers, such as Thoreau, Tolstoy, and Ruskin provided ideas that were foundational for Gandhi’s understanding of civil disobedience, the evils of the modern state, and the salvation contained in working.<sup>82</sup> Here, then, *Kanthapura* establishes a set of diametrical oppositions only to dissolve these binaries into three unstable forces which compete and collude during this period of intense nationalism.

C.D. Narasimhaiah claims that *Kanthapura* “is probably the only novel of its kind in English depicting with such authenticity life in a village, in a land of villages... [A] daring innovator... I don’t know of another novelist in India, barring perhaps R.K. Narayan in some respects, who exploited the resources in his own tradition with such remarkable success as Raja Rao.”<sup>83</sup> The legitimacy of Rao’s authorial position can, however, be interrogated because he is attempting to depict the experiences of a village through the consciousness of an illiterate village grandmother. This peasant consciousness is about as different as it is possible to be from Rao’s privileged social and religious position. In other words, as a high caste, upper-class, foreign-educated member of the Indian intellectual elite, who is fluent in at least three languages, Rao occupies one pole of the spectrum of Indian experience while Achakka represents the extremities of the other. This disparity between experiences is marked by the fact that Achakka could never read the novel, signalling that Rao’s nationalism uses the peasant consciousness as a means of appealing to the Indian intellectual but does not engage with the common villagers he depicts. In representing his portrait of Indian village life through the consciousness of an illiterate woman, Rao treads a similar terrain to that covered by the Subaltern Studies Group. Spivak explains the following:

To investigate, discover, and establish a subaltern or peasant consciousness seems at first a positivistic project – a project which assumes that, if properly prosecuted, it will lead to firm ground, to some *thing* that can be disclosed.... [However,] there is always the counterpointing suggestion in the work of the group that subaltern consciousness is subject to the carthexis of the elite, *that it is never fully recoverable*, that it is always askew from its received signifiers, indeed that it is effaced even as it is disclosed, that it is irreducibly discursive.<sup>84</sup>

As an author of a peasant experience during a moment of political insurgence, Rao’s authenticity is questionable, especially since he was not even in India during this

time, but was in fact at the Sorbonne. Rao's is a precarious position from which to represent the perspective of the peasant as his method elides the disparate experiences of colonial subjectivity. Achakka's strong oral heritage enables her to express herself through speech, but by translating her voice into a novel, Rao draws attention to the peasant-narrator's 'voicelessness' within a literary culture because he *writes* her story.



Even though *Kanthapura* describes the colonial legacy in completely reprehensible terms, the novel's debt to the Indian oral tradition appears to be undermined by Rao's means of expression. The novelist risks affirming Britain's cultural hegemony in India through his use of the English language, especially during a time of intense Indian nationalism. The privileging of English as a literary language of the subcontinent not only fails to promote India's regional languages, but it also fails to deny the reading agency of the British. However, it is precisely because *Kanthapura* is written in English that British readers are made aware of colonialism's negative impact on India, its exploitation of the country's resources, its violence toward the Indian subject, its vandalism of their possessions, and its contribution to the poverty of the Indian condition. Enabling the British reader to consider the colonial relationship from an Indian perspective does not compromise the novelist's nationalistic urge. On the contrary, by appropriating the language of the coloniser, Rao has chosen a strong subversive tactic, as though he has hijacked and sabotaged the language of empire in the novel form.

Rather than merely being "the bastard child of Empire,"<sup>85</sup> the English language has proven a viable and lasting means of expression for Indian novelists writing in English. Yet, it is not as though the English used in *Kanthapura* is exactly the same

kind of language that one encounters in a novel by Charles Dickens or by Thomas Hardy. (Nor is it, for that matter, that the language used by these two novelists is identical either.) Instead, Rao has modified his English in order to signal its Indian climate by creating a dialect that reflects an imagined linguistic community: a kind of Kannadan-English. He attempts to infuse a distinctively Indian quality into the novel's language, to 'nativise'<sup>86</sup> the imperial language so that it echoes the local vernacular of Kannada. Discussing the difficulties involved in renovating the English language in a way that signals the specific Indian historical context from which it emerges without compromising his international audience, Rao concedes that "[t]he telling has not been easy." He goes on to write the following in his much-quoted preface:

One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought-movement that looks maltreated in an alien language. I use the word "alien," yet English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up – like Sanskrit or Persian was before – but not of our emotional make-up. We are all instinctively bilingual, many of us writing in our own language and in English. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the world as part of us. Our method of expression therefore has to be *a dialect* which will some day prove to be as distinctive and colourful as the Irish or the American. Time alone will justify it (p.vii, my emphasis added).

The novel opens with the following description of the village and its surroundings: "High on the *Ghats is it*, high up the steep mountains that face the cool Arabian seas, up the Malabar *coast is it*, up Mangalore and Puttur and many a centre of cardamom and coffee, rice and sugar cane" (p.1, my emphasise added). This altered word order, in which the subject follows the verb, seeks to echo the structure of the regional language of Kannada.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, Rao uses repetition and alternation as a means of echoing the rhythmic tendencies of his native vernacular,<sup>88</sup> as demonstrated by the following quotation: "Then there is the sound of Moorthy

speaking and of Range Gowda shouting, and Pariah Rachanna whispering this and Rangamma saying that, and bicycles after bicycle comes from the city, bicycle after bicycle carrying the orders to the Congress panchayat, and the Volunteers go straight to Rangamma's veranda, and they talk to Moorthy" (p.124). For the most part, then, the novel's language is the perceived speech of an illiterate village narrator, and its style seems aptly to reflect the simple rustic narrative persona and her typical village idiom. Through a strategy of nativisation, then, the novelist alters the English language in order to create a new dialect reflecting the imagined vernacular of an Indian regional language.

Rao also makes the following claims in his preface:

The tempo of Indian life must be infused into our English expression... *We, in India, think quickly, we talk quickly, and when we move we move quickly. There must be something in the sun of India that makes us rush and tumble and run on.* And our paths are paths interminable. The *Mahabharata* has 214 778 verses and the *Ramayana* 48 000. The *Puranas* are endless and innumerable. We have neither punctuation nor the treacherous "ats" and "ons" to bother us – we tell one interminable tale. Episode follows episode, and when our thoughts stop our breath stops, and we move on to another thought. This was and still is the ordinary style of our story-telling. I have tried to follow it myself in this story (pp.vii-viii, my emphasis added).

In order to convey this hectic pace of Indian life, Rao frequently employs run-on sentences, as demonstrated by the following extract:

And the fanner said, "Take it brother," and Moorthy stood by the Mahatma and the fan went once this side and once that, and beneath the fan came a voice deep and stirring that went out to the hearts of those men and women and came streaming back through the thrumming air, and went through the hair and the nails of Moorthy into the very limbs, and Moorthy shivered, and then there came a flooding up in rings and ripples, "Gandhi Mahatma Ki Jai" – "Jai Mahatma!" and as it broke against Moorthy, the fan went faster and faster over the head of the Mahatma, and the perspiration flowed down the forehead of Moorthy (pp.32-33).



However, while Rao claims to echo the rhythms of his native vernacular, emphasising the qualities of incantation and of the mantra, his assertion that Indian life exists at a pace faster than elsewhere borders dangerously close to a kind of cultural solipsism. While Salman Rushdie makes similar claims about Indian culture, he does so to celebrate the pluralism, the diversity, and the teeming multiplicity of postcolonial India, and precisely to reject the kind of cultural purity Rao seems to be championing.<sup>89</sup>

Although rarely used in the novel, code-switching is another technique employed by Rao in order to establish a distinct dialect, to further incorporate an Indian quality into the English language. Yet code-switching is not strictly a nativisation technique because it alternates between two separate language systems, rather than to blend and create a new hybrid. The limited presence of Indian words and phrases punctuates *Kanthapura*, infusing an exotic quality into the narrative. To suggest, however, that these words and phrases add only decorative local colour and Indian flavour to the novel is to oversimplify the matter. Gordon and Williams draw a distinction between different uses of literary code-switching. “Extrinsic” code-switching is often not “essential to the understanding of the text – they are exclamations, forms of address or tags where the meanings can be adduced from the context.”<sup>90</sup> Of the few instances of extrinsic code-switching in *Kanthapura*, the toddy trees or the names of characters, such as Post-Office Suryanarayana and Waterfall Venkamma, function as signposts indicating the intended cultural location of the novel. However, even the character’s names provide deep insights into Hindu culture; Bhatta, for example, is extended to Bhattare in order accommodate the honour and prestige associated with being Kanthapura’s First Brahmin in a manner which both the English ‘Mister’ and its Indian counterpart ‘Sri’ do not convey. The undertone of this suffix also enhances

Rao's ironic echoes of the fallen Brahmin, traditionally perceived as the Hindu society's conscience-keeper.<sup>91</sup>

“Organic” code switching, however, is an essential part of the text, woven into the narrative's fabric, and while also rare, it is located more frequently than extrinsic code-switching in *Kanthapura*. Single words, such as “Ghee (Clarified butter, an essential to all Indian meals)” (p.208), and “Kaliyuga (The age of Kali, the iron age according to one ancient Hindu belief)” (p.209), are deeply rooted into the Indian villager's traditional daily routine, and without the assistance of the novel's glossary the non-Indian reader is likely to encounter some difficulty in comprehension. More importantly, though, the mantra “Gandhi Mahatma Ki Jai,” despite being easily translated into English as “Victory, victory to Mahatma Gandhi” (p.212) is implicated in Indian cultural history since it has its linguistic origin in Sanskrit, and has deep emotional ties for those Indians who experienced the decades surrounding independence. Given that certain Indian words and phrases are unfamiliar to most non-Indian readers, it suggests in a minor way that *Kanthapura* divides its audience into at least two separate linguistic groups. Code-switching makes those unable to understand the Indian terms (that is, one would presume the majority of non-Indian readers) aware of their status as foreigners by introducing a quality of ‘strangeness’ into the narrative. Similarly, code-switching unites the Indian reading community as they comprehend the words, and because *Kanthapura* deals with the Gandhian nationalist movement which effected, influenced, and unified India, the novel serves as a vehicle from which self-definition evolves, even if only to establish a collective identity at an elite level, excluding the illiterate peasantry. While the Indian intellectual reading community is united by their relation to the novel, liberal British readers are also united by their imperial or post-imperial perspectives.

However, while code-switching can often seek to undermine the reading agency of the dominant linguistic group, alerting them to their position outside certain cultural and linguistic communities, and may also attempt to address or restore political, cultural, and linguistic powers in situations where relationships were unbalanced and unequal between cultures or within societies,<sup>92</sup> the acute code-switching in *Kanthapura* passively educates the non-Indian reader. Instead of including vast tracts of Indian prose in order to exclude entire reading communities, Rao has opted for a more subdued, non-antagonistic vocabulary that actually educates his readers by describing the exploitation and degradation suffered by his Indian community. The glossary located at the end of the novel seems to support this view, as it attempts to bridge this novel's self-imposed linguistic barriers and is intended to "fill out the background for the American reader's more complete understanding and enjoyment."<sup>93</sup>

Although these linguistic alterations have led at least one critic enthusiastically to exclaim that "*Kanthapura* is essentially a triumph of the new dialect; its artistically deployed 'Indian' English no longer strikes one as an innovative device but is wholly absorbed in the larger 'folk-epic' purpose, and is so congruous with it,"<sup>94</sup> and to later conclude that "[i]t is as though the English-speaking world is served notice of a new dialect's coming of age,"<sup>95</sup> the novel's language has not evaded criticism. V.Y. Katak has identified at least two problems with the English used in *Kanthapura*. He contends that Rao places too much emphasis on the sound of a word at the expense of the expressing accurate and precise meaning. It is as though the aural qualities outweigh the visual images induced by these words. In particular, it appears that some words have been selected purely for their alliterative power, such as: "there was a charge and the soldiers came *grunting* and *grovelling* at us."<sup>96</sup> Yet this style would

be consistent with that of an illiterate grandmother telling her story to an audience in the most attractive and compelling way possible. More importantly, as Kantak argues, the register employed by the narrator is at times inconsistent with her character. As a framing device, the illiterate narrator relates what others have said, even in certain instances when the register and diction used is elevated above and beyond her own vocabulary. Moorthy's dialogue is, for example, inconsistent throughout the novel, especially during his epiphanic transition to a 'Gandhi man,' and as Kantak correctly maintains, Moorthy's "response to that transforming experience – a vision of the Mahatma, mighty and God-beaming – finds expression in language that seems to have suddenly dropped its dialect form, its naivete, and has donned refinement."<sup>97</sup> In other words, the dialect emerging from *Kanthapura* reveals that the novelist's voice is inadequately accommodated by his narrative device, and as a consequence the narrator becomes less authentic because part of her story is told in a language, a high lyrical style, and a register that she cannot be expected to know.<sup>98</sup> In this respect, the frequent use of alliteration is, therefore, "hardly in keeping with the assumed spontaneity and artlessness of the unlettered Grandmother's narration."<sup>99</sup> A further irony is that Achakka would never be in a position to read *Kanthapura*, suggesting that Rao intended his major audience to consist of liberal British, Indian intellectuals, middle-class Americans, and other communities loosely scattered around the globe dealing with their own colonial legacies.

However, even though the novel's language echoes an Indian vernacular, his alterations can equally demonstrate a link to the English literary tradition. In *The Novels of Raja Rao*, Esha Dey demonstrates that while Rao might attempt to reflect an imagined regional vernacular, his novel's language is not grounded in Indian

literature. Dey claims that the ancient Indian literary tradition, embodied in classical Sanskrit, contains a general theory of aesthetics and is not in the least concerned with concrete depictions of the local, especially of common people belonging to some rural village, as in *Kanthapura*.<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, whereas Achakka has an intimate, personal and complex structure of address, the *Puranas* are simple, impersonal, and formal. This shows, according to Dey, that the stylistic expression used in Rao's novel are dissimilar to those found in the *Puranas*.<sup>101</sup> Yet, despite not resembling India's classical literary traditions, *Kanthapura* comprehensively signals its debt to India's oral cultures. Dey goes on to claim that the alterations to the novel's language – the same ones that have frequently been traced to the Kannada vernacular – can also be located in certain works belonging to the English literary canon. For example, the *Holy Bible* contains the same types of syntactical structures that Rao employs in *Kanthapura*, particularly in the repetitive use of 'and' to link together short sentences.<sup>102</sup> Moreover, Rao's syntactical inversions, which deviate from Standard English, are a technique also found in English literature, and is a practice used even by Shakespeare.<sup>103</sup> Here, then, the dissociation of the novel's language from standard English is a practice found in the work of some important western authors, and Rao's intention of creating a distinctively Indian dialect of English is also, in fact, common among some western writers,<sup>104</sup> especially as he seeks to resemble the successful models provided by American and Irish literatures. In an interview with Feroza Jussawalla and Reed Way Dasenbrock, Rao explains that his choice of language for *Kanthapura* was determined by his historical situation, stating that he would have preferred to write in Sanskrit, but he considered his grasp of that ancient language to be insufficient. Similarly, he also considered his Kannada

inadequate as a means of expressing the themes and content of his novel. He goes on to explain the following:

If an Indian writer asks, and I am asked this question, “Why do you use English?” I say, “I’m sorry. Historically, this is how I am placed. I’m not interested in being European but in being me. But the whole of the Indian tradition, as I see it, is in my work.” There is an honesty in choosing English, an honesty in terms of history.<sup>105</sup>

From this perspective in the early nineties, Rao acknowledges his debt to his British heritage, that to be a modern Indian is to be the product of the colonial encounter, even if his novel rejects imperialism, and the legacy of colonialism it left behind.

Using English as his medium, Rao not only reaches an international audience, but also increases his own domestic Indian readership as more Indians read in English than in Kannada. Widespread illiteracy in the subcontinent is a significant factor contributing to the low proportion of Indians reading in English.<sup>106</sup> Even though only two percent of Indians speak English, India has the fastest growing population in the world, and this tiny minority is an important part of the influential Indian-elite.<sup>107</sup> By writing an Indian novel in English, Rao also further undermines the cultural dichotomies presented in his novel demonstrating that English is no longer only the language of the colonial master, but is also an important mode of communication and indeed an important literary language for modern Indian writers. That English is used in an attempt to convey a particular Indian sensibility of an illiterate peasant is indicative of the complexity involved in the various cultural negotiations that occur between Indian novelists and their colonial legacy. Similarly, Rao’s use of the novel form also signals this postcolonial era as it is a genre introduced to India by the British, the production of which was only possible after the introduction of cultural mass production in the form of the printing press; ironic, considering that he first published *Kanthapura* in London, and not India.

Written during the period immediately preceding independence, *Kanthapura* articulates a negative response to India's legacy of colonialism by portraying the exploitation of India's resources, especially its human labour, illustrating the economic motivation informing British imperialism. By describing India's contemporary history in terms of colonialism's negative impact – its atrocities, its methodical exploitation, and its brutal violence – the novel seeks to participate in the urgent political moment from which it emerges, and to hasten the retreat of the foreign government. The novel also attempts to contrast the 'benevolent' Indian subject with the 'malevolent' imperial master, and uses this dichotomy to structure an antagonistic response to the colonial legacy. Moreover, the novel prioritises indigenous culture by employing an illiterate village grandmother as its narrator, frequently deploying Hindu mythology, and stressing the importance of India's storytelling tradition. The colonial legacy is presented by this novel as a force to be rejected, and an influence of which India should purge itself.

