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**University Of Sussex**

**Homing Diaspora/Diasporizing Home:  
Locating South Asian Diasporic Literature and Film**

Thesis submitted for DPhil in English

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June 2017

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any degree.

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University of Sussex

Ratika Kaushik Ph.D in English

Title: Homing Diaspora/Diasporizing Home: Locating South Asian Diasporic Texts and Films

Summary

This thesis contains a detailed study of contemporary South Asian diasporic literary and cinematic works in English. The majority of the works analyzed and discussed are those produced from the 1980s onwards. My research investigates how selected diasporic texts and films from South Asia problematize representations of homeland and host spaces. I reveal in the course of this study, how these works, actively negotiate alternative modalities of belonging that celebrate the plurality of cultural identities within and outside the homeland. This exploration of diasporic narratives of homeland and host land is explored by examining these narratives across two mediums: the cinematic and the literary. In so doing, the thesis initiates a dialogue between the two mediums and locates these selected diasporic works within a larger tapestry of contemporary cultural, literary and global contexts. The thesis shows that these literary and filmic representations celebrate as well as present an incisive critique of the different cultural spaces they inhabit. The thesis also reveals how, in representing the experiences of multiple-linguistic, geographical, historical dislocations, these texts invite readers to see the changing faces of diasporic cultures and identities. My thesis complements this analysis of representation with a broader analysis of the reception of these diasporic works. My analysis sets out to move away from the critical tendency to scrutinize texts in relation to a politicized rhetoric of reception which privileges a reading of texts through insider/outsider binarism, by drawing together and contrasting academic and popular responses in the reception of diasporic texts. In so doing, my thesis reads these texts as agents of cultural production, focusing on interpretative possibilities of the literary critical mode of reading and enabling nuanced modes of analysis attentive to issues of diasporic identity, the identity of nation-states and the emergent global dynamics of migrant narratives.

The texts I analyze are Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) and *The Satanic Verses* (1988), Micheal Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* (1982) and *Anil's Ghost* (2000), Rohinton

Mistry's *A Fine Balance* (1995), Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), and Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) and as well as two filmic texts, Mira Nair's *The Namesake* (2007) and Gurinder Chadha's *Bend It Like Beckham* (2001).

*In the loving memory of my Grandfather,*

*Baba, I miss you every day.*

*For my Best Friends, Ma & Papa*

*&*

*For Sha, the light of my life.*

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### **Homing Diaspora/Diasporizing Home: Locating South Asian Diasporic Literature and Film**

My title is a reference to Avtar Brah's conceptualization of home and diaspora, in which he offers a 'critique of discourses of fixed origins, while taking account of a homing desire, which is not the same thing as a desire for "homeland"' (190).<sup>1</sup> In other words, the title suggests a desire for home, rather than a desire to return home. It is 'not so much about the connection with a country as it is about the creation of a sense of place, which is often uttered in terms of "home"' (Brah, qtd in Fortier 163). Brah attempts to explain the instability of home as a signifier in contemporary diasporic discourses, and therefore deconstructs the fixity of 'home' as an epistemological originary symbol.<sup>2</sup> In other words, home can no longer be considered the fixed point of origin, that source of unproblematic identity, as it is being constantly diasporized. My title, therefore, plays with this idea of 'homing' and 'home' to suggest how the notions of 'home' and 'belonging' are continually articulated and redefined through representations of homeland and host nations in diasporic works.

The premise of this thesis begins from this point of diasporic intervention in constructions of homeland and host land in South Asian diasporic literature and film. My research is motivated by a desire to explore how South Asian diasporic writers and filmmakers imagine, construct and portray their home or host lands in relation to their diasporic positioning and experience of displacement. The thesis is dedicated to exploring, unravelling and analysing the challenges posed by these rearticulated notions of home and belonging, in order to comprehensively represent the postcolonial realities of migration vis-à-vis South Asia.

The analysis of representations of homeland and host nation within South Asian diasporic works will be complimented by a broader analysis of the global reception of each of these diasporic works. The intention is to compliment my engagement and analysis of diasporic

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<sup>1</sup> Avtar Brah's *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* focuses on diasporic groups in the host community, arguing that diaspora has a 'subtext of home' (190) and that 'homing desire' is distinct from 'a desire for home' (16). This concept is explored through various debates on feminism and post-structuralism, in order to address questions of culture, identity and politics. Brah examines these themes by exploring the intersections of race, gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity, different generations and nationalism in different discourses, practices and political contexts.