We have seen, however, that the cultural dichotomies employed in *Kanthapura* are unstable because they are an inadequate means of discussing the complex situation of postcolonial India, and that Rao recognises the limitations of Gandhi's nationalism, reflecting its deficiencies in his novel. Rao modifies the English language in order to reflect a regional vernacular, to link the novel to India's past, but the very intent informing this strategy is western in origin, revealing an inescapable colonial trace that his novel strives to reject. Demonstrating the residual effects of colonialism, Rao's dialectal variant of English targets only the Indian intellectual elite. Rao's education abroad and his privileged position within India's class and caste hierarchies implies that his is a precarious position from which to speak on behalf of India's insurgent peasantry. Here, then *Kanthapura* emerged together with

the early novels of Anand, Narayan, and Desani as an important contribution to the foundation of the Indian novel written in English. Even though this novel precedes formal independence, it signals itself as 'postcolonial' because ideologically it interrogates the intention behind imperialism and its impact and effect upon India. The novel also reveals, despite its negative portrayal of imperialism, that to be a modern Indian is to have a British heritage, especially if that Indian is a novelist writing in English. *Kanthapura* is a site where two cultures collide, rather than collude into a mixture of heritages as they do in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. Yet, clearly Rao is not a spokesman for a pure, self-reflexive Indian culture that has no room for its British heritage. As we shall see in the following chapter, Rushdie demonstrates that by the time his generation emerges the British influence is no longer a separate, competing force, but an important component of postcolonial India. *Midnight's Children* endorses Harish Trivedi's observation that these cultural negotiations are so complex, so sophisticated and perpetually shifting that they are a kind of "interactive dialogic,"<sup>108</sup> as opposed to a one-way economic transaction.



### Chapter Three: Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981)

Salman Rushdie responds to the legacy of colonialism in *Midnight's Children* by fusing it with his Indian heritage. In doing so, his novel displays the hybridisation of British imperialism and Indian culture, rather than describing them as competing cultural dichotomies, as Rao does in *Kanthapura*. This novel signals an important shift in Indian history by demonstrating that while the legacy of colonialism remains an important influence in postcolonial India, its strength is rivalled by the influence emanating from American popular culture, which has increasingly penetrated India since independence. Rushdie uses his narrator's mixed cultural heritage with his tendency to digress during his narrative, and his characters' dynamic and at times regenerating identities as a means of tracing and registering this shift between a state of colonialism, and a more ambiguous and multifarious postcolonial condition. Written in the early 1980s, Rushdie's novel is 'postcolonial' in the sense that it comes after formal independence, and deals with the legacy of colonialism, rather than coming to terms with first-hand experience of the Raj.

Within the first paragraph of the novel the narrator remarks upon the relationship between himself and the Indian nation, explaining that "thanks to the occult tyrannies of those blandly saluting clocks I had been mysteriously handcuffed to history, my destinies indissolubly chained to those of my country."<sup>109</sup> This intimate relationship between Saleem and modern India is officially acknowledged in a letter from the first Indian Prime Minister, in which Nehru writes, "[y]ou are the newest bearer of that ancient face of India which is also eternally young. We shall be watching over your life with the closest attention; it will be, in a sense, a mirror of our own" (p.122). Even the school master, Emil Zagolla, notes the resemblance between Saleem's face

and the geographic map of India and Pakistan. The subcontinent, it seems, can be mapped onto the individual postcolonial self,<sup>110</sup> the collective nation conflated into an individual character. Yet it is not merely that Saleem physically resembles India, but that the two are also inextricably linked, his body literally suffering the fate of the country. The narrator complains that he has “noticed a thin crack, like a hair, appear in my wrist, beneath the skin... No matter. We all owe death of life” (pp.36-37), and “[i]n short, I am literally disintegrating, slowly for the moment, although there are signs of acceleration. I ask you only to accept (as I have accepted) that I shall eventually crumble into (approximately) six hundred and thirty million particles of anonymous, and necessarily oblivious dust” (p.37). Moreover, Zagollo removes a tuft of hair from Saleem’s head, reminding the reader that Saleem is the illegitimate son of the balding William Methwold, while Misha Miovic causes Saleem to lose part of his finger at a school social event. While these characters mutilate parts of Saleem’s figure, his entire body literally disintegrates as India, the world’s largest democracy, struggles to retain its geographical and political unity within its first thirty years of self-rule.

In addition to resembling India, sharing its birth-date as well as its destiny, Saleem is linked to India through the Midnight’s Children Conference. Out of the 1001 children born during that midnight hour, only 581 survive to see their tenth birthday in 1957. These children were endowed with magic powers, such as the ability to pass into mirrors and re-emerge through other reflective surfaces, the ability to multiply fish, the ability to increase or decrease personal physical dimensions, and the power of inflicting wounds through speech. The closer to midnight they were born, the more potent the gift, and since Saleem and Shiva were born on the stroke of midnight, they receive the most powerful gifts. Like all of these gifts, Saleem’s

powers of telepathy are effective only in India, not in Pakistan.<sup>111</sup> As the members of the conference are scattered throughout the subcontinent, Saleem employs his telepathic power in order to communicate with them, uniting these children into a kind of collective. In doing so, Saleem overcomes the apparent communication problem posed by India's many languages: "The voices babbled in everything from Malayalam to Nega dialects, from the purity of Lucknow Urdu to the Southern slurrings of Tamil. [Saleem] understood only a fraction of the things being said within the walls of [his] skull" (p.168). By reading the thought of the other midnight's children, Saleem is able to transcend these linguistic barriers and unite his generation in much the same way that Rao employs English as a pan-Indian language. Yet, Saleem is able to reach more than an English-speaking Indian audience, and is able cross caste and class divisions as well. Though the conference is a small, insignificant proportion of the nation's population, it encompasses some of the country's most intense magic and wonder, encapsulating the potential and promise of newly independent India. The conference also allows Saleem to utilise his unique telepathic ability to view reality from multiple perspectives, experiencing various versions of India: Saleem sees the India of the politically powerful and the India of the slums, the India in the south and the India of the north, and of course urban India and its rural counterpart. Saleem's telepathic powers not only legitimise the novel's omniscient account through a single narrative consciousness,<sup>112</sup> but also function as a kind of microcosmic democratic Indian parliament through which the various dialects of Indian consciousness are channelled. Ironically, it is this magical gift – that extraordinary midnight legacy – that makes Saleem an Indian 'everyman.'

Unlike *Kanthapura*, in which an illiterate and naive village woman relates an anti-colonial tale, *Midnight's Children* employs a sophisticated narrative agent who is

able to blend his dual parentage into a single narrative, albeit a long and complex one. Switched at birth with Shiva, his alter ego, the narrator-protagonist is raised by the Sinai family. As Saleem's biological parents are William Methwold, an Englishman in India, and Vanita, an Indian who dies during labour, Saleem is what Padma describes with astonishment as "an Anglo... an Anglo-Indian?" (p.118). In response to Padma's remarks, Saleem explains that his dual heritage did not matter, and that "[i]n a kind of collective failure of imagination, we learned that we simply could not think our way out of our pasts" (p.118). Since Saleem is a product of Indian and British 'interaction,' he is able to draw a parallel between himself and the gander: "the mythical bird, the hamsa or parahamsa, symbol of the ability to live in two worlds, the physical and the spiritual, the world of land-and-water and the world of air, of flight" (p.223). For example, Saleem goes on to remark that "before blood has its day, I shall take wing (like the parahamsa gander who can soar out of one element into another) and return, briefly, to the affairs of my inner world" (p.226), and later admits that "[e]ven a symbolic gander must come down, at last, to earth" (p.229).

These comments are particularly illuminating since the narrator, like the novelist, is a product of both British and Indian cultures, and has access to both these worlds, transcending the British / Indian dichotomy.<sup>113</sup> In fact, Rushdie admits he intended his readers to confuse Saleem's autobiography with his own past.<sup>114</sup> Discussing the position of the migrant writer, Rushdie writes "[o]ur identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools. But however ambiguous and shifting this ground may be, it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy."<sup>115</sup> During the novel, Saleem floats between memory and fact, fiction and history, past and present and, by establishing himself as a bridge between these states, he renders strict categories less meaningful.

Similarly, in order to be able to express what it is to be an Indian in Rushdie's postcolonial context, one must first recognise that Indian identity is dynamic, shifting, and consists of a myriad of cultural influences, as opposed to the dichotomy between the colonial master and the Indian subject employed in *Kanthapura*. Whereas Achakka's tale is determinedly anti-imperialist, relying on pre-colonial indigenous methods of story-telling, Saleem combines his oral heritage with his colonial legacy; whereas British and Indian culture are presented as separate, colliding and competing forces in *Kanthapura*, *Midnight's Children* presents the fusion of these two cultures. In fact, Rushdie explains that "[i]n the India where I grew up, [Indian culture and European culture] were already intermingled because of several centuries of British presence... I did not have to make a synthesis. I was merely the echo of a culture which is really plural."<sup>116</sup> In *Midnight's Children*, then, the colonial legacy is seen not as something that can easily be rejected or dismissed but as an important force contributing to postcolonial India.



Rushdie's narrator frequently digresses in order to tell other half-related stories, as demonstrated by the following extract which is typical of the novel's style: "leaving the history of the Midnight's Children's Conference to one side, and the pain of the Pioneer Café to another, I shall tell you about the fall of Evie Burns" (p.223). Despite Saleem's best efforts to restrict his narrative to its linear sequence, both the future and the past often penetrate the present tense of the novel. The following passage illustrates this point:

Someone speaks anxiously, trying to force her way into my story ahead of time; but it won't work... someone, who founded this pickle-factory and its ancillary bottling works, who has been looking after my impenetrable child, just as once... wait on! She nearly wormed it out of me then, but fortunately I've still got my wits about me, fever or no fever! Someone will just have to step back and

remain cloaked in anonymity until its her turn; and that won't be until the very end (p.209).

Like Saleem's disintegrating body, the narrative fragments beyond the narrator's control. Digression is obviously an integral part of Rushdie's narrative strategy in *Midnight's Children*, and the novelist explains that this particular method seeks to echo "the Indian talent for non-stop self-regeneration,"<sup>117</sup> to mirror the infinite possibilities and opportunities of newly independent India. It is possible that Rushdie inherited this 'digressive' technique from the Indian oral tradition, as the novel taps the same indigenous source as Rao does for *Kanthapura*, making references to important Indian texts, such as the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, which lie at the roots of India's rich story-telling tradition.<sup>118</sup>

Furthermore, *Midnight's Children* not only contains references to the *Quran* – a central, defining text for Muslims – but also relies on Hindu myth as a means of presenting Indian characters. Saleem, his wife Paravati, and his alter ego Shiva are all described in terms of Hindu mythology: Shiva's namesake is the god of procreation and destruction, and together with Paravati-the-Witch, these two characters symbolise the archetypal parents of Hindu tradition; as preserver, Saleem resembles Vishnu,<sup>119</sup> while his extraordinary nose invokes the elephant god, Ganesh, the deity of intelligence, arts and creation. Furthermore, like Ganesh, Saleem also has a mother who is impure, as Amina's illicit relationship with her former husband, Nadir Kahn, is 'unfaithfully' restored.<sup>120</sup> Saleem even indicates the parallel between himself and Valmika, the author of the *Ramayana*, by despairing at Padma's lack of enthusiasm, tolerance and patience as he reads her his autobiography-in-progress.<sup>121</sup> By presenting some of his major characters as the modern manifestation of well-known figures of ancient Hindu mythology, Rushdie acknowledges his novel's debt to the Indian mythic tradition. But more than merely situating his novel within this

extensive tradition, he renovates these traditional myths in order to link India's ancient past to its postcolonial present, providing a continuity in India's past by crossing the historical demarcation marked by the British retreat in 1947. What Rushdie does not do, however, is to use myth as a means of attributing 'good' or 'evil' characteristics to the Indian or to the British, as Rao does in his novel.

*Arabian Night's Entertainment* is another significant influence in the novel, and many similarities between these two works have already been drawn. Jean-Pierre Durix goes as far as to claim that both Saleem and Scheherazade tell stories in order to "defer the advent of death."<sup>122</sup> This is, however, not entirely accurate because while Scheherazade does try to forestall the murder of other young maidens in her community, Saleem, aware that his own death is approaching, maintains that he is "telling my story for him [his son], so that afterwards, when I've lost my struggle against the cracks, he will know" (p.211). Saleem's narrative is therefore not an attempt to "defer the advent of death," but rather to leave a record or a kind of trace of the individual's plight in history. There are, nevertheless, similarities between these two works, and Rushdie signals them when on the first page he writes that his narrator cannot "count on having even a thousand nights and a night. [He] must work fast, faster than Scheherazade, if [he is] to end up meaning – yes, meaning – something" (p.9). Padma occupies a position in the novel that resembles Dinarzade in *Arabian Night's Entertainment*, as both these characters demonstrate the stories' self-conscious nature, and remind the reader of the text's artificiality. Like Dinarzade, Padma acts as the narrator's "artistic conscience,"<sup>123</sup> which perpetually interrogates the narrative. Similarly, Padma also symbolises the traditional Indian storyteller's audience, exposing the tension between the novel's (western) form and

its (Indian) themes.<sup>124</sup> There is also a sexual attraction between both narrators and their singular, immediate audience.

The modern Indian cinema, which since the early 1970s has produced the largest quantity of films in any region of the world, is another possible source of Rushdie's digressive narrative tendencies. While Jon Thompson likens the narrative structure of *Midnight's Children* to 'graphic fiction,' or cartoons,<sup>125</sup> Rushdie's novel more precisely resembles contemporary motion film, especially in its employment of the flashback technique. Consider, for example, the first chapter in which Saleem shifts from his Grandfather's recollection of the blind landowner Ghani, to a description of Boatman Tai, back to his Grandfather's Heidelberg days with Oscar and Ilse, and then to his great-grandmother's gemstone business and her illness which is caused by being seen in public. All these – connected only by the narrator – are related in a style that disregards linearity or standard plot development. In fact, Rushdie admits that an elementary knowledge of cinema would allow his readers more easily to grasp the technique of his later novel, *The Satanic Verses*.<sup>126</sup> The same can, of course, be said for readers of *Midnight's Children*. Furthermore, the following extract illustrates Saleem employing cinematic jargon to describe the clandestine coffee house meeting between Amina and Nadir Khan:

Unable to look into my mother's face I concentrated on the cigarette-packet, cutting from two-shot of lovers to this extreme close up of nicotine. By now hands enter the frame... but always at last jerking back... because what I'm watching here on my dirty glass cinema-screen is, after all, an Indian movie, in which physical contact is forbidden lest it corrupt the watching flowering of Indian youth... two strangers, each bearing a screen name which is not the name of their birth, act out their half-unwanted roles. I left the movie before the end (p.217).

It has been estimated that in India motion film attracts a contemporary audience of about one hundred million people per week,<sup>127</sup> a common fact that Rushdie alludes



to by writing that “nobody from Bombay should be without a basic film vocabulary” (p.33). Like the Indian novel written in English, Indian cinema emerged and developed under the Raj,<sup>128</sup> and is also often a suitable vehicle for expressing and preserving traditional Indian art forms, and for embodying various nationalisms. However, unlike the novel, film communicates to the illiterate as well as the literate, reaching a significantly larger audience.<sup>129</sup> By using the techniques commonly employed by India’s filmmakers, Rushdie presents a narrative structure that is familiar to film audiences while also importing a modern element into his novel. The digressive narrative technique employed in the novel can, therefore, be attributed to both the ancient oral tradition and the modern cinema, blending these similar yet distinct Indian influences into his single narrative consciousness. Despite employing a narrative structure that resembles film, the novel, obviously, excludes India’s huge population of illiterates. Yet Rushdie does not use the exploited peasantry to make a political point, nor does he depict the insurgent peasantry as national heroes only to exclude the very people he writes about, as Rao does.

The intertextual scope of *Midnight’s Children* is not, however, merely restricted to *Arabian Night’s Entertainment*, ancient Indian texts and myths, or the developing Indian cinematic tradition. This novel draws on such varied sources as *Alice in Wonderland*, the *Wizard of Oz*, the *Holy Bible*,<sup>130</sup> and even refers to the colonial novel through its deliberate echo of E.M. Forster’s *Aziz* and the Marabar hills in *A Passage to India*,<sup>131</sup> and of Kipling’s *Kim*.<sup>132</sup> Rushdie’s narrative begins in a manner derived from conventional western fairy-tales: “I was born in the city of Bombay ... *once upon a time*. No, that won’t do” (p.9, my emphasis added). Despite admitting that this kind of fairy-tale style narration is, in some ways, an inadequate means of beginning a novel concerned primarily with India, Saleem still retains this method, if

only to use it to tell his pre-history.<sup>133</sup> In doing so, Rushdie acknowledges both his major cultural traditions as significant contributions to his identity as a postcolonial Indian novelist. Yet, *Midnight's Children* also undermines these standard western conventions by emphasising its oral qualities and through its constant digressions, both of which disrupt the traditional straightforward linear development of plot, continually disappointing Padma and her expectant "what-happened-nextism" (p.38). Padma, it seems, does not fully appreciate Saleem's digressive style of narration, despite being an illiterate peasant like Achakka.

*Midnight's Children*, moreover, draws upon Laurence Sterne's eighteenth-century novel, *Tristram Shandy*: both novels contain a 'reader figure' within the text; both are autobiographical in nature; each has considerable difficulty in reaching the births of the narrator; and both narrators are at some stage rendered impotent. Furthermore, both novels include in-depth discussions concerning noses and their importance, and include a mysterious widow-figure whose presence and significance is noted well before she enters the narrative.<sup>134</sup> So links between the two novels have already been established, and it is equally clear that *Midnight's Children* has been influenced by a number of different and varied sources. In this respect, K.J. Phillips makes a crucial point:

These eastern and western influences have actually been reverberating back and forth for centuries. Laurence Sterne, for example, acknowledges Cervante's *Don Quixote*, as one of his great teachers. The narrator of *Don Quixote*, in turn, claims that he is merely transmitting the story as he heard it from an Arabic author, one Cid Hamete Benengeli. Of course, attributing Don Quixote's story to an Arabic author is all a hoax, to imitate the way a medieval narrator of romance will refer to a previous minstrel from whom he had heard the tale. But Cervante's parody reminds us that Arabic forms did, in fact, influence the development of courtly love and medieval romance in the first place. And so, from Arabic love poetry to European romance to Spanish picaresque, on to the British 18<sup>th</sup> century-novel, and back to India's *Midnight's Children*, we have come full circle, showing a fertile interplay from east to west and from west to east.<sup>135</sup>

Since postcolonial literary and cultural traditions are not strictly 'pure,' instead interacting and reciprocating on many levels, it is not surprising that the texts informing *Midnight's Children* are derived from various Indian and European sources. Moreover, the pre-colonial Indian cultural tradition was not strictly monolithic either.<sup>136</sup> The novel, then, reveals elements of British culture that have been implicitly retained in India, demonstrating the continuous cultural interaction occurring in postcolonial India. However, as we shall see later in this chapter – and in the following chapter that deals with *The God of Small Things* – the general decline of British imperialism between the two World Wars is offset by the increasing influence exerted by the United States and the global exportation of its popular culture. In other words, the asymmetrical relationship between the British empire and the United States bears directly upon India because as one's influence declines, the other increases and consolidates. For India this shift, from colonialism to 'neo-colonialism' or cultural imperialism, introduces the postcolonial Indian novelist to a new range of influences other than those emerging from either India or Britain, or the interaction of the two.

Boatman Tai is obviously a character who symbolises traditional India, remembering the past rather than recording it in literature. No one knew exactly when Tai was born, and he even claims to have met Christ. This ageless, toothless figure who scorns Aadam Aziz for his foreign education, dies suddenly in 1947 while protesting as a Kashmiri separatist. As his death occurs immediately prior to the emergence of the modern Indian State, it can be read analogously as the demise of traditional India. Yet the boatman is not strictly portrayed in benevolent terms, as his stench was so repulsive that "[f]lowers died; birds fled from the ledge outside old father Aziz's window [... and when] Aziz asked the ancient, straight out, what it was

all for; but Tai only breathed on him and rowed away. The breath nearly felled Aziz; it was sharp as an axe” (pp.27-28). If the old boatman is the personification of ancient India, then William Methwold is a representative of British imperialism,<sup>137</sup> and the transfer of his estate and its complete contents is a parody of the British government’s departure from the Indian subcontinent. Methwold’s insistence on two specific conditions of purchase – that the house and its contents be sold together, and that the sale should legally occur at midnight, August 14<sup>th</sup> 1947 – comically deflate India’s democratic system of government and its bureaucratic language, as it indicates that they were simply transferred from one authority to another, and were enduring leftovers of the Raj inherited by newly independent India.

Methwold’s estate illustrates the impact of British imperialism in a way that the Skeffington estate fails to do in *Kanthapura*. Whereas Rao emphasises the negative consequences of imperialism, such as the poverty, the degradation, and the disruption of traditional village-life for many Indians, Rushdie goes further to acknowledge comically the splendour of India’s colonial legacy. The buildings of the Methwold estate are built in a classical Roman style, “named majestically after the palaces of Europe: Versailles Villa, Buckingham Villa, Escorial Villa and Sans Souci” (p.95). The estate thus becomes an anglicised Indian residence for ‘select’ Anglo-Indians who are part of a new emerging India, simultaneously maintaining the legacy of certain European cultural values. Moreover, the persistence of the six o’clock drink routine testifies to the idiosyncratic influences marking the period of Indian history immediately following independence, signalling the presence of colonial customs as well as those tangible imperial structures; it proved to be “a habit too powerful to be broken” (p.128). Furthermore, the discovery of Methwold’s wig reveals the charade of power that the British used to govern India,<sup>138</sup> as it is the illusion of Methwold’s

hair – it is in reality a hairpiece – that proves almost irresistible to Indian women. His affair with Vanita also reveals him as a scoundrel, and offers a poignant interpretation of the colonial relationship. Presumably, the implication is that Britain possessed only the illusion of power and authority, and lacked complete military dominance over their Indian subjects. Here, then, although Methwold illuminates the cultural trace left behind after the departure of the Raj, the status of the imperial master is reduced through travesty, as is traditional India through the stench-ridden boatman. Despite presenting a number of ‘representative’ characters, *Midnight’s Children* does not saturate these with ‘good’ or ‘evil’ imagery, nor does the novel articulate cultural dichotomies as Rao does in *Kanthapura*.

Like Methwold and Tai, Evie Burns is another ‘representative’ character, as she signifies the encroachment of American popular culture upon modern India. Saleem’s initial attraction toward Evie, her bad-mannered style, her bizarre cycling antics, resemble India’s fascination with the United States and its mainstream culture of movies and comic book heroes; this attraction is also unrequited, ending in disaster. The seductive influence of American culture is also registered through Rashid the Rickshaw boy. Although Rashid’s role in the novel is a relatively minor one – he enables Nadir Khan secretly to enter the Aziz household – Rushdie’s description of him is as comic as it is serious, encapsulating India’s fascination with things foreign following a period of progressive and intense nationalistic fervour. This character allows Rushdie to draw attention to India’s propensity of assimilation, especially since Rashid had watched “an eastern Western” (p.49) and mimics its hero. In the following extract, Rushdie uses an overweight Lone Ranger lookalike to depict India’s grotesque imitation of foreign cultural icons:

Its hero, Dev, who was not slim, rode the range alone. It looked very like the Indo-Gangetic plain. Gai-Wallah means cow-follow

and Dev played a sort of one-man vigilante force for the protection of cows. SINGLE-HANDED! AND DOUBLE-BARRELLED! he stalked the many herds of cattle which were being driven across the range to the slaughterhouse, vanquished the cattleman and liberated the sacred beasts (pp.49-50).

Drawing attention to the use of a western genre – the typical cowboy and Indian ‘shoot-em-up’ – as a vehicle for Indian themes and concerns, Rushdie indicates the parallel with his own novel, demonstrating that while both Europe and America “repeats itself, in India, as farce” (p.185), the extensive availability of American culture is a strong and penetrating influence for postcolonial Indian novelist. The characters Tai, Methwold, and Evie signal an important shift in Indian cultural history, in which the influence exerted by the colonial legacy is in the process of being displaced by a kind of neo-colonial rise of American popular culture, by an assertion of cultural imperialism instead of direct political control. Since these cultural negotiations are so complex, varied and contingent, diametric oppositions, with their tendency to attribute moral status, are no longer an adequate means of portraying the postcolonial Indian situation from which this novel emerges.



Saleem’s divided identity, his split-consciousness, is a result of the impact of colonialism and the presence of two competing cultural heritages.<sup>139</sup> His birth on the exact moment of independence, the historic demarcation between colonial and postcolonial India, further problematise Saleem’s identity,<sup>140</sup> as does his uncanny ability to create a number of mother and father figures. In Saleem’s likeness, the novelist creates a sinister version in Shiva, a character who relishes his own destructive capabilities and his potent power to create one thousand and one images of himself (whereas Saleem only reproduces a single but dynamic representation of himself in his autobiography). As an alter ego, Shiva embodies most of Saleem’s

negative attributes, his abject qualities, while also – somewhat confusingly – being Saleem’s father’s biological son, and Saleem’s son’s biological father. Moreover, although this divided self symbolises the individual torn between the colonial legacy and the indigenous cultural heritage, it is also a metaphor for socio-religious dilemma posed by the subcontinent’s partition into India and Pakistan. Furthermore, Saleem is divided between the private and the public worlds, uncertain of his role in Indian history after he was created in part by a colonial legacy. This is an anxiety that plagues the narrator throughout the novel. It is not surprising, then, that Saleem’s divided self is an unsustainable identity that collapses, fragments and then disintegrates as the narrative unfolds. Yet, Saleem is more than merely an ‘Anglo-Indian,’ and despite his British father and his Indian mother, Saleem identifies strongly with the American comic book hero, Superman; in fact, the narrator describes himself as a “mild-mannered Clark Kent protecting [his] secret identity” (p.154). A spokesman for his generation, a freakish incarnation of his nation, Saleem’s identity is reduced essentially to a mere reflection of his contemporary environment, incorporating contemporary foreign myth with ancient Indian myth into a single but complex character. Through his appropriation of American popular culture, Saleem realises he lacks a core identity, and that his self is merely a collection of influences, a collage of his contemporary culture.<sup>141</sup> Saleem is, therefore, a repository of both ancient Indian myth and contemporary American myth, signalling that the shifting and dynamic postcolonial Indian identity consists of more than the products of British and Indian negotiation.

Yet it is not only Saleem whose identity is dynamic, as other character’s identities are also complex, dynamic and shifting. Reverend Mother’s capacity to dream her daughter’s dreams suggests a further slippage between individual

identities, as does Saleem's ability to access and enter other people's minds. Furthermore, character's emotions can often spill into others through the food they cook and eat, as indicated by following passage:

Reverend Mother doled out the curries and meatballs of intransigence, dishes imbued with the personality of their creator; Amina ate the fish salans of stubbornness and the birianis of determination. And, although Mary's pickles had a partially counteractive effect – since she had stirred into them the guilt of her heart, and the fear of discovery, so that, good as they tasted, they had the power of making those who ate them subject to nameless uncertainties and dreams of accusing fingers – the diet provided by Reverend Mother filled Amina with a kind of rage, and even produced slight signs of improvement in her defeated husband (p.139).

Even Aunt Alia possesses this strange ability to impregnate food with her emotions, and Saleem cannot evade this same kind of intrusion as he notes that elements of Padma's personality are leaking into him. Moreover, Mary's communist revolutionary-inspired baby-switching suggests that identity is accidental and fictional.<sup>142</sup> Since India has been influenced by a plethora of diverse sources, postcolonial Indian identity is not something fixed or certain; rather it exists as a potpourri of cultural influences, as a kind of chutney.<sup>143</sup> By extension, Indian collective or national identity is also mixed, heterogeneous, responsive, dynamic, and fictional.

Moreover, Cyrus-the-great has his entire identity overhauled when his mother reinvents him as Lord Khusro Khusrorand Bhagman, another humorous renovation of the Superman myth. As some of the other characters develop, they assume different names: the Brass Monkey becomes Pakistan's revered Jamila Singer, Nadir Kahn becomes Quasim the Red, and Mumtaz Aziz becomes Amina Sinai. The three child-soldiers of the buddha's CUTIA unit – Ayooba, Shaheed, and Farooq – are cartoonish, two-dimensional, interchangeable, and indistinguishable. Even Saleem



has a series of signifiers, such as “Snotnose, Stainface, Baldy, Sniffer, Buddha, and even Piece-of-the-Moon” (p.9). As Catherine Cundy explains, “the depiction of figures who reinvent themselves can serve as a positive refutation that the past is the place where character and fate are decided.”<sup>144</sup> In *Kanthapura*, the character’s names are generally fixed, and gain their meaning in relation to either the particular character’s role in the village, or as a specific reflection of their personality. In contrast to Rao’s presentation of an essentially static identity, Rushdie illustrates that his generation is capable of, at least in part, attempting to evade the colonial legacy. In other words, variable nomenclature and the perpetual self-renovation that occur in *Midnight’s Children* partly deny the strength of the colonial legacy because individual fate can be determined by means other than history. If the character’s names contain their fate, then their fate remains open to possibility as this novel continually evades closure. Like the characters in *Midnight’s Children*, the Indian nation is also in a constant state of perpetual self-renovation. However, the renovation of identity equally indicates the shifts and changes that have occurred since independence precisely because they respond to the immense weight of colonialism in India’s past.

Although *Midnight’s Children* contains elements of Indian, British, and American culture – all acknowledged as important determining factors in the development of postcolonial Indian identity – all three are also undermined in specific ways: the British, as I have already discussed in this chapter, are comically deflated through travesty; by drawing a parallel between the impish, impotent Saleem and those ancient mythic figures drawn from the Hindu pantheon, Rushdie’s novel, through metaphor, demystifies hieratic Hinduism by comparing it to an ‘uncommon’ common-man, who is nonetheless demotic; this novel uses the dualistic, cartoon

world of Superman in order to subvert America's neo-colonial dominance in Third World countries by revealing, through satire, its over-simplistic view of its own authority and its implicit naiveté.<sup>145</sup> Yet, Rushdie retains this dualistic vision for Book Three of *Midnight's Children*, describing Indira Gandhi as 'the Black Widow,' and indicating the deplorable similarities between his contemporary India, and twentieth-century America. Despite comparing himself with the comic-book action hero, Saleem is no Superman; as the novel progresses and as the Indian nation matures, the narrator, vulnerable to the corruption of clocks, literally disintegrates. These subversive strategies enable Rushdie to demonstrate that within his postcolonial world, he still has an active choice in selecting and manipulating cultural influences, that he retains an enormous amount of agency, and that he can engage with those cultural traditions that have roots outside India.

*Midnight's Children* is influenced by a wide range of sources; from the *Quran* to the *Holy Bible* – central religious texts for the east and west respectively – from eighteenth-century British fiction to ancient Hindu epics and mythology, to post-modern magic realist techniques. This novel, describing the historical events surrounding Indian independence from the British Raj has, like Saleem, “a wild profusion of... inheritance” (p.109). Within the novel, these influences are registered and manifested in a number of ways: particularly through its multitude of characters, through its real estate, and even through the novel's cinematic style and digressive narrative strategy. However, Rushdie's cultural heritage is so varied and mixed that a simple dichotomy of 'good' and 'evil' is inadequate to convey his version of India, and his novel does not establish binaries in order to construct images of benevolent Indian characters at the expense of a malevolent British imperial master. Rather, these influences are fused into the narrator's life in order to replicate the national

experience of modern India. Projected through the figure of Saleem, Rushdie's India is vastly complex, and the cross-cultural fertilisation that has occurred in India is illustrated in his novel. In other words, *Midnight's Children* reflects the postcolonial Indian condition by acknowledging both the positive and the negative attributes of its mixed cultural heritage, while the novel is itself also a product of the negotiations that it portrays. As a gander-figure, Saleem, like Rushdie, links these influences into a single form: Rushdie's novel, then, emphasises India's dynamic ability to constantly reinvent itself by assimilating and absorbing invading cultures. It is also suggested by Dr Aziz's unsuccessful attempt "to fuse the skills of Western and Hakimi medicine, an attempt which would gradually wear him down" (p.67), that this ability to blend and preserve these various influences was not available to the previous generation of Indians to which Rao belongs; it was, rather, a capacity solely reserved for the Rushdie and his so-called midnight generation.

At times, *Midnight's Children* portrays postcolonial India as a land of magic and fantasy. In particular, the novel describes a number of fantastic events, such as statues galloping on the eve of the nation's birth, rubies and diamonds dropping from Dr. Aziz's nose and eyes, Reverend Mother's extraordinary luck at the Mahalaxmi Racecourse, and even the six thousand four hundred and twenty dogs who respond to Abdullah's humming during his assassination. In Rushdie's India, self-given curses come to fruition, as Musa demonstrates by returning to Ahmed Sinai, begging forgiveness after contracting the leprosy he swore upon himself. India, the site of the fulfilment of Ramran's incredible prophecy predicting that Saleem's life would mysteriously be linked to the nation, is described in terms of magic and myth, as the following extract illustrates:

[A] new myth to celebrate, because a nation which had never previously existed was about to win its freedom, catapulting us into a

world which, although it had five thousand years of history, although it had invented the game of chess and traded with the Middle Kingdom Egypt, was nevertheless quite imaginary; into a mythical land, a country which would never exist except by the efforts of a phenomenal collective will – except in a dream we all agreed to dream; it was a mass fantasy shared in varying degrees by Bengali and Punjabi, Madrasi and Jat, and would periodically need the sanctification and renewal which can only be provided by rituals of blood. India, the new myth – a collective fiction in which anything was possible, a fable rivalled only by the other mighty fantasies: money and God (p.112).