<sup>2</sup> The concepts of 'homing', 'home' and belonging will be discussed at length in the latter part of this chapter.

representations by contextualizing it within contemporary critical debates emerging from both the global and from the native centre, so as to locate them within a larger cultural and literary context. In so doing, I will explore the ways in which the study of these texts aids and sustains the production of South Asian cultural identity within a global framework.

My thesis analyses Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) and *The Satanic Verses* (1988), Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* (1982) and *Anil's Ghost* (2000), Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* (1995) and Moshin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007). In addition, since film plays a crucial role in the formation of South Asian diasporic cultures, 'partially because of its key role in South-Asia itself' (Desai 8), I will be focusing on Gurinder Chadha's *Bend It Like Beckham* (2001) and Mira Nair's *The Namesake* (2007) in the final chapter of the thesis. The inclusion of cinema within the thesis is particularly relevant to South Asian diasporic culture because, as Desai has pointed out, 'it is the most popular and significant cultural form and commodity in the transnational South Asian cultural and political economy' (Desai 373).

My selection of these diasporic texts and authors is based upon a number of criteria. First of all, the texts studied here resist conventional models of nostalgia, trauma and loss of home in their representations of homeland, and therefore shift the focus away from 'notions of old diaspora' and pre-world war migration patterns (Mishra 1). For instance, Naipaul's fictional masterpiece *A House for Mr Biswas* and Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* or *Sea of Poppies* trilogy tend to dwell on 'notions of old diaspora' (Mishra 1). Naipaul's conception of diaspora and, to some extent, Ghosh's portrayal of pre-war diaspora, both focus on pre-decolonization phase of the Indian diaspora. As a consequence, representations of homeland are marked by a pervading sense of temporal and geographical 'homelessness'. Hence representations of homeland narrated through old world migration patterns and indentured labour are mediated through this idea an impossible return or an absence of the original home because it has been forever undermined by history. The works of other diasporic writers such as Bharati Mukherjee and Kiran Desai also reflect upon temporal and spatial movement, looking backward and forward, and the deterritorialization and re-territorialization which are connected by travel. Texts like Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* or Mukherjee's *The Tree Bride* juxtapose journeys between India and the USA, home and adopted country/new

homeland. The focus on relocation and assimilation, and ties with the homeland, diverts the focus from diasporic frameworks to newer dynamics of transnationalism. In so doing, the primary focus shifts from analysing diasporic identities in relation to homeland and host-land realities and understanding the reconfiguration of nation states diachronically, to exploring transitional ties and migration patterns that have developed post-globalization.

My selected writers, in contrast, focus on ways of narrating nation and identity from a location in diaspora, engaging with several key issues concerning the reconfiguration of the nation, and the re-presentation of the national imaginary, from perspectives that defy nationalist interpretations of culture and history. For instance, my first chapter, which focuses on Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and Mistry's *A Fine Balance*, attempts to rearticulate nationalist history through a diasporic lens, narrowly scrutinizing the socio-political turmoil of the Indian Emergency (1975-77). Other texts in the thesis are also able to articulate certain conceptions of homeland or host nation by problematizing the stable and unitary configurations of homeland, belonging and diasporic identity. In fact, these texts, as my thesis will also show, continually foreground the unstable and ambivalent nature of diasporic identity, by focusing on the instability of signs of home and belonging.

Secondly, the writers and filmmakers included in this thesis are people of international acclaim who dominate the field of diasporic literary and film studies, and who have emerged as 'highly influential figures' amidst the intensive discussions on multi-culturalism, cosmopolitanism and postcolonial diasporic writing (Nasta 6). In analysing their works, I am looking at some of the most widely-read diasporic works, works that have gained considerable global recognition. For instance, Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* was awarded the Booker Prize in 1981. It was also subsequently awarded the Best of the Booker Prize twice, in 1993 and 2008. Moreover, Rushdie's novel has been adapted as a film, released worldwide in 2012. Other literary works, such as Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* and Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* are international best-sellers and critically acclaimed novels. Moreover, Kureishi's novel has been televised in Britain and Hamid's novel has been adapted into a film that was released worldwide in early 2012. *Ipsa facto*, the global audience/readership of these texts is

particularly useful for my research, as it enables me to assess the making and growth of the cultural production of South Asian diasporic works globally.