While Rushdie employs a kind of magic realism as a means of presenting the fantastic origins of the Indian nation, he also uses this technique to portray the terrible aspects of Indian history as well. Although the events surrounding Indian independence were themselves miraculous, as the attainment of political freedom was relatively bloodless,<sup>146</sup> the partition did, however, prompt an atrocity — the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of Hindu and Muslim migrants — so terrible as to rival the holocaust as the twentieth-century's central tragedy. Not only is Rushdie's magic realism a viable means of expressing the wonder of the nation's emergence, but it is also an effective copying strategy for dealing with the horrors of contemporary Indian history. The CUTIA unit, for example, witness certain atrocities when in East Pakistan, (some twenty years after Indian independence) they:

[S]aw things that weren't-couldn't-have-been true: soldiers entering women's hostels without knocking; women, dragged into the street, were also entered, and again nobody troubled to knock. And newspapers offices, burning with the dirty yellowblack smoke of cheap gutter newsprint, and the offices of trade unions, smashed to the ground, and roadside ditches filling up with people who were not merely asleep – bare chests were seen, and the hollow pimples of bullet-holes. Ayooba Shaheed Farooq watched in silence through moving windows as our boys, our soldiers-for-Allah, our worth-ten-babus jawans held Pakistan together by turning flame-throwers machine-guns hand-grenades on the city slums (pp.356-357).

Rushdie version of magic realism is at its most overt during the Sundarban jungle scenes, where the unbelievableness of historical fact is made believable both by the

dream-like narrative technique and by the near-mythical location. In other words, it is only in the density of this jungle, a physical and emotional refuge from the nightmare of history, that these men can temporally come to terms with the knowledge that West Pakistani troops invaded, terrorised, slaughtered, and raped citizens of East Pakistan. Like *Kanthapura*, *Midnight's Children* describes acts of extreme violence; yet in Rao's novel the most aggressive violence is perpetrated by the British Raj protecting its imperial interests, whereas in Rushdie's novel – although it does describe the Amritsar massacre – the most shocking acts of violence are, in fact, committed by Indians and Pakistanis.

Saleem, in his matter-of-fact manner, narrates his life story as the history of the Indian nation, and, as Joseph Swann explains:

[T]he smile which seems rarely to leave the narrator's lips, even when he is confronting us with massacre, even when he is telling us, in the midst of a description of family crisis, of the dropping of the atomic bomb on Japan, *reflects in the idiom of the modern novel*, and despite that novel's Muslim background, *the smile on the features of the Buddha*, all-seeing and compassionate, suffering and not suffering at once.<sup>147</sup>

Like the digressive style of narration, the magic-realism in *Midnight's Children* has both Indian and western origins. Rushdie's technique is similar to that used by Gabriel Garcia Marquez in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) and Gunter Grass in *The Tin Drum* (1962), as all three novels share a similar relationship to history, seeking to subvert the authority of an oppressive regime, rejecting their totalitarian views of absolutism. In this sense, *Midnight's Children* "reflects in idiom of the modern novel." However, Rushdie's version of magic realism is also linked to India's indigenous oral traditions, to the concept of 'maya' or illusion, and is an extension of the Indian mythic tradition. While the origin of Rushdie's magic realism can be attributed to different sources, according to Harrison:

[T]he introduction of non-rational, ‘magical’ elements into an otherwise apparently realistic, rational world serves as a subversive rejection of the overwhelming scientific, rational approach to life of a culture that, in an ostensibly postcolonial world, still colonises and still paternalises, but economically and culturally more than militarily.<sup>148</sup>

This technique, then, not only draws on modern world literature and India’s indigenous mythic tradition, but also embodies the conflict between two very different ways of perceiving and experiencing the world; by distinguishing between the old binary distinctions of western rationalism and Indian mysticism, *Midnight’s Children*, in its contemporary context, questions the authority and appropriateness of the post-imperial culture in India.

In the 1930s, Rao imports and infuses ancient myth into Achakka’s essentially social-realist narrative in order to affirm and continue India’s oral tradition, and as a means of attributing moral superiority to his benevolent Indian villagers. *Midnight’s Children*, written a generation later, uses contemporary myth in the form of magic realism not only to extend India’s mythic tradition, but also to deal with the disturbing history of postcolonial India; it copes with the violent clashes between British troops and Indians during the formal British Raj, as well as after independence when Indians committed atrocities against fellow Indians. Both *Kanthapura* and *Midnight’s Children* are epic – the former in style, the latter in scope – and use India’s mythic tradition to signal a separate cultural heritage from the colonial legacy, but in the late 1970s, Rushdie’s novel registers a dark mood of pessimism by tracing the collective disappointment felt toward Indian self-government.



As a self-consciously unreliable narrator, Saleem admits making chronological errors, incorrectly announcing Gandhi’s assassination, and deliberately distorting the

narrative's facts: "To tell the truth, I lied about Shiva's death" (p.443). His unreliability stems from his reliance upon memory in order to relate his narrative, and even though Saleem admits these mistakes he chooses not to correct them, despite his power to do so as the textual authority. Although Saleem, as a first person narrator, is constantly present, a detached observer of his own life, he distorts and forgets events, admitting that he "fell victim to the temptation of every autobiographer, to the illusion that since the past exists only in one's memories and the words which strive vainly to encapsulate them, it is possible to create past events simply by saying they occurred" (p.443). Even though his 're-invented' past may seem false – perhaps even fictive within the confines of a fictional world – Saleem argues for a truth quality locatable in memory, a special kind of reality, which registers important historical shifts, but undermines misguided authoritative accounts.

In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie points to the disparity between two very different kinds of history: officially sanctioned public history and unofficial, unverified, personal recollections of the past. At times, Saleem's narrative is counter-historical and deeply suspicious of the accuracy and truth of these official, public narratives. For instance, the novel illustrates that the public narrative is often vulnerable to manipulation and easily exploited, as the following passage suggests:

Hidden behind newspaper reports – DASTARDLY INDIAN INVASION REPELLED BY OUR GALLENT BOYS – the truth about General Zulifikar become a ghostly, uncertain thing; the paying-off of border guards became, in the papers, INNOCENT SOLDIERS MASSACRED BY INDIAN FAUJ" (p.337).

At a more personal level, the Sinai family choose to ignore their own private past in favour of the public narrative, continuing to love Saleem as their son, despite

discovering his biological links to other parents. For Saleem, public history seems often to conspire against him, particularly during times of conflict as the following four examples indicate: “At the end of that January, history had finally, by a series of shoves, brought itself to the point at which it was almost ready for me to make my entrance” (p.90); “The purpose of that entire war had been to re-unite me with an old life, to bring me back together with my old friends ... a dying pyramid of heads” (p.373); “The entire war of 1965, whose secret purpose had been the annihilation of my family” (p.374); “The truest, deepest motive behind the declaration of a State of Emergency was the smashing, the pulverising, the irreversible discombobulation of the children of midnight” (p.427). Public history is, therefore, a significant shaping force in Saleem’s life.

As protagonist, however, Saleem alters history by selecting and cutting up newspaper headlines, which inform Sabaramati of his wife’s unfaithful activities. Saleem attempts to rearrange history by sending the following note:

COMMANDER SABARMATI  
 WHY DOES YOUR WIFE GO TO COLABA  
 CAUSEWAY ON SUNDAY MORNING? (p.260).

The events that follow – including the trial that became a spectacle preoccupying the nation – clearly illustrate Saleem’s ability to play a significant role in the public history described in the novel. As Buddha, Saleem further contributes to the course of public history by sniffing out Mujib-Ur-Rahman on the day he announced the new state of Bangladesh. Thus, Harrison is mistaken in asserting that “Saleem establishes that it is his role in life to be acted upon rather than to act.”<sup>149</sup> Clearly, Saleem is not merely a character to whom things happen, a type of passive agent spectating in an aggressive and dynamic world. In this sense, Saleem’s cutting up and rearranging of history resembles Rushdie’s larger aims within the novel.<sup>150</sup> As narrator, Saleem



creates or constructs history in the form of a narrative; as protagonist he merely plays a role in the historical action, sometimes altering events.<sup>151</sup> Put another way, while history shapes and controls Saleem, Saleem can also shape history, even if he cannot always control it. During these times Saleem is obviously not history's master, and the final words of the novel explain the exact relationship between Saleem and the history that he lives, which is also the autobiography of a nation which he writes at age thirty-one: "It is the privilege and the curse of midnight's children to be both masters and victims of their times, to forsake privacy and be sucked into the annihilating whirlpool of the multitudes, and to be unable to live or die in peace" (p.463).

It follows that, if Rushdie employs Saleem as the lens through which he focuses his version of India, then Saleem's autobiography will also be an account of postcolonial Indian history. By writing his autobiography, Saleem selects his past, recreating himself in the text as the unfortunate hero of his own life. As a site where the private and the public selves converge, autobiography enables Saleem to oscillate between official, collective versions of the past (public history) and personal, individual recollections (private history). Even as the buddha, Saleem creates a sense of self, establishing an identity by telling stories:

I was rejoined to the past, jolted into unity by snake poison, and it began to pour out through the buddha's lips. As his eyes returned to normal, his words flowed so freely that they seemed to be an aspect of the monsoon. The child-soldiers listened, spellbound, to the stories issuing from his mouth, beginning with a birth at midnight, and continuing unstoppably, *because he was reclaiming everything, all of it, all lost histories*, all the myriad complex processes that go to make a man (pp.364-365, my emphasis added).

Telling one's own narrative is a means of creating, establishing or reclaiming identity. It is as though Saleem attempts to re-colonise himself through literature, and as Kathleen Flanagan suggests "the act of telling his story and the story of India is

imperative to the creation of both self and nation.”<sup>152</sup> Thus, throughout the novel, the narrator constructs and reclaims both his individual and his national identity. Durix notes that, “[i]n a formerly colonised country where history was confiscated by a foreign power, writing is a way of shaping history, of symbolically ‘making’ it instead of only submitting to its implacable rule.”<sup>153</sup> In these terms, the construction of an autobiography is a means of contesting history, and its production overcomes Saleem’s inability to control the direction taken by history. The autobiography is also a fertile site of reproduction for Saleem, acting as an ante-dote to his impotence, restoring his creative ability by enabling him to present his own version of India. He indicates this connection in the following extract:

All the six hundred million eggs which gave birth to the population of India could fit inside a single, standard-size pickle-jar, six hundred million spermatozoa could be lifted on a single spoon. Every pickle-jar (you will forgive me if I become florid for a moment) contains, therefore, the most exalted of possibilities; the feasibility of the chutnification of history; the grand hope of the pickling of time! (p.459).

Like *Kanthapura*, which seeks to participate in an urgent political moment in Indian history, Rushdie’s novel attempts to remind its readers of the optimism, the magic, and the seemingly infinite possibility belonging to India’s midnight generation. The novel attempts to restore a collective Indian memory of that defining pan-Indian moment of national independence, and to encourage the ambition of a slumbering nation: the novel is indeed the “thirty jars [that] stand upon a shelf, waiting to be unleashed upon the amnesiac nation” (p.460).

In order to write an autobiographical account of modern Indian history, to mix his fiction with historical fact, and to express the varied ‘chutney’ of postcolonial Indian identity, the narrator employs the same method that occupies his hours during the day. Saleem notes the connection between his dual roles as preserver: “my

chutneys and kassaundies are, after all, connected to my nocturnal scribblings – by day amongst the pickle-vats, by night within these sheets, I spend my time at the great work of preserving memory, as well as fruit is being saved from the corruption of the clocks” (p.38). Saleem explicates his exact method in the following extract:

Twenty-six pickle jars stand gravely on a shelf; twenty-six special blends, each with its identifying label, neatly inscribed with familiar phrases: ‘movements Performed by Pepperpots,’ for instance, or ‘Alpha and Omega,’ or ‘Commander Sabaramti’s Baton.’ Twenty-six rattle eloquently when local trains go yellow-and-browning past: on my desk, five empty jars tinkle urgently, reminding me of my uncompleted task. But now I cannot linger over empty pickle-jars; the night is for words, and green chutney must wait its turn (p.384).

The pickle master blends the different flavours of his cultural heritage, the alternative versions of history and myth into a single narrative, which is at the same time personal and public, concerned with the individual as well as the collective nation. Like chutney, Saleem’s narrative method has Indian roots, and by taking certain public historical events and comparing these with Hindu myth, Saleem establishes a predominantly Indian means of understanding the nation’s past.

If the Indian identity presented in *Kanthapura* is constructed through perceived cultural polarities, then these polarities are deliberately dissolved in *Midnight’s Children*. Although Rushdie’s novel contains a number a representative characters, they are not employed to construct a binary opposition from which an Indian national identity can be defined and extracted. Rather, these ‘representative’ characters register the far-reaching and diverse influences that have contributed to the emergence and the development of postcolonial India. Unlike Rao, Rushdie does not merely portray the negative characteristics of the British influence in India in order to participate in a conscious nation-building enterprise; *Midnight’s Children* is a more penetrating criticism, deflating the Indian as well as the British. Yet instead of lamenting this loss of cultural purity, Rushdie’s novel celebrates India’s diversity, its

pluralism, and its mixed and varied cultural heritage that contribute to his identity as an Indian novelist. Born in Bombay and educated at Cambridge, Rushdie is a liminal figure positioned somewhat precariously between Indian and British culture, but unlike Rao, who was also born in India and educated abroad but uses an illiterate narrator, Rushdie's own position in this postcolonial world is reflected in his novel through Saleem. Whereas Rao rejects the colonial legacy by signalling his novel's debt to the Indian oral and its mythic traditions, Rushdie demonstrates an array of different influences, but while he celebrates these possibilities, he also recognises its less favourable possibilities, it less than fantastic social, economic, and political reality. While the similarities between *Kanthapura* and *Midnight's Children* indicate the continuing force of the colonial legacy upon the consciousness of the Indian novelist writing in English, the differences between these novels illustrates that this legacy is dynamic, unstable, and shifting.

#### Chapter Four: Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997)

In *The God of Small Things* postcolonial India is confronted with the new challenges presented by the emergence of an increasingly global culture, and India's integration into this new era of modernity is conducted with a certain amount of scepticism. If, in *Midnight's Children* the popular culture exported to India from the United States rivals the colonial legacy in terms of its influence, then in Arundhati Roy's novel, it surpasses and displaces that legacy. In addition to registering this rise of American popular culture and its specific impact on India, Roy's novel, published half a century after Indian independence from British rule, also focuses on two separate transgressions of traditional Hindu 'Love Laws.' The absence of a strong and distinct colonial presence implies that contemporary India has largely absorbed the impact of British imperialism and its colonial legacy. However, this novel does not seek completely to liberate itself from its British cultural heritage as its highly metaphoric style of English and its affirmation of the English literary tradition signal this novel's debt to its colonial past.

*The God of Small Things* registers the legacy of colonialism through Chacko, the Rhodes scholar who marries and divorces an English woman, then returns to India to assume control of his mother's pickle factory; he is, of course, an example of postcolonial India's bourgeois intellectual. This legacy is also indicated by Baby Kochamma's near-totalitarian enforcement of English, of which the twins' "Prer NUN sea ayshun"<sup>154</sup> had to be perfect, and by the various punishments enforced in conjunction with the Oxford English Dictionary. It is, moreover, evident in the family's high regard for the world hit, *The Sound of Music*, which is, as Chacko

describes, “an extended exercise of Anglophilia” (p.55), as well as in Pappachi’s title of ‘Imperial Entomologist.’ In addition to these relatively minor but highly visible traces of empire, the novel includes a less subtle resonance of former colonial rule; as in *Kanthapura* and *Midnight’s Children*, *The God of Small Things* contains a representative of British imperialism. Just as the plantation owners in *Kanthapura* economically and sexually exploit the coolies, Mr Hollick suggests that Babu take a holiday in order to overcome his alcoholism, and that meanwhile “Ammu be sent to his bungalow to be ‘looked after’.... Already there were a number of ragged, lightskinned children on the estate that Hollick had bequeathed on tea-planters he fancied” (p.42). This example of imperialism’s overt exploitation of India is, however, subordinate to the more dominant concerns of the novel, one of which registers the increasing influence of American popular culture upon India, while another focuses on the transgression of caste boundaries within a microcosm of Hindu society.

Whereas *Kanthapura* demonstrates the link in India between the impact of colonialism and the rise of modernity, *The God of Small Things* illustrates postcolonial India's negotiation with the powerful forces belonging to the increasingly dominant American culture. Roy’s characterisation registers the emergence in India of this post-World War Two influence: in particular, both Baby Kochamma and Kochu Maria become addicted to television, watching programmes such as the Phil Donahue Show, becoming familiar with figures such as Hulk Hogan and Bam Bam Bigelow. This influence is, moreover, registered in more subtle ways, such as through Estha's 'Elvis puff,' as well as through the recurring use of popular western clichés, such as the Beatle’s ‘Let It Be.’ At times, however, the twins’ acceptance of this foreign influence is sceptical as they notice that contrary to the

advertisement's slogan, "Sometimes Things went worse with Coca-Cola" (p.313). Likewise, the impact of television culture and all its 'Prime Time Happiness' has its negative consequences as "[f]ilth had laid siege to the Ayemenem house like a medieval army advancing on an enemy castle. It clotted every crevice and clung to windowpanes" (p.88), and meanwhile a beautiful garden is left to deteriorate and grow wild. Baby Kochamma and Kochu Maria are thus presented as victims of an international consumer culture, virtual slaves to the hypnotic images on their television screens. The novel signals an important change in postcolonial Indian culture whereby the cinema is displaced by the television as the dominant mode of experiencing stories, indicating a shift from the traditional village storytellers, to the modern Indian film, to the living-room television culture imported from abroad.

The novel's depiction of the United States is, especially from a migrant's point of view, less than attractive. In New York, for example, Rahel works at a gas station with bullet proof windows, "where drunks occasionally vomited in the money tray, and pimps propositioned her with more lucrative job offers. Twice she saw men being shot through their car windows. And once a man who had been stabbed, ejected from a moving car with a knife in his back" (p.20). In *Midnight's Children*, Evie is returned to a similar, disillusioned late-capital America, only to stab to death an elderly lady. The consistency of this portrait between these two novels implies that America is not as fabulous and as glittery as its exported culture might suggest it to be. However, in both novels the influence of American popular culture and its impact on India is more important than a highly detailed portrait of the country itself.

Like *Midnight's Children*, *The God of Small Things* suggests that since independence, India's colonial legacy has become less dominant, and the important challenges confronting contemporary India are now presented in terms of retaining

some sort of national identity while negotiating with this trans-national culture. Just as the colonial legacy yields both negative and positive consequences for India, the impact of this foreign culture is also presented with ambivalence, with a certain amount of resistance. Both novels, then, register the historical shift of India's attention away from the imperial centre towards the new empire(s) emerging from the late-capitalist American world<sup>1</sup>. In this way, these two novels witness the so-called 'coca-colonisation' of the Third World. Yet, Roy's novel implies that the aggressive exportation of American popular culture to India not only rivals the influence of India's previous colonial master, but also that it has in last two decades of the twentieth century become a more assertive and penetrating influence. This novel's negative description of the United States, which resembles the twins' adult view of India, is either a warning that India could share America's dismal fate if it continues to consume that popular culture without sufficient hesitation or scepticism, or as an observation that this has already occurred. In this respect, *The God of Small Things* employs a strategy used already by *Midnight's Children*: American popular culture, or more specifically its 'pulp-culture,' is used to satirise the Indian government, indicating certain negative affinities between late-capital America and postcolonial India. By identifying the emergence and continuation of this foreign force informing and shaping postcolonial India, these novels signal that the colonial legacy is still an important part of the consciousness of the Indian novelist writing in English, but that as a shaping force on postcolonial India its influence is declining.



Another thematic concern that dominates *The God of Small Things* is the socially forbidden transgression of traditional Hindu caste boundaries. Precisely because it is sexual, Ammu's relationship with Velutha is more threatening to the Hindu caste



structure than Moorthy's transgression in Rao's novel. Moorthy is threatened with excommunication because he talks to Untouchables, and on one particular occasion he drinks from a mug after entering an Untouchable's home. In *Kanthapura*, this action is considered a very serious violation indeed, and despite being performed in the name of Gandhi, social conscience, and political independence, it still causes an outrage among the village community, and even precipitates the protagonist's crisis of consciousness. Moorthy's example, then, illuminates the severity of the sexual transgression committed by Velutha and Ammu, which jeopardises the community's social integrity by prioritising their own private desires. Since Velutha's and Ammu's sexual intercourse has the potential to collapse the caste structure that divides them, threatening the identities of all the members of this society, it is not surprising that in this context neither the police, Ammu's family, nor even Comrade Pillai tolerate this relationship. Nor is it surprising that Velutha's father brings this matter to Mammachi's attention, as the affair compromises every individual's identity within the community, regardless of their caste position. It is ironic that despite her outrage at this affair, Mammachi is implicated in this incident of caste-pollution because she was the one who crossed the initial barriers that allowed Velutha to work at the factory, enabling him to "touch things that Touchables touched" (p.77).

In *Kanthapura*, the British government is responsible for the police presence that leads to the sharp disruption of traditional Hindu village life. In Roy's novel, the police-force likewise consists of Indians, but when Velutha is brutally punished for his sexual relationship with Ammu, the police do not act at the command of a foreign government, nor do they seek revenge or to resolve any personal dispute; rather, the fatal beating is a means of maintaining the social order that these two lovers had

breached. This beating, which seeks to preserve traditional ways of living, is systematic, calculated, impersonal and, as the following quotation demonstrates, is particularly brutal:

His skull was fractured in three places. His nose and both his cheekbones were smashed, leaving his face pulpy, undefined. The blow to his mouth had split open his upper lip and broken six teeth, three of which were embedded in his lower lip, hideously inverting his beautiful smile. Four of his ribs were splintered, one had pierced his left lung, which was what made him bleed from the mouth.... His lower intestine was ruptured and haemorrhaged, the blood collected in his abdominal cavity. His spine was damaged in two places, the concussion had paralysed his right arm and resulted in a loss of control over his bladder and rectum. Both knee caps were shattered (p.310).

The resulting homicide serves to highlight the strict punishments dealt to those who choose to transgress and disrupt such boundaries, as well as to those who possess socio-revolutionary aspirations. Whereas Moorthy crosses caste boundaries in order to unite his community and to encourage a collective rejection of imperial authority, Velutha and Ammu transgress for the sake of personal desire, and thereby invite the most severe punishments possible. While the Kanthapurians do not wholly endorse Moorthy's transgression, they do not beat him to death, nor do they ostracise him. The deaths of both Ammu and Velutha stand as a lesson to the rest of the community, and as an event around which the local community can consolidate.

By focusing her novel upon the transgression of these 'Love Laws,' which pre-date Britain's involvement in India by hundreds of years and are a concern particular to Hindu society, Roy de-emphasises the colonial legacy, placing the less than two hundred years of colonial domination in the context of the subcontinent's three thousand year long history:

It could be argued that it actually began thousands of years ago. Long before the Marxists came. Before the British took Malabar, before the Dutch Ascendancy, before Vasco da Gama arrived, before the Zamorin's conquest of Calicut. Before three purple-robed Syrian

Bishops murdered by the Portuguese were floating in the sea, with coiled sea serpents riding on their chests and oysters knotted in their tangled beards. It could be argued that it began long before Christianity arrived in a boat and seeped into Kerala like tea from a teabag. That it really began in the days when the Love Laws were made. The laws that lay down who should be loved, and how. And how much (p.33).

In fact, Chacko's description of world history as the 'Earth Woman' complies with the novelist's sentiment because it seeks further to reduce the importance of British colonialism by comparing it to the world's entire past, revealing that his family is "just a twinkle in her eye" (p.54).

Instead of presenting the exploitation of Indian labour as a symptom of colonialism, as Rao does in *Kanthapura*, Roy's novel displays Indians occupying managerial positions. As a consequence of this Indian bourgeois, Paradise Pickles and Preserves, which is the family business, becomes a site of ideological conflict in Ayemenem, as the two following passages indicate:

In the evenings, after the factory shift was over, Comrade K.N.M. Pillai waylaid the workers of Paradise Pickles and shepherded them into his printing press. In his reedy, piping voice he urged them on to revolution. In his speeches he managed a clever mix of pertinent local issues and grand Maoist rhetoric which sounded even grander in Malayalam (p.120).

Compare that with the management's point of view in this passage on the following page:

[W]hen Punnachen the accountant, who read Mammachi the papers every morning, brought news that there had been talk among workers of demanding a raise, Mammachi was furious. 'Tell them to read the papers. There's a famine on. There are no jobs. People are starving to death. They should be grateful they have any work *at all* (pp.121-122).

Rushdie's pickle factory is the site where his autobiography is constructed, the site where all the flavours of memory are mingled. In *The God of Small Things*, with an uncertain political climate providing the possibility of revolution, the situation at the factory demonstrates a class struggle between the Indian workers and the Indian

management, as opposed to a cultural negotiation between the (post-)imperial master and (post-)colonial subject. This situation provides Comrade Pillai with the power to undermine Chacko's authority, as it enables him to hold "his poverty like a gun to Chacko's head" (p.275). Yet, even this class confrontation is complicated by caste hierarchies because the factory workers resent Velutha and his 'touchable' duties, and by the persistence of gender inequalities illustrated by Chacko's libertine relationships that (presumably) sexually exploit his female workers. *The God of Small Things* not only depicts a class struggle among Indians, but also demonstrates that the British no longer play a significant role in the day-to-day affairs of the family, and, thus, the novel illustrates a further departure from colonial concerns.

It also appears that the condition of the poor, as presented in *The God of Small Things*, has not altered significantly from Rao's depiction of those starving coolies who were unable to gain their financial independence, despite spending much of their lives working in harsh condition on plantations. The immobile social position of these coolies resembles that of the rice-Christians in *The God of Small Things*. In an effort to evade their Untouchable status, these characters convert to Christianity only to discover "that they had jumped from the frying pan into the fire.... After Independence they found they were not entitled to any Government benefits like job reservations or bank loans at low interest rates, because officially, on paper, they were Christians, and therefore Casteless" (p.74). Furthermore, Murlidharan, the naked Untouchable sitting at the railway crossing, is an emblem of the Indian cost of defending and maintaining empire; not only is he poor and destitute, but his body also bears the testimony of conflict in scars, disfigurements and missing limbs. He is an Indian who, unlike the privileged Chacko, has his life subsumed by the battles fought for a foreign empire. Saleem, who at age thirty-one realises that his body is

disintegrating after a lifetime of sharing the wounds of the Indian nation, at least has the comfort of knowing that his demise is linked to his beloved country, not to some foreign empire in its declining moments.

The wife beating that occurs in *Kanthapura* is also visible in *The God of Small Things*, suggesting that this problem, like the constant plight of India's poor, is also endemic. Ammu's father, who routinely beats his wife with a brass vase, destroys household items, and on one occasion, even shreds Ammu's favourite pair of gumboots, presents himself as a generous and benevolent man to the public. This gap, between private and public self, is an additional source of misery for the family who "were beaten, humiliated and then made to suffer the envy of friends and relations for having such a wonderful husband and father" (p.180). Even the "Kathakali Men took off their make-up and went home to beat their wives" (p.236). Ammu's defiance of caste hierarchies is a rare exception in *The God of Small Things*, and her transgression is all the more remarkable given the context where the other major female characters – Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, and Kochu Maria – all endorse the patriarchy in one way or another. As the social position and even the identity of these female characters depend upon the male-dominated religious structures, these women collude with the forces of patriarchy in a way that differs from the Sevika Sangha in *Kanthapura*. Rao's village women group together collectively in order to assert national sovereignty, and in doing so take important steps towards their own emancipation, yet when Ammu takes similar but more private and intimate steps, the social ramifications are enormous. This implies that these social and religious forces are fixed and immobile, and the impending perils for those who choose to transgress them in the name of personal fulfilment, rather than for a just social cause, are increasingly severe. This is especially the case after the

Raj departed, removing a collectively defining pan-Indian focus. Furthermore, Inspector Thomas Mathews combines his dominant masculine position with his authority as a law-enforcement officer by tapping his baton on Ammu's breasts, maintaining the gender inequalities and preserving the traditional caste hierarchies that her affair potentially compromises. During this moment, social and religious forces collude and coalesce, revealing that particular themes explored by Rao's novel recur as preoccupations engaging at least one contemporary Indian novelist.

Roy uses postcolonial Indian history as a means of signalling the continuation of these caste and gender inequalities, as well as the persistence of human exploitation and widespread poverty. By describing Ayemenem in the 1960s, the novelist draws a parallel with her contemporary situation. By demonstrating that Indians have filled the various vacuums created by the departure of the Raj, the novel suggests that exploitation still exists in postcolonial India, but that it is no longer a problem that can be simply attributed to colonialism. In moving away from explicitly writing about colonialism, the novel relocates its focus to specific problems entrenched in traditional and contemporary Indian life; yet, while certain aspects of the postcolonial Indian condition remain significantly unchanged, new external influences emerge to penetrate India in on-going and complex ways. *The God of Small Things* thus attempts to demote the importance of the British in Indian history by contextualising the impact of the colonial legacy in terms of both India's extensive past and the powerful and seductive forces of American culture. Rather than define an Indian identity in terms of binary oppositions, as Rao does, or fuse together a hybrid culture, as Rushdie attempts in *Midnight's Children*, Roy examines caste, class, and gender inequalities within postcolonial Indian society. For these three Indian novelists the colonial legacy is a perpetually changing and unstable concept.



Just as Gandhi's salt-march provides *Kanthapura* with a specific historical context, the references to the United States' bombing campaign in Vietnam and China's threatening advance in Northern India in 1962 situate Roy's novel in a particular historical location. Whereas *Kanthapura* mixes myth into the daily experience of the villagers, representing history as seasonal, cyclical, and regenerative, *The God of Small Things* displays history as an unforgiving mechanical process, where any agency taken by the individual is accompanied with a high cost. While certain characters manipulate this process in order to secure personal gains, such as Comrade Pillai who slips "his ready fingers into History's waiting glove" (p.281), other characters are subordinate to history's rule, acting only as "history's henchmen. Sent to square the books and collect the dues from those who broke its laws" (p.309). In fact, even Velutha – the one who momentarily evades 'history's blinkers' to see Ammu as a desirable woman rather than merely as a Syrian-Christian mother – is eventually led by history, "[a]s though they were the leash and he were the dog. History walking the dog" (p.288). This mechanical, irreversible, and unalterable process also decays Pappachi's valuable moth collection. Even though this novel presents history as a deterministic force that controls and shapes the life of the individual, there is a divide that occurs at the precise moment at which Estha and Rahel are separated, signalling an abrupt ending of their childhood. Rather than a historical moment that a collective community can experience – such as India's independence on 15 August 1947, or even the end of the Second World War on 25 August 1945 – this particular moment is experienced only by the twins and by their mother. Although this single moment does not mark a discontinuity in the grand

historical process, it is a point at which these characters are radically changed, never to be the same again.

This moment, which occurs as the Madras Mail train departs with Estha on board, is also the culmination of a series of personal losses experienced by the twins; these losses include the Orangedrink Lemondrink man at the Abhilash Talkies corrupting Estha's sexual innocence, the drowning of Sophie Mol, Velutha's homicide, and Ammu's death. During this separation, both twins experience particularly miserable lives. Estha suffers a psychological form of scarring as he is haunted by the memories of Velutha's beaten and broken body, he ceases to speak, and is then no longer noticed by those around him. Rahel eventually migrates to the United States in a marriage that she had drifted into "like a passenger drifts toward an unoccupied chair in an airport lounge. With a Sitting Down sense" (p.18). Only after Estha has re-returned does Rahel move back to India, returning to this altered and decaying Ayemenem to offer Estha her body as "an unnameable Balm."<sup>155</sup> By attempting to heal those deep personal wounds inflicted in the past, this offer is a means by which the twins attempt to regain the wholeness they shared in their mother's womb, when they were no more than "strangers who had meet in a chance encounter. They had known each other before Life began" (p.327). It is an escape beyond the historical and social structures that dominate the lives of these postcolonial Indians, to find a place of solitude, of timelessness, and of castelessness; a place, that is, where life is conceived, the unreal place one inhabits before knowledge can be known. Although this attempt to evade the effects of history is bound to fail, like Ammu's inter-caste affair, it is also more likely to succeed precisely because it occurs in private, leaving the community unaware.<sup>156</sup> Whereas Ammu crosses caste divisions in order to love an Untouchable, the twins explore the



degree to which one can love a sibling, confronting the conventional family structure and, as the novel explains, “[t]hey all broke the rules. They all crossed into forbidden territory. They all tampered with the laws that lay down who should be loved and how. And how much” (p.31). In this sense, social pressures are like historical forces as they both limit the individual's choice in a postcolonial situation. In *The God of Small Things*, the postcolonial Indian is subject to powerful foreign forces as well as those generated from within traditional society.

In *Midnight's Children*, Saleem's numerous pseudo-parents denote the various influences that have shaped and informed modern India. Saleem and his alter ego demonstrate the potential of these colonial and indigenous inheritances to divide the consciousness of the postcolonial Indian; being self-centred, physically strong and sexually over-aggressive, Shiva is the personification of Saleem's abject qualities. Estha and Rahel illustrate a similar split in postcolonial Indian subjectivity, but whereas Saleem and Shiva are born at the same moment, are switched at birth, and develop contrasting identities, the twins are born of the same “single Siamese soul” (p.41), are able to remember the experiences of the other, and dissolve those boundaries of the self that are often used to establish, construct or define identity.

The following passage further explains this point:

In those early amorphous years when memory had only just begun, when life was full of Beginnings and no Ends, and Everything was For Ever, Eathappen and Rahel thought of themselves together as Me, and separately, individually, as We or Us. As though they were a rare breed of Siamese twins, physically separate, but with joint identities (p.2).