Lastly, these seven literary texts cover a span of about three decades, from the early 1980s to the present, while Nair and Chadha's films belong to the decade just gone. The reason for choosing this span of three decades, from 1981 to 2007, has to do with my desire to address the growth and making of South Asian diasporic literary and cinematic cultural frameworks diachronically. Through these texts, I will be able to address the representation of a continually changing South Asian diasporic identity and reveal emergent narratives about migrant relationships with homeland and host nations. The reason for choosing the two films, *Bend It like Beckham* and *The Namesake*, is that both these films engage with gender and the postcolonial complexities of diaspora, in a way that furthers the aim of my thesis. This is not to suggest that other diasporic films of the last decade, such as Nair's *Monsoon Wedding* (2001), Chadha's *Bride and Prejudice* (2004) and Deepa Mehta's *Water* (2005), do not engage with gender issues within South Asian cultures, but they do so without connecting diasporic and gender issues within a single narrative. Moreover, these three films were exclusively shot in South Asia and focus on representing dysfunctional filial ties or social problems within India, which automatically distances the films from narratives of displacement and diaspora<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, my choice of literary and filmic texts is driven by one of my main objectives: to contextualize contemporary and emergent South Asian diasporic identities and culture.

## Critical Overview

There is a wealth of information and scholarship on the South Asian diaspora. Representations of home and belonging have been studied and analysed through a variety of different approaches. Recent texts like Vijay Mishra's *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora* (2007), Susheila Nasta's *Home Truths: Fictions of the South Asian Diaspora in Britain* (2001), Yasmin Hussain's *Writing Diaspora: South Asian Women, Culture and Ethnicity*

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<sup>3</sup>For instance, in a movie like *Water*, Deepa Mehta attempts to capture the lives of widows in a non-secular, orthodox Hindu environment in 1930s Gandhi-led India, and therefore the movie was initially shot in Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh in India and the lead roles were played by Indian actors John Abraham and Lisa Ray. However, In January 2000, Deepa Mehta was forced to shut down the shooting of *Water* in Varanasi after receiving death threats from Hindu fundamentalists who believed that the subject of the film was anti-Hindu. The film was shut down and then four years later it was shot in Sri Lanka

(2005) and Joel Kuortti's *Writing Imagined Diaspora: South Asian Women Reshaping North American Identity* (2009) have significantly contributed to an understanding of representations of homeland and host nations in diasporic writing.<sup>4</sup>

In *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora* Mishra begins by stating that 'all diasporas are unhappy', homogenizing all diasporas as emerging from loss, trauma or the discomfort of dislocation (1). He argues that:

'the fantasy of the homeland is then linked, in the case of the diaspora, to that recollected trauma that stands for the sign of having been wrenched from one's mother (father) land. The sign of trauma may be the "[middle] passage" of "slave trade" [*sic*] or Indian indenture' (Mishra 6).

Mishra represents the diaspora as desiring an originary homeland or as constructed through an absence of homeland, even for generations born in the new land. Similarly, Rajendra Chetty and Pier Paolo Piciuccio's insightful text *Indias Abroad: The Diaspora Writes Back* (2004) addresses the issue of diasporic displacement and the relationship with the homeland by invoking the tension between host country and motherland, the overwhelming weight of non-belongingness, and the diasporic struggles associated with movement, journey, migration and exile. These texts extensively build upon theories foregrounded by Safran and Cohen, who have insisted that diasporic identity is constituted by defining relationships with the homeland and the self, and by negotiating with issues of belonging and rootedness at the psychological level of 'belief' and 'restoration of homeland' articulating less stringent requirements regarding the relationships between dispersed communities and their homelands (Cohen 5-8).

This concept of 'home' within diasporic frameworks is largely defined by juxtapositions of movement and fixity.<sup>5</sup> It is intrinsically linked to locating a fixed point of origin so as to ensure that all forms of movement, away or towards it, can be measured and presented from

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<sup>4</sup>Several other books, such as *Global South Asians: Introducing the Modern Diaspora* (Judith Brown, 2007), the *Routledge Handbook of the South Asian Diaspora* (eds Joya Chatterji and David Washbrook, 2013) and *South Asians in the Diaspora* (eds Knut Jacobsen and P. Pratap Kumar) also make strong contributions to the field of diaspora studies vis-à-vis South Asia. These theorists have investigated this field from the vantage point of religion, history, anthropology and contemporary political relations. They have also provided useful insights as to how South Asia has influenced politics, literature, social codes, the family and culture across the globe.