Only after the twins are geographically separated do their lives gain shape and autonomy. The separation, prompted by the intense social horror felt towards Ammu's cross-caste affair and the loss of Sophie Mol, is an extension of the twins' split-subjectivity. The attempt to restore wholeness, to undo the damage caused by

the separation during that specific moment of historical demarcation, resembles Saleem's incestuous desire for his sister in *Midnight's Children*, as it seeks to heal the character's split-consciousness through incest.<sup>157</sup> Furthermore, the dissolution of stable identities resembles those characters who reinvent themselves in *Midnight's Children*: for example, Rahel's ability to remember her brother's dreams echoes Reverend Mother's dreaming her daughter's dreams. In this sense, both these novels display identity as contestable and dynamic, reflecting a common anxiety over postcolonial India's dual heritage. Yet, in *The God of Small Things*, only the identity of the twins is shifting and unstable, and identity is stable and fixed for most of the other characters. Although Ammu can, for example, select her surname from either her ex-husband or her father, it is essentially a choice between two patriarchal authorities.<sup>158</sup> Lenin is perhaps an obvious exception, but even the change from Lenin to Levin is a minor and even comic renovation of identity, attempting only to evade the communist legacy forced onto him by his father's political ambition. Rather than presenting a set of divided selves who are at odds and who seek the demise of the other, as Saleem and Shiva do in *Midnight's Children*, Roy's novel gestures towards a healing of this split-consciousness, only to acknowledge later the futility of such a gesture. The novel suggests that the key to unity, coherence, and wholeness lies not in an incestuous sexual encounter, but in the memory of the postcolonial subject, and its capacity to indulge in those longed for moments belonging to the past.

The India of the twin's adulthood is a somewhat pale and deflated version of their childhood, and is described, as I have already observed, in terms similar used to those used to depict the morally declining of late-capitalist America. During Estha's solitary walks, he notices that present day Ayemenem has lost its charm and entered a

state of decline. The Meenachal river that had claimed Sophie's life is now a shrunken, pathetic, and polluted version of its former self: "Some days he walked along 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" (p.13). In fact, even the colour has drained away from Pillai's communist flag. Since this present has become a kind of anti-utopia, memory is used in order to re-enter the past of lost innocence, which Rahel nostalgically remembers in the following quotation: "Rahel liked all this. Holding the handbag. Everyone pissing in front of everyone. Like friends. She knew nothing then, of how precious a feeling this was. *Like friends*. They would never be together like this again. Ammu, Baby Kochamma, and she" (p.95). Hence, there is a deep longing for that time prior to the twins' separation, Velutha's murder, and Sophie Moll's drowning. Unlike Saleem who writes his autobiography as a rewriting of national history, the twins are unable to alter the events of the past, or to change the course of history. Since the twins cannot rewrite their past in the terms that they desire, and they must try other, socially unsanctioned methods of unity, like incest, which are doomed to fail. At best, the twins are merely able to obtain access to their pre-separation past because their historical agency is limited to their recollection of that past, as other forms of agency are dealt with by society with harsh penalties.

The narrator notes the importance of personal recollection: "It is curious how sometimes the memory of death lives on for so much longer than the memory of the life that it purloined" (p.16). Sophie's death changed more lives than her own life was capable of ever altering, Velutha exists only as memories for the adult twins, and Chacko, likewise, has memories of his daughter only before and after her visit to India. While incest fails to achieve a meaningful re-union and its success at

achieving wholeness is at best doubtful, memory partially succeeds in restoring unity by re-entering the time prior to that traumatic separation. As in *Midnight's Children*, memories are "pickled, sealed and put away" (p.192), and by focusing on the currency of personal recollection, the novel illustrates the importance of the memory of the postcolonial subject as a means of undermining and contesting that non-reversible historical process. Memory, like the twins' ability to read backwards, is used as a means of resisting the decaying effects of history. Just as reading backwards is an act of reversal, memory enables Rahel's mind to revert behind those tragic events that resulted in the disintegration of her family. Like reading backwards, postcolonial memory is a subversive act that attempts to reverse the historical processes since independence, to take refuge in that past prior to separation, and to import the past into the present moment, making it more bearable. Moreover, Roy links postcolonial Indian memory to the writing of postcolonial Indian fiction, as both are a means of re-entering the past without significant social reprimand, and creating an alternative, even officially unsanctioned reality which eludes social pressures.

As in *Midnight's Children*, Roy's novel signals the disparity between officially sanctioned public history and private, unendorsed recollections of the past: "All that had been in the papers. The Official Version. Of course the thick-lipped man with rings had no idea about the other version" (p.303). These alternative views of the past link both these novels to the indigenous oral tradition, where memory is the crucial tool used in reconstructing the past, rather than the more literary methods developed from the European-derived print culture of newspapers and history books.<sup>159</sup> Private recollections can easily become false testimony, a fact that Saleem constantly reiterates. Both *Midnight's Children* and *The God of Small Things*

presume that the fallibility of individual memory is, however, less dangerous than the deliberate falsification of historical accounts by official truth-makers. Baby Kochamma, for example, misrepresents the events of the past conveniently to suit her contemporary situation as “[s]he had managed to persuade herself over the years that her unconsummated love for Father Mulligan had been entirely due to *her* restraint and *her* determination to do the right thing” (p.45). Moreover, at the police station, Baby Kochamma even begins to believe the imaginary reconstruction of the past that she tells the inspector, and her deliberate falsification contributes to Velutha’s death and to the scandal that subsequently surrounds Ammu. Although the twins also deliberately falsify reality, their ‘reality-bending’ is employed as a means of coping with the horrors of the present. The twins, therefore, suppress their role in Velutha’s beating by claiming that the body, nearly a corpse, was in fact his imaginary brother, Urumbra. In the church, moreover, they again suspend their reality by imagining that Sophie was still alive, performing her characteristic cartwheels in her coffin. Even though this method is not identical to the magic realism in *Midnight’s Children*, it similarly stresses both the power of the imagination and the immense weight that certain words carry once they become part of an official narrative of the past, the judicial record of public history.

These three novels register a number of common concerns, such as the exploitation of India’s poor, the continuing subordination of Indian women, the maintenance of rigid caste hierarchies, the inherited collective memory of the empire’s exploitation of the subcontinent, and the postcolonial Indian identity divided by two cultural heritages. While some of the concerns shared by these novels demonstrate the continuing force of the colonial legacy in the consciousness of the Indian novelist writing in English, the differences reveal that this legacy is dynamic.

While the plight of India's poor continues, the postcolonial Indian bourgeoisie has filled the vacuum left by the imperial master. Moreover, these novels indicate that the colonial legacy is only one component in the perpetually developing postcolonial Indian identity. Both *Midnight's Children* and *The God of Small Things* signal the emergence of new forces from abroad that influence and shape postcolonial India in complex and ongoing ways. *Kanthapura* and *The God of Small Things* are both concerned with the individual who threatens to destabilise the traditional Hindu caste structure. Yet, the different historical perspectives of these generations inform the novelist's approach: Rao sees anti-imperial nationalism as an opportunity for a concerted movement towards the emancipation of the village women; over fifty years later, Roy is less optimistic by showing the persistence of Indian women's inequality. The narrative strategies employed by *Kanthapura*, *Midnight's Children*, and *The God of Small Things* are in part derived from India's story-telling tradition; but whereas *Midnight's Children* frequently digresses only to return to its central plot, the essential narrative strategy of *The God of Small Things* is circular, beginning with the concluding events of the plot, and concluding after the plot's beginning but still prior to the novel's central tragedies. The differences between these generations of novelists is also evident in the different focus of each novel. For example, *Kanthapura*, which focuses much of its narrative on a village community, rather than on any specific character, differs from *Midnight's Children*, which is concerned with the Indian nation and uses its narrator's life as an organising and structuring device. The focus of both these novels differs from that of *The God of Small Things*, which is concerned with the experiences of a particular family. While this movement from the village to the nation to the domestic is not necessarily a result of a literary development, it does illustrate that the different perspectives of these consecutive

generations compete against one another, registering important historical shifts that occur in postcolonial India.

Perhaps Roy seeks to soothe anxieties about the massive social and political changes occurring in twentieth-century Indian history by meditating on specifics, as do Velutha and Ammu: “Even later, on the thirteen nights that followed this one, instinctively they stuck to the Small Things. The Big Things ever lurked inside. They knew that there was nowhere for them to go. They had nothing. No future. So they stuck to the small things” (p.338). Since the generation to which Roy belongs does not share the pan-Indian experience of witnessing formal independence, one possible way of reaching and connecting with her Indian audience is to retreat to the level of the personal, taking refuge in the comfort of details. In taking refuge in these minor and seemingly insignificant details, *The God of Small Things* not only diverts its reader’s gaze away from colonialism to traditional Indian concerns, but also towards more general humanitarian issues by dealing with the crossing of socially constructed boundaries. Roy claims that her novel:

Is not a book specifically about "our culture" – it’s a book about human nature. Of course, in different societies the details vary. But since the dawn of time, human society has found ways in which to divide itself, to make war across these divisions, to make love across these divisions.... Its really a way of seeing, a way of presenting the irreconcilable sides of our nature, our ability to love so deeply yet be so brutal.<sup>160</sup>

The god of small things is, therefore, no trivial god, and while Roy’s novel is set in a specific locale, it targets a widespread, international English-speaking audience. Despite the novelist’s intention to focus on other, non-colonial aspects of Indian life, *The God of Small Things* signals its colonial legacy through its metaphoric style of English and through its extensive range of intertextual references drawn almost exclusively from the English literary tradition. Roy acknowledges her postcolonial

status by including in her novel easily identifiable aspects of indigenous India, imperial Britain, and the post-war United States, and by using English as her artistic medium.



Although Roy refuses to answer questions directed at her use of language, explaining that it "is the skin on my thought.' My language is something that I find hard to analyse and dissect. It's the way I think. I have no answers to questions about it,"<sup>161</sup> her novel does explore the use of the English language in a postcolonial context. One of the striking features of the novel's language is its richness, its metaphoric depth. The novel is pervaded by lines such as the following: "Baby Kochamma's fear lay rolled up on the car floor like a damp, clammy cheroot" (p.70), "Silence hung in the air like secret loss" (p.91), and "[S]lowly the old boat sank, and settled on the sixth step. And a pair of two-egg twin hearts sank and settled on the step above the sixth. The deep-swimming fish covered their mouths with their fins and laughed sideways at the spectacle" (p.204). Roy also alerts her readers to the meaninglessness of some conversational English, indicating the redundancy of clichés (and of other examples of over-serious and often verbose English) through her frequent use of capital letters, and less often by the use of italics. In fact, Roy further illuminates the 'deadness' of this kind of language by juxtaposing it with her own fresh use of figurative language. For example: "Rahel tried to say something. It came out jagged. *Like a piece of tin.* She walked to the window and opened it. *For a Breath of Fresh Air.* 'Shut it when you've finished with it,' Baby Kochamma said, and *closed her face like a cupboard*" (p.29, my emphasise added). In *Kanthapura*, Rao uses clichés as part of his nativisation technique by translating western clichés into Indian terms: A "Cock and Bull story" becomes, for example, a "crow and sparrow story" (p.15). Though Roy



also uses clichés, she mutates and deconstructs them from a child's viewpoint, and as such does not overtly participate in a kind of inter-cultural politics.

In order to explore, interrogate and deconstruct the English language, Roy utilises the immaturity and simplicity provided by the twin's childhood perspective. Roy displays a playfulness with her medium of expression, creating neologisms, such as "porketmunny," and "Ei. Der. Downs." (p.105). This perspective not only allows Roy to focus on the small cruelties that often go unnoticed by adults, but also to indicate the slippage between signifier and signified, as is evident in this quotation: "The bellboy who took them up wasn't a boy and hadn't a bell" (p.114). This narrative perspective also enables the novelist to employ a lyrical, nursery-rhyme type refrain, which is at times both soothing and shocking. The recurring "dum dum" (pp.98-99) infuses a poetic quality, a familiarity that comes with repetition and is common among western nursery rhymes, whereas the recurrence of the 'eggwhite' images and the echoing words of the Orangedrink Lemondrink man create a haunting affect within the narrative.

The most obvious trace of the colonial legacy in the consciousness of the Indian novelist writing in English is, of course, the English language. Yet, it is the different styles of English used in these novels that signal generation shifts, implying this legacy is changing and unstable. Achakka's voice represents traditional India during its opposition to the British Raj; Rao has rooted his English into a specific locale, making it indigenous to India, seemingly narrowing it into a focused, unitary Indian voice. Saleem's is a polyphonic voice, including a myriad of language styles: the jargon of the Bombay talkies, the pompousness of Dwyer's military commands and applause at his men shooting prowess, the cartoon-speak of the CUTIA unit, Nehru's political rhetoric, traditional story-teller, and even Saleem's own confessional. All

these, and possibly many more, inhabit Rushdie's mixed-bag of linguistic styles, which reflects and extends the narrative's digressive strategy, his shifting identity, and the novel's 'various cultural influences. Roy's English is more cosmopolitan in the sense that it is not rooted into a specific locality, and her language is employed as attractively as possible. As in *Midnight's Children*, the language of *The God of Small Things* is not constantly punctuated by indigenous words or phrases, and signals its British heritage without seeking to subvert it.

If the novel's use of the English language signals the persistence of India's colonial legacy and its British cultural heritage, then its intertextual scope is a more complex form of acknowledgement. Judie Newman has recently explained that literary rewritings in a postcolonial context – such as, Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), V.S. Naipaul's *Guerrillas* (1975), and J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* (1986) – seek to revise "the fictions of influential predecessors in order to deconstruct conventional images of the postcolonial situation."<sup>162</sup> In other words, postcolonial writers with strong links to pre-colonial indigenous culture can use intertextuality, creating a 'counter-text' as a means of reclaiming identity, as a strategy of reversing statuses, and of positing alternative viewpoints from those emerging from the imperial centre-based narratives. Interestingly, Newman suggests that this strategy tends merely to maintain the centre-periphery relationship, as these fictions are produced within the terms of that colonial discourse it seeks to destabilise, implying that the postcolonial 'counter-text' has no subject of its own, lacks creativity, "and is fundamentally dependent for its materials on the centre."<sup>163</sup> Yet, Roy's intertextual strategy does not create a 'counter-text'; rather, her novel is saturated with references from a number of English literary works that specifically locate *The God of Small Things* within a discrete postcolonial context.

Harish Trivedi mistakenly notes that while Shakespeare was probably either finishing *As You Like It* or beginning *Hamlet*, “a consortium of London merchants met on the last day of the seventeenth century to found the East India Company, perhaps the most successful agency to date of commercial, imperial and cultural expansion.”<sup>164</sup> Despite placing Shakespeare in the wrong century – it is generally accepted that Shakespeare wrote those plays around the beginning rather than the end of the seventeenth century – Trivedi’s point remains valid for at least two reasons: Shakespeare wrote during an age when British imperial and economic impulses *were* being articulated into enterprises,<sup>165</sup> and Shakespeare’s literary greatness was later used to justify imperial expansion and domination, as a way of imparting superior cultural and moral qualities to the so-thought ignorant natives. Trivedi is correct, then, to assert that “Shakespeare had so far been seen by some British as a supreme achievement of the race, as a measure of England’s general world-wide superiority, and as an emblem of that English heritage whose propagation could be regarded as part of the white man’s civilising burden.”<sup>166</sup> Shakespeare’s work has, therefore, been implicated in the colonial project since its inception and emergence.

Roy owes a great deal to Shakespeare in particular. One of the novel’s recurring images echo a similar motif found in *MacBeth*; Shakespeare’s fatal bellman shrieks during the murder of the King in II.ii, and the owl is again mentioned when the King’s death is discovered during II.iii. Roy reworks the bird into Ousa, the Bar Nowl (a linguistic play on ‘barn owl’), as a symbol of childhood experience – as an antecedent of tragedy – and acknowledges this debt by referring explicitly to the three witches of *MacBeth*. Unlike the watch that is a permanent reminder of the past, buried in the History House, the owl dies and his carcass decays. As a symbol of childhood innocence, it is a powerful echo of Saleem Sinai’s third principle in

*Midnight's Children*: "Its name is childhood. But it dies; or rather, it is murdered" (p.256). Furthermore, *The God of Small Things* portrays a socially forbidden love that resembles Shakespeare's immortal "pair of star-crossed lovers [and] the fearful passage of their death-marked love."<sup>167</sup> Using the love-story of *Romeo and Juliet* as an archetype for her novel, Roy has Ammu and Velutha also attempt to love across socially constructed divides only to fail.<sup>168</sup> Here, then, while the Shakespearean references imply historical links to the imperial impulse and to the origins of the colonial encounter between Britain and India, certain Shakespearean plays also inform Roy's narrative technique at both a symbolic and a thematic level.

The references to Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) invoke an image of Victorian London during its great age of imperial expansion. Yet, more than signalling this novel's acknowledgement to the English literary tradition, this particular reference imports a moment of massive social upheaval into Roy's novel, linking the French Revolution to the potential communist revolution in Ayemenem. By bringing this particular historical situation to bear directly on her own narrative, Roy demonstrates that revolutions have already overthrown and displaced existing social orders. Furthermore, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902) narrates Marlow's journey outward from the imperial centre of London to the furthest recesses of the empire, the African Congo, in search of the mysterious Kurtz; Marlow finds him alive, but living among a tribe and literally insane. In *The God of Small Things*, an Englishman has gone native and, like Kurtz, also descended into madness. The deliberate resemblance of Conrad's novella by Roy's novel reiterates the human injustices conducted under the guise of colonialism, mocking the idea that European civilisation could enlighten the so-called dark primitive continents of Africa, America, and the Indian subcontinent. The twins' references to Rudyard Kipling's

work completes Roy's mapping of this particular postcolonial trajectory as he is a major English author who has written specifically on India. By saturating her novel with these kinds of literary references, Roy acknowledges her British heritage in much the same way that Raja Rao emphasises his debt to the Indian oral tradition by his frequent recourse to Hindu myth, songs, and stories.

In the 1930s, Rao signals his novel's debt to its indigenous traditions through the use of an illiterate narrator, his frequent recourse to Hindu epic myths, and to India's extensive oral culture. In fact, *Kanthapura* can be seen to continue this strong pre-colonial oral tradition of storytelling by seemingly recording this oral tale in a literary form. In the early 1980s, Rushdie acknowledge his novel's mixed cultural heritage by employing a narrator who is divided by both his Indian and British lineage, and through his many references to important works from the Indian, the British, and even the American cultural traditions. In the late 1990s, Roy demonstrates her novel's debt to the colonial legacy by constantly referring to works belonging predominately to the British literary tradition. In terms of acknowledging cultural debts, these three novels represent an historical shift from the assertion of a collective national identity that opposes imperialism and favours indigenous traditions, towards a postcolonial Indian identity that consists of a mixture of cultural influences, and then to a concerted acknowledgement of postcolonial India's British heritage. These differences, between the acknowledged cultural sources of each novel, demonstrate that the colonial legacy is a dynamic force in the consciousness of the Indian writing in English, and the postcolonial Indian identity is continually unfolding.

In addition to signalling the novel's debt to the English literary tradition, tracing a literary pathway that duplicates the imperial voyage from England to India, Roy's literary references highlight the different social positions of certain characters. When

Chacko's quote from F. Scott Fitzgerald, for example, generates a limited and unappreciative response, it separates him from his less literate family who understand his behaviour as eccentric: "Everyone was so used to it that they didn't bother to nudge each other or exchange glances. Chacko had been a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford and was permitted excesses and eccentricities nobody else was" (p.38). In particular, Shakespeare is often used by certain characters as a higher form of cultural capital because it is largely recognised that his writings constitute one of the supreme achievements within the English literary canon. A higher level of cultural sophistication thus separates the twins from Kochu Maria. Whereas the twins know the origin (*Julius Caesar*) and context (of betrayal, intrigue and murder) of the phrase, "Et Tu, Brute" Kochu Maria "remained certain that Estha, when he said '*Et Tu, Kochu Maria!*' was insulting her in English. She thought it meant something like *Kochu Maria, You Ugly Black Dwarf!* She bided her time, waiting for a suitable opportunity to complain about him" (p.171).

Furthermore, Comrade Pillai, the people's advocate in Ayemenem, enjoys the increased status he receives that is derived from the extent of his children's education. His niece, Latha, has won an elocution prize for her recital of Sir Walter Scott's "Lochinvar," and his son, Lenin, demonstrates his ability to recite Mark Antony's speech in *Julius Caesar*. In doing so, Lenin implicates Shakespeare's cultural authority into his father's political campaign, especially as the speech recited is the one Antony uses to pacify and control the plebeian crowds, then to turn the crowd upon the conspirators, Brutus and Cassius. Latha and Lenin have acquired access to cultural capital in the form of English literature and this is used as a means of endorsing Pillai's political authority, furthering his own endeavours to fuel a social revolution. There is, however, an irony in the fact that this communist uses elite

cultural capital as class weapon to endorse his social position, while also provoking a revolution to overthrow the existing social order, revealing that his position of authority lies more in the threat of revolution, than in its coming to fruition.

The character's manipulation of this cultural capital as a means of asserting and endorsing their social authority is, however, undermined by Sophie Mol's ignorance. In fact, Sophie's lack of knowledge concerning her own national literary tradition makes any elite form of British cultural capital redundant and less meaningful within the novel, as the following passage demonstrates:

'D'you know who Ariel was?' Baby Kochamma asked Sophie Mol.  
 'Ariel in *The Tempest*?'  
 Sophie Mol said she didn't.  
 "'Where the bee sucks there sucks I?'" Baby Kochamma said.  
 Sophie Mol said she didn't  
 "'In a cowslip's bell I lie?'"  
 Sophie Mol said she didn't.  
 'Shakespeare's *The Tempest*?' Baby Kochamma persisted.  
 All this was of course primarily to announce her credentials to  
 Margaret Kochamma (p.144).

Unfortunately for Baby Kochamma, it seems that both Margaret and Sophie Mol neither know, nor care, and her attempts to "set herself apart from the Sweeper Class" (p.144) are unsuccessful on this particular occasion. By allowing the words to slip into one another during the respective recitals, Roy further undermines both Latha's and Lenin's manipulation of this cultural capital as their inadequate pronunciation leads one to infer that these two characters merely repeat the sounds without comprehending the deeper meaning and significance of the words. For example: 'O, young Lochin varhas scum out of the vest, / through wall the vide Border his teed was the bes; / Tand savissgood broadsod heweaopn sadanun, / Nhe rod all unarmed, and he rod al lalone (p.271); and again: "I cometoberry Caeser, not to praise him. / Theevil that mendoo lives after them, / The goodisoft interred with their bones" (p.275). Here, then, these characters are revealed to be ignorant puppets, rather than

masters of the English language and British culture, and they have their claims of cultural authority undermined by Sophie's lack of knowledge, and subverted by the novelist's use of dialogue.



Coinciding with India's fiftieth anniversary celebrations of independence, *The God of Small Things* participates in a current trend of marketing India as a consumable good in a rapidly globalising world culture. In this respect, not only does Roy's Booker prize increase the literary-world's focus on India, but the half-century celebrations may have also been, in fact, a contributing factor in the widespread acclaim of the novel. Graham Huggan outlines the danger involved in these celebrations of India's half-century of independence, questions what and who is being celebrated, and fears that in this case the orient is displayed as an exhibit. "And here," writes Huggan, "is a further example of the twisted logic of the tourist industry, more than capable of turning the occasion of a half-century of independence into fanfare for colonial nostalgia and the invented memories of imperial rule."<sup>169</sup> During his discussion of *Granta*, *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing*, and *The God of Small Things*, Huggan makes the following claim in regard to a conference which could equally refer to Roy's novel:

The conference, seen in this context, was an appropriately festive occasion, with a muted nationalism underscoring many of its cross-cultural performances and a series of liberal gestures being made to the reciprocity between Euro-Asian "ethnic" cultures. Such liberalism, as can also be seen in the Vintage Press and especially the *Granta* collections, also has its obvious disadvantages. For one thing, it risks collapsing cultural politics into an "ethnic" spectacle, reclaiming culture as a site not of conflict but of pleasurable diversion.<sup>170</sup>

Roy's novel is also vulnerable to this charge of turning India into a spectacle for the foreign gaze, and her literary (and also financial) success can be understood in terms



of an international market place, where cultural artefacts are traded, and “in which [the code-word] ‘India’ functions not just as a polyvalent cultural sign but as a highly mobile capital good.”<sup>171</sup> Huggan identifies a current trend involving the ‘commodification’ of India, recognising that Roy’s novel participates in this trend; Roy’s highly accessible, cosmopolitan style of English, the archetypal social issues explored by the novel, and the canonical and widely-known literary works referred to by the characters, provide the ingredients for an attractive novel targeted at a reasonably well-educated international audience. Moreover add sexual transgression and the novel becomes the site of the erotic as well as the exotic.]

By describing the lives of an Indian family as a spectacle for the foreign gaze, as objects for Sophie and Margaret to inspect and consider, *The God of Small Things* presents India as a kind of exhibit. The twins are even aware of their self-conscious presentation to the British visitors: “The rehearsals had been rehearsed. It was the Day of the Play. The culmination of the *What Will Sophie Mol Think? Week*” (p.136). The contrived nature of this introductory meeting, with characters who function like a cast walking on and off its stage but at the same time attempting to not behave like a group of pre-discovered primitives, illustrates that the family attempts to project (what they presume to be) a positive first impression. It is as though the family ‘struts and frets [its] hour upon the stage’ in order to show that they are cultured in the British sense, and fully capable of participating in a polite and formal society. The communist’s march is another spectacle that is ‘staged’ or performed in order to rally support, to demonstrate worker solidarity, and to intimidate class enemies. Like Gandhi’s salt-march, or the Kanthapurian’s toddy marches, the communist protest relies on being seen by an audience in order to maximise its effectiveness.

However, while certain scenes in the novel require audiences in order to be important or successful, other equally important events occur in private, with few or no witnesses. Estha is alone, for example, when he is coerced into masturbating the Orangedrink Lemondrink man. In contrast to the affair between Ammu and Velutha, which is described at length in a detailed passage that meditates upon their intense love for each other, and upon the tragic knowledge that the affair is doomed, the single moment in which the twins commit incest is conveyed only by the following lines:

There is very little that anyone could say to clarify what happened next. Nothing that (in Mammachi's book) would separate Sex from Love. Or Needs from Feelings. Except perhaps that no Watcher watched through Rahel's eyes. No one stared out of a window at the sea. Or a boat in the river. Or a passer-by in the mist in a hat (p.328).

The act of incest is penetrated by memories of the separation, whereas Ammu's affair with Velutha is informed by the impending future. This is a more sophisticated method of 'writing back' because it refrains from presenting a full picture of these intimate experiences. Moreover, the boundary between the spectator and the spectacle is destabilised as Sophie, more than merely a spectator, becomes an important player in the novel's action, only to die then re-enter, occupying centre-stage in the memories of the characters. It is not merely the case, then, that Roy simply presents India as an exhibit, a spectacle for the foreign gaze. She even comments that the half-century celebrations were frequently referred to in India as "the BBC festival," explaining that:

In India there has been so much political chaos and there are so many other things to worry about. Besides, we feel a little older than 50. People treat India as such an old country and yet they talk about it being 50. It's really the West latching onto something and getting excited."<sup>172</sup>

In *Kanthapura*, the Harikatha man unites the village community for the duration of his tales, continues the oral tradition, and preserves indigenous myths so that they are available to future generations of Indians who will then be able to appreciate, learn from, and contribute to this portion of their cultural heritage. Conversely, in *The God of Small Things*, the Kathakali man sells his stories in order to avoid starvation: “[T]hey danced to jettison their humiliation in the Heart of Darkness. Their truncated swimming pool performances. Their turning to tourism to stave off starvation” (p.229). Roy signals the affinity between her novel, which presents India for an international audience, and the Kathakali man, who turns indigenous myths into an exotic spectacle for the pleasure of the foreigner; it appears that the indigenous roots used to combat imperialism in *Kanthapura* are now being turned into images sold to the former empire. Although the novel risks collapsing serious Hindu issues into an ‘ethnic’ spectacle, presenting India not as a site of inter-cultural political conflict but of pleasurable diversion for her international audience, her method engages and interrogates the authority of the foreign gaze by its partial and fractured presentation of postcolonial India’s reality.

Like the Kathakali man who sells his Indian stories to the tourist, the History House demonstrates the marketability of India, especially as a hotel, filled with lots of “Toy Histories for rich tourists to play in... The furniture and knick-knacks that came with the house were on display. A reed umbrella, a wicker couch. A wooden dowry box. They were labelled with edifying placards which said *Traditional Kerala Umbrella* and *Traditional Bridal Dowry Box*” (p.126). The ‘hotel’ represents, however, only a single phase in the history of this building. Initially the home of an English colonial – the Black Sahib – who goes insane and commits suicide by shooting himself in the head, this building registers the impact of British colonialism

as both a monument and a stage upon which the empire arrives and ‘conquers’ the subcontinent. It is then the house that Indian are forbidden to enter, and as Chacko explains, “[t]o understand history... we have to go inside and listen to what they’re [ancestors] saying. And look at the books and the pictures on the wall. And smell the smells” (p.52). As the colonials have taken India’s dreams and replaced them with imperial ones, leaving the Indian adoring the conqueror while despising themselves, the novel implies that postcolonial India needs to obtain access to that house in order to re-dream their dreams, and undo this process of ‘Anglo-fication.’ Yet, when Velutha, Estha, and Rahel enter the abandoned abode to retreat from the outside world, they find only powerful social and historical forces at work. The potential sanctuary thus becomes the stage on which Velutha is given his fatal beating, witnessed by an audience of bewildered twins; it was “History in Live performance” (p.309). Like Methwold’s estate in *Midnight’s Children*, the History House is an emblem of the persistence of colonial rule after the departure of the Raj. Unlike Bhatta’s house in *Kanthapura*, which as a symbol of the Indian-elite complying with the imperialism powers is burnt to the ground, the History House is an enduring record both of colonial activities and of postcolonial India’s response.

*The God of Small Things* diverts its reader’s gaze away from issues of empire toward particular Indian concerns, such as the maintenance of the Hindu caste structure, focusing upon minor details but at the same time registering important historical shifts. The novel suggests that the penetration of powerful economic, political and cultural forces originating from the United States have displaced the colonial legacy as the dominant external influence on contemporary India. Yet, the absence of a colonial presence is itself an awkward acknowledgement of the share weight of the colonial legacy. The residual traces of colonialism are registered by the

novel's use of the English language, and its references to several works belonging to the canon of English literature. By taking a nostalgic look back to the twin's childhood, this novel also demonstrates that during an age in which a post-modern urge has been to emphasise the construction of 'History,' postcolonial memory is still a viable and valuable means of accessing the past. In its celebration of the small things, its expression of delight at life's minor and seemingly trivial details, *The God of Small Things* presents itself as being more cosmopolitan, opposed to as nationalistic, and as the antithesis of *Midnight's Children's* dramatisation of moments of massive cultural traffic or trans-historic shifts. Coinciding with India's fiftieth anniversary celebrations of independence, Roy's novel is part of a current trend in which India is marketed as though it were a consumer good in a rapidly globalising world culture, but her manipulation of this foreign gaze enables her 'look back' in a more complex and sophisticated way, suggesting a movement beyond the conventional notions of 'postcolonialism'.



By exploring three Indian novels written in English, this thesis identifies the colonial legacy as it appears in its literary manifestation, as opposed to its various social, political, or economic formations. In doing so, it demonstrates that the legacy of colonialism is not merely evident in the more visible, tangible leftovers of the Raj, but is also an important force informing and shaping the consciousness of the Indian novelist writing in English. This legacy is, moreover, registered by *Kanthapura*, *Midnight's Children* and *The God of Small Things* through various characters, their dialogue and actions, the books that they read and from which they quote, the films that they watch, and even, in the case of Saleem Sinai, through the character's absent parents. It is also registered through coffee plantations and extravagant housing

estates. Contained in these novels, then, are aspects of India, which were effected by the presence of British colonialism. As the Indian nation matures, postcolonial Indian identity evolves. Since the legacy of colonialism is a powerful force in the consciousness of the Indian novelist writing in English, it is not surprising that various narrative strategies employed by Raja Rao, Salman Rushdie, and Arundhati Roy are derived from the English literary tradition as well as the novelists' traditional indigenous culture of story-telling. The Indian novel in English belongs to a tradition, which among its various responses to a range of international influences, can also engage with earlier works in English by Indians. As by-products of the colonial encounter, these novels exist as evidence of the ongoing and dynamic negotiations between British imperialism and postcolonial India. The tensions created by these negotiations, between postcolonial India and the legacy of colonialism, and the anxiety over the dual parent traditions, informs much of this writing, making this particular literary tradition an extremely rewarding reading enterprise. Saleem's poignant reminder that his autobiography is written "in a pool of anglopoised light" is a condition inevitably shared by all Indian novelists writing in English.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Makarand Paranjape, "Theorizing Postcolonial Difference: Culture, Nation, Civilisation" *Span* 47 (October, 1998) p.8.

<sup>2</sup> William Walsh, *Indian Literature in English* (London: Longman, 1990) p.62.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Meenakshi Mukherjee, *The Twice Born Fiction: Themes and Techniques of the Indian Novel in English* (New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann, 1974) p.18.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p.19.

<sup>6</sup> Klaus Steinvorth, *The Indo-English Novel: The Impact of the West on Literature in a Developing Country* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1975) p.3.

<sup>7</sup> Mukherjee, pp.20-22.

<sup>8</sup> Stanley Wolpert, *A History of Modern India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) p.10.

<sup>9</sup> Harish Trivedi, *Colonial Transactions: English Literature and India* (Calcutta: Papyrus, 1993) p.24.

<sup>10</sup> Stuart Murray, *Not On Any Map: Essays on Postcolonialism and Cultural Nationalism* (Exeter, Devon: University of Exeter Press, 1997) p.4.

<sup>11</sup> Salman Rushdie, "'Commonwealth Literature' does not exist" *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism, 1981-1991* (London: Granta Books, 1991) p.64.

<sup>12</sup> Salman Rushdie and Elizabeth West, *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing, 1947-1997* (London: Vintage, 1997) p.xiii.

<sup>13</sup> Steinvorth, pp.3-4.

<sup>14</sup> Feroza Jussawalla and Reed Way Dasenbrock, eds. *Interviews with Writers of the Post-Colonial World* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1992) p.5.

<sup>15</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993) p.4.

<sup>16</sup> Trivedi, pp.19-20.

<sup>17</sup> Murray, pp.7-8

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<sup>18</sup> Timothy Brennan, "The National Longing for Form" *Nation and Narration* Ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990) pp.48-49.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p.63.

<sup>20</sup> Francis Watson, *A Concise History of India* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973) p.152.

<sup>21</sup> Percival Spear, *India: A Modern History* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1961) p.341.