<sup>5</sup>Many other theorists argue that since they exist geographically away from home, an often involve an idealized longing for return, diasporas are frequently characterized as having an 'imagined' or 'mythical' home (Anderson 1983; Blunt 2003; George 2003; Golan 2002; Gowans 2003; Veronis 2007; Yeh 2005).

the vantage point of 'home'. This sort of equation asserts a fixed relationship between diaspora and the homeland. This conventional anthropological understanding of 'home' has been challenged by many theorists, who have been able to diffuse and largely redefine the meaning of home within contemporary diasporic discourse. Tololyan, for example, rather than eliminating or evading diaspora's relationship with the homeland, unfetters it from a permanent physical return in favour of diverse connections to the homeland (14). In so doing, he addresses diasporic displacement through binaries of home and away. In this way, he addresses the complex relationship between diaspora and homeland by constructing homeland as an originary place, articulating its relevance through departure from this place and the subsequent negotiation of identity through loss of home.

However, this approach towards diasporic representations of home and host land has been deconstructed by recent theorizations that tend to dismantle fixed, naturalized conceptions of diaspora and homeland. Nasta, for instance, in her influential work *Home Truths*, reveals a common concern with questions of 'home' and 'abroad', that leads to the creation of 'imaginary homelands', mythical mental constructs based on reconstituted fragments of memory firmly rooted in the past. As the imagined boundaries of 'home' continuously shift, new diasporic texts 'open up new cycles of resistance, alternative ways of writing, reading, and living in the world' (Nasta 212). Nasta uses Hall and Bhabha's theories of diaspora, removing homeland from the centre of diaspora, describing diasporic frameworks as symbolic sites where the fixity of notions of identity and ideological affiliations is progressively revised. Bhabha and Hall acknowledge the instability of ties to the homeland and have attempted to decouple diaspora from homeland in a bid to avoid essentialist narratives of belonging and origins (124). By using the concepts foregrounded by Bhabha and Hall, Nasta makes the compelling argument that diasporic writers are no longer concerned with lost homelands of the past, but instead use memory and language to re-angle old stories and create 'fictional homes within the text itself' (10). This complex definition and understanding of home is used by Nasta to situate contemporary British South Asian diasporic texts by Rushdie, Kureishi and Naipaul as a significant part of the long-established tradition of Western modernism.

This line of argument is also followed in texts like Jigna Desai's *Beyond Bollywood: The Cultural Politics of South Asian Diasporic Films* (2004), P.Liao's *Post-9/11 South Asian Diasporic Fiction: Uncanny Terror* (2013), *Culinary Fictions: Food in South Asian Diasporic Culture* (2010) by Anita Mannur, and *Religion and Identity in the South Asian Diaspora* (2013) by Rajesh Rai and Chitra Sankaran. These texts have usefully deployed these reconceptualisations of home and belonging to investigate the South Asian diaspora from a range of different vantage points. Desai's book, for instance, looks at South Asian diasporic films in order to analyse the representation of diasporic identities, homeland and host land experiences, with the aim of understanding the rise of diasporic cinema, locating it outside the globally popular movie industries of Hollywood and Bollywood. Unlike Desai, who looks at the development and consolidation of one major artistic discipline of diasporic films, other recent texts have carefully limited their scope of analysis by concentrating on a particular cultural element or event. Liao's text, for instance, reads South Asian diasporic texts from the vantage point of the 9/11 attacks, arguing that this event was integral in shaping the South Asian diasporic relationship with the West, while Mannur reads diasporic literary and filmic texts with the aim of establishing food as a key component in the relationship between the Indian sub-continent and diasporic communities in the US.

These volumes of research on the South Asian diaspora have been able to produce extensive critical scholarship on the dynamics of home and host land vis-à-vis South Asian diasporic texts(literary and cinematic), and have been able to critically problematize complex notions of home, belonging, survival and re-settlement. In some ways, however, these texts have circumscribed their scope of analysis by limiting their study to a particular geographical diasporic space, usually the host countries, as in the case of Nasta's book, for example, which is a study of 'writers of South Asian origin and their descendants, who, for the most part, migrated to Britain from the Asian sub-continent', and which aims 'to situate the fictions of the South Asian diaspora in Britain'(5); or, for that matter, Hussain and Kuortti's representations of gendered diasporic narratives in the UK and the USA, respectively.<sup>6</sup> As a consequence, research in this area has shifted from understanding the broader, global literary

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<sup>6</sup>Joel Kuortti's *Writing Imagined Diaspora* deals with female diasporic writers and their narratives of struggle and re-settlement in the West. The text also focuses on diasporic lives in the host land. As a result, Kuortti tends to locate South Asian diasporic writing within North American literary traditions (5-10).



and cultural relevance of diasporic texts, to a limited purview of these works in relation to Western literary traditions and/or cultural frameworks. What this has done is shift the analysis from the homeland, or where one starts from, to 'where you are at', and therefore 'works focus primarily on the developing situation of diasporic location as home' (Gilroy 214). In this manner, the host land is posited as some sort of destination, marking it as the teleological end point of the diasporic journey. Thus, despite broadening the meaning and symbolism of home in diasporic representations, what this has done is that it has reduced the relevance of 'home' to an originary point, imbuing diasporic representations of homeland with a yearning for a univocal home. Moreover, this has also circumscribed the significance of host land in diasporic narratives by positioning it in a dialectical tension with homeland, thereby reducing the scope of any dialogical interaction between the two spaces within one framework.