<sup>22</sup> Robin Jared Lewis, "National Identity and Social Consciousness in Modern Indian Literature" *Problems in National Literary Identity and the Writer as Social Critic* ed. Anne Paolucci (New York: Griffon House, 1980) p.38.

<sup>23</sup> Abdul R. JanMohamed, "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature" *Critical Inquiry* 12 (Autumn 1985) p.62.

<sup>24</sup> Refer to Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practise in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989) p.ix.

<sup>25</sup> Even in the 1980s, *Midnight's Children* addresses the issue of defining postcoloniality through chronology; its first one hundred pages are primarily concerned with Saleem's ancestry, his pre-history, implying that postcolonial India has its roots prior to formal self-government.

<sup>26</sup> Steinvorth, pp.50-51.

<sup>27</sup> See Dorothy Spencer, *Indian Fiction in English* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1960); K.R. Srinvasa Iyengar, *Indian Writing In English* (Bombay: Asia, 1962); M.E. Derrett, *The Modern Indian Novel in English: A Comparative Approach* Editions De L'Institut De Sociologie: Universite Libre de Bruxelles, 1966; and C.D. Narasimahaiah, *The Swan and the Eagle* (Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1969).

<sup>28</sup> Refer to *National Identity: Papers delivered at the Commonwealth Literature Conference, University of Queensland, Brisbane 9-15<sup>th</sup> August, 1968* ed. K.L. Goodman (Melbourne: Hieneman, 1970).

<sup>29</sup> Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge, "What is post(-)colonialism?" *Textual Practice* 5:3 (1991) p.30.

<sup>30</sup> Spear, p.423.

<sup>31</sup> Wolpert, p.348.

<sup>32</sup> Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*, pp.66-67.

<sup>33</sup> Mishra and Hodge, p.31.

<sup>34</sup> Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*, p.14.



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- <sup>35</sup> Wolpert, pp.361-367.
- <sup>36</sup> Arun Mukherjee, "Whose Post-Colonialism and Whose Postmodernism?" *World Literature Written in English* 30:2 (Autumn, 1990) p.6.
- <sup>37</sup> Dennis Walder, *Post-colonial Literatures in English: History, Language, Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998) pp.207-208.
- <sup>38</sup> Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, p.2.
- <sup>39</sup> Ella Shohatt, "Notes on the Post-Colonial" *Social Text* 31/32 (1992) p.104.
- <sup>40</sup> Arun Mukherjee, p.5
- <sup>41</sup> Paranjape, p.1.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid, p.6.
- <sup>43</sup> Ania Loomba, *Colonialism / Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 1998) p.3.
- <sup>44</sup> Harish Trivedi, "India and Postcolonial Discourse" *Interrogating Postcolonialism: Theory, Text, and Context* eds. Meenakshi Mukherjee and Harish Trivedi (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1996) p.238.
- <sup>45</sup> Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) p.1
- <sup>46</sup> Walder, p.33.
- <sup>47</sup> Rushdie and West, p.ix.
- <sup>48</sup> Roger Burford Mason, "Interview: Salman Rushdie" *P.N. Review* 15:4 (1989), p.18.
- <sup>49</sup> Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*, p.67.
- <sup>50</sup> Saleem notes on several occasions (p.79, p.166, and p.383) that his narrative is being written "in a pool of Anglepoised light."
- <sup>51</sup> Meenakshi Mukherjee, *The Twice Born Fiction* p.6
- <sup>52</sup> Raja Rao, *Kanthapura* (New York: New Direction, 1963) p.vii. All citations hereafter are to this edition and are included in the text.
- <sup>53</sup> Attma Ram, "Peasant Sensibility in *Kanthapura*" *Indo-English Literature: A Collection of Critical Essays* ed. K.K. Sharma (Ghazabad: Vimal Prakashan, 1977) p.196.
- <sup>54</sup> Meenakshi Mukherjee, *The Twice Born Fiction* p.141.
- <sup>55</sup> Janet Powers Gemmil, "Kanthapura: En Route to Independence" *CEA-Critic: An Official Journal of the English Association* 44:4 (May, 1982) p.31.

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<sup>56</sup> Walsh. pp.68-9.

<sup>57</sup> Meenakshi Mukherjee, *The Twice Born Fiction* p.139.

<sup>58</sup> For a more in depth discussion on this particular issue refer to Shannon T. Hiatt, "The Oral Tradition as a Nativization Technique in Three Novels" *Journal of Indian Writing in English* (January, 1986) pp.10-21.

<sup>59</sup> Jatin and Bhagat "[b]oth were famous young revolutionaries who did not believe in non-violence, and who were hanged by the British for anti-government activities. They became heroes and their names part of the national pantheon" (Rao, p.242).

<sup>60</sup> C.D. Narasimhaiah, *Raja Rao* (New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, nd.) p.41.

<sup>61</sup> Meenakshi Mukherjee, *The Twice Born Fiction* p.101.

<sup>62</sup> Gemmil, p.33.

<sup>63</sup> Esha Dey, *The Novels of Raja Rao: The Theme of Quest* (New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1992) p.27.

<sup>64</sup> Ralph Crane, *Inventing India: A History of India in English-Language Fiction* (New York: St. Martin's, 1992) p.98.

<sup>65</sup> For a useful discussion of the use of location or 'space' in *Kanthapura*, refer to Anshuman Mondal, "The Ideology of Space in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*" *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 34:1 (1999) pp.103-114.

<sup>66</sup> V.A. Shahane, "Raja Rao: *Kanthapura*" *Major Indian Novels: An Evaluation* ed. N.S. Pradhan (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1986) p.22; Narasimhaiah, *Raja Rao* p.43; Mondal, p.112; Crane, p.94; Ram, p.198.

<sup>67</sup> Dey, p.36.

<sup>68</sup> Yet these traditional ways of living are not, as C.D. Narasimhaiah implies, excessively idealistic or naively optimistic: "One is left in no doubt of the novelist's valuation: the lot of the poor and the low continues the same regardless of who rules – the Redman or the Gandhiman." Refer to "National Identity in Literature and Language: Its Range and Depth in the Novels of Raja Rao," p.159.

<sup>69</sup> Gemmil, p.35.

<sup>70</sup> Narasimhaiah, "National Identity in Literature and Language: Its Range and Depth in the Novels of Raja Rao," p.157.

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<sup>71</sup> As no other critic I have encountered deals with this particular issue, or confronts these passages in any meaningful depth, I consider it appropriate to quote at some length.

<sup>72</sup> Meenakshi Mukherjee, *The Twice Born Fiction* p.60.

<sup>73</sup> Senath W. Perera, "Towards a Limited Emancipation: Women in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*" *Ariel* 23:4 (October, 1992) p.100.

<sup>74</sup> Gemmil, p.36

<sup>75</sup> Rao, pp.231-232.

<sup>76</sup> Perera, p.103.

<sup>77</sup> Mondal, p.106.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, pp.110-111.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, p.111.

<sup>80</sup> Dey, p.28

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, p.30.

<sup>82</sup> Barbara Cady, *Icons of the Twentieth Century: Two Hundred Men And Women Who Have Made A Difference* (Victoria: Hardie Grant, 1998) p.132.

<sup>83</sup> Narasimhaiah, "National Identity in Literature and Language: Its Range and Depth in the Novels of Raja Rao," p.154.

<sup>84</sup> Gayatri Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography" *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1988) pp.202-203 (my emphasis).

<sup>85</sup> Rushdie and West, *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing, 1947-1997* p.xii.

<sup>86</sup> Galante explains that "[n]ativisation is the adaptation of a language to a speech community's particular needs. The more varied the needs, the greater the need to be intelligible to different speech communities. English is adaptable and does not hesitate to borrow a word or particular usage when necessary. The necessity arises when the language of context is not culturally or lexically familiar to the "standard" users of the language. If "standard" English cannot provide a word or phrase with the appropriate meaning or emotional tie, then the "native" language will fill the gap." Refer to Loretta Lynn Galante, "Nativization and Characterization in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drunkard*, and Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People*" *Journal of Indian Writing in English* 14:1 (January, 1996) p. 21.

<sup>87</sup> Gemmil, p.31.

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- <sup>88</sup> V.Y. Katak, "The Language of *Kanthapura*" *Indian Literary Review* 3:2 (April, 1985) pp.15-16.
- <sup>89</sup> Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands* p.394.
- <sup>90</sup> Elizabeth Gordon and Mark Williams, "Raids on the Articulate: Code-Switching, Style-Shifting, and Post-Colonial Writing" *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 33:2 (1998) p.81.
- <sup>91</sup> Narasimhaiah, "National Identity in Literature and Language: Its Range and Depth in the Novels of Raja Rao" p.156.
- <sup>92</sup> Gordon and Williams, p.82.
- <sup>93</sup> I am, however, unaware if Rao wrote and supplied the Glossary himself, or even if it was included in the first edition. The quotation is taken from the back cover of *Kanthapura*.
- <sup>94</sup> Katak, p.15.
- <sup>95</sup> Ibid, p.24
- <sup>96</sup> Ibid, p.17.
- <sup>97</sup> Ibid, p.20.
- <sup>98</sup> Despite these latent problems with the novel' language, Katak still maintains that these linguistic shortcomings do not in any major way compromise Rao's "confident affirmation of the integrity of English as the Indian fiction writer's medium," p.23.
- <sup>99</sup> Dey, p.54.
- <sup>100</sup> Ibid, p.42.
- <sup>101</sup> Ibid, p.44.
- <sup>102</sup> Ibid, p.48.
- <sup>103</sup> Ibid, p.51.
- <sup>104</sup> Ibid, pp.42-43.
- <sup>105</sup> Jussawalla and Dasenbrock, p.144. Made some fifty-five years after the novel's publication, these comments may not necessarily reflect the novelist's thoughts at the time of writing.
- <sup>106</sup> Stienvorth, p.30
- <sup>107</sup> Travedi, *Colonial Transactions*, p.34.
- <sup>108</sup> Ibid, p.15
- <sup>109</sup> Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (London: Vintage, 1995) p.9. All citations hereafter are to this edition and are included in the text.

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- <sup>110</sup> Una Chaudhuri, "Writing the Raj Away" *Turnstile* 2:1 (1990) p.31.
- <sup>111</sup> James Harrison, *Salman Rushdie* (New York: Twayne, 1992) p.44.
- <sup>112</sup> Ashutosh Banerjee, "Narrative Technique in *Midnight's Children*" *Commonwealth Review* 1:2 (1990) p.26.
- <sup>113</sup> This is a point that Harrison also draws attention towards in his study, *Salman Rushdie* (1992), p.1. Harrison indicates the parallels between Rushdie and the lives of his characters, Saleem from *Midnight's Children*, and Saladin Chamcha from *The Satanic Verses*. D.C.R.A Goonetilleke also does the same in his *Salman Rushdie* (New York: St. Martin's, 1998) pp.1-15.
- <sup>114</sup> Anuradha Dingwaney, "Author(iz)ing *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*: Salman Rushdie's Construction of Authority" *Reworlding: The Literature of the Indian Diaspora* ed. Emmanuel S. Nelson (New York: Greenwood, 1992) p.159.
- <sup>115</sup> Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands* p.15.
- <sup>116</sup> Quoted from Jean-Pierre Durix, "Salman Rushdie's Declaration of Kaleidoscopic Identity" *Declarations of Cultural Independence in the English-Speaking World: A Symposium* ed. Luigi Sampietro (Milan: D'Imperio, 1989) p.173.
- <sup>117</sup> Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands* p.16.
- <sup>118</sup> Crane, p.170.
- <sup>119</sup> Ibid, p.177.
- <sup>120</sup> Durix, "Salman Rushdie's Declaration of Kaleidoscopic Identity" pp.176-7.
- <sup>121</sup> Here, Rushdie makes a deliberate error in his use of Hindu myth. Cundy poses the following question: "Would the 'average' western reader of a Rushdie novel know that Ganesh acted as amanuensis to Vyasa in the creation of the *Mahabharata* and not to Valmiki in that of the *Ramayana*?" Catherine Cundy, *Salman Rushdie* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999) p.34.
- <sup>122</sup> Durix, p.177.
- <sup>123</sup> Banerjee, p.25.
- <sup>124</sup> Cundy, p.32.
- <sup>125</sup> Jon Thompson, "Superman and Salman Rushdie: *Midnight's Children* and the Disillusionment of History" *Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies* 3:1 (Fall, 1995) p.10.
- <sup>126</sup> Colin MacCabe, "Interview: Salman Rushdie" *Critical Quarterly* 38:2 (1996) p.51-52
- <sup>127</sup> David A. Cook, *A History of Narrative Film* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996) p.860.

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<sup>128</sup> Cook, p.861.

<sup>129</sup> Binod C. Agrawal, "Indianness of the Indian Cinema" *Continuity and Change in Communication Systems: An Asian Perspective* eds. Georgette Wang and Wimal Dissanayake (New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1984) p.184.

<sup>130</sup> Crane explains the significance of Evie Burns name in biblical terms, and alludes to the similar significance in the names of Joseph and Mary, p.177.

<sup>131</sup> Goonetilleke, p.21.

<sup>132</sup> For a discussion of the relationship between *Midnight's Children* and *Kim*, refer to Richard Cronin, "The English Indian Novel: *Kim* and *Midnight's Children*" *Imagining India* (London: Macmillan, 1989).

<sup>133</sup> Luis De Juan Hatchard, "Saleem's Historical Discourse in *Midnight's Children*" *Miscelanea: A Journal of English and American Studies* 15 (1994) p.333.

<sup>134</sup> K.J. Phillips, "Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*: Models for Storytelling, East and West" *Comparative Literature – East and West: Traditions and Trends* eds. Cornelia Moore and Raymond A. Moody (Honolulu: University of Honolulu Press, 1989) p.204.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid*, p.202.

<sup>136</sup> Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*, p.67.

<sup>137</sup> Goonetilleke, p.25.

<sup>138</sup> Crane, p.183.

<sup>139</sup> Kathleen Flanagan, "The Fragmented Self in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*" *Commonwealth Novel in English* 5:1 (Spring, 1995) p.38.

<sup>140</sup> M.K. Naik, "A Life of Fragments: The Fate of Identity in *Midnight's Children*" *Studies in Indian English Literature* (New Delhi: Sterling, 1987) p.46.

<sup>141</sup> Thompson, p.9.

<sup>142</sup> Durix, "Salman Rushdie's Declaration of Kaleidoscopic Identity," p.181.

<sup>143</sup> The OED defines chutney as "a pungent originally Indian condiment made of fruits or vegetables, vinegar, spices, sugar, etc." The same source also explains that this word's etymological origin is from the Hindu word "catni," p.236.

<sup>144</sup> Cundy, p.42.

<sup>145</sup> Thompson, p.11.

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid, p.2.

<sup>147</sup> Joseph Swann, " 'East is East and West is West'? Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* as an Indian Novel" *The New Indian Novel in English: A Study of the 1980s* ed. Viney Kirpai (New Delhi: Allied, 1990) p.256.

<sup>148</sup> Harrison, p.55.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, p.43.

<sup>150</sup> Crane, p.178.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, p.176.

<sup>152</sup> Flanagan, p.41.

<sup>153</sup> Durix, p.178.

<sup>154</sup> Arundhati Roy, *The God Of Small Things* (London: Flamingo, 1998) p.36. All citations hereafter are to this edition and are included in the text.

<sup>155</sup> Brinda Bose, "In Desire and in Death: Eroticism as Politics in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*" *Ariel* 29:2 (April, 1998) p.59.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid, p.67.

<sup>157</sup> M.K.Naik argues that Saleem's sexual desire for the Brass Monkey is a direct result of his identity crisis, pp.50-51.

<sup>158</sup> Tirthankar Chanda, "Sexual/Textual Strategies in *The God of Small Things*," *Commonwealth Essays and Studies: Language and Languages in the New Literatures in English* 20:1 (Autumn, 1997) pp.40-41.

<sup>159</sup> For information concerning the effects of print culture upon Europe refer to Elizabeth Eisenstein, "Some Conjectures about the Impact of Printing on Western Society and Thought: A Preliminary Report" *Journal of Modern History* Vol. 40 (1968): pp.1-56.

<sup>160</sup> Taisha Abraham, "An Interview with Arundhati Roy" *Ariel* 29:2 (April, 1998) p.91.

<sup>161</sup> Abraham, p.91.

<sup>162</sup> Judie Newman, *The Ballistic Bard: Postcolonial Fictions* (London: Arnold, 1995) p.4.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid, p.5.

<sup>164</sup> Travedi, *Colonial Transactions*, p.23.

<sup>165</sup> Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin, "Introduction: Shakespeare and the post-colonial question" *Post-Colonial Shakespeares* (London: Routledge, 1998) p.1.

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<sup>166</sup> Trivedi, *Colonial Transactions*, p.27

<sup>167</sup> William Shakespeare, "Prologue" *Romeo and Juliet* ed. T.J.B. Spencer (London: Penguin, 1967)

<sup>168</sup> Chanda, p.38.

<sup>169</sup> Graham Huggan, "Consuming India" *Ariel* 29:2 (April, 1998) p.245.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid*, p.252.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid*, p.253.

<sup>172</sup> Linden Thornton, "Interview: Arundahti Roy" *Kunapipi* 19:3 (October, 1997) p.179.



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