Contrary to these approaches, my aim in this thesis is to investigate the selected diasporic texts in order to reveal that home is not that fixed point of origin; it emerges as necessarily constituted of unresolved contradictions and dilemmas. My thesis begins by reassessing these frameworks, asserting along with Brah that 'the question of home is...not free from attachment to place of origin, or for that matter place of settlement' and therefore there is an urgent need to address both these socio-political areas within one framework (Brah 20). In order to accomplish this, I will study and explore: how do the selected diasporic texts problematize representations of homeland and host spaces in their works? In what way do these writers and filmmakers deconstruct the conventional wisdom of 'home' to produce alternative identities of homeland and host land? What is the impact of these alternative identities of home on conceptions of diasporic identity within and outside the homeland and migrant identity and migrant presence in the host land?

To accomplish this, my thesis looks at the larger framework of South Asian diasporic writing, and addresses homeland and host land narratives together. In this way, the complexities of belonging and displacement are tackled in both socio-geographic spaces simultaneously. By addressing homeland and host land narratives simultaneously, my thesis dismantles the boundaries between the originary point of the homeland and the arrival point of the host land. Moreover, the thesis moves away from understanding homeland and host nations as fixed entities that tend to define a rigid relationship between them and the diasporic individual. In

so doing, the thesis further investigates the relationship between diasporic identity and fixity, by deconstructing the conventional wisdom of 'home' as a fixed, stationery locus in diasporic narratives that usually defines all movements towards and away from it. Each of the chapters in the thesis attempts to re-construct mutated or hybrid spaces in order to create imagined homelands and reinvent host space. In the process, I reveal how the texts under discussion produce alternative identities of the homeland and host nations.

Furthermore, these reconfigurations of place and cultural explorations of diasporic narratives of homeland and host land are enhanced by examining these narratives across two distinct mediums, the cinematic and the literary, building upon their symbiotic reciprocity and their dialogic relationship. The recent growth in South Asian diasporic cinema is making a significant contribution towards popularizing South Asian culture and creating new identities in a globalized space. Most South Asian diasporic films thrive on the use of English, with modest infusions of native languages and folk culture, and also use an indigenous cast in order to reach out to a wider audience. Thus, by addition of the final chapter of the thesis on films, which offers a critical closure to the thesis by presenting the popular fabric of diasporic works, the thesis is able to reveal the ways in which these works contribute to the making and growth of South Asian diasporic culture. The thesis, thus, moves from literary to cinematic representations, initiating a dialogue between the two and widening the scale of South Asian diasporic influences.

My methodology of analysing two mediums, literature and cinema, is primarily inspired by Hussain's seminal work, *Writing Diaspora*. Hussain's text explores cultural production by British South Asian women, including Monica Ali, Meera Syal and Gurinder Chadha, and provides a useful analysis of the contexts and experiences of the British South Asian community, discussing key concerns that emerge within the work of this new generation of women writers and filmmakers. This interdisciplinary approach towards studying the South Asian diaspora, including writers and filmmakers within one framework, has influenced my approach towards understanding South Asian diasporic texts, and my decision to bring literary and filmic representations of home and host land together in one thesis. This is not to suggest that I have adopted the same theoretical and critical approach as employed in her book. In fact, Hussain's approach of analysing literary texts as potential data via which to chart

contemporary stories of diasporic struggles in the UK, and therefore identifying them as representative of the social realities of diasporic experience in the UK, is largely sociological in nature, and therefore fundamentally different to my own approach, which is largely literary and cultural. In this manner, my project positions these texts as literary and cultural products that are able to explore the fluidity and relativity of cultural identity, resulting from interaction between diasporic positionalities and the matrix of peoples and cultures, showcasing the growth and expanse of South-Asian cultural influences globally.

Moreover, Hussain's attempt to understand the cultural production of the South Asian diaspora ignores the value and relevance of the reception of diasporic texts. In fact, most of the critical writing on South Asian diasporic texts (including the works mentioned above) has overlooked or paid less attention to the way diasporic writing has been received globally. I aim to suggest that reception has been largely ignored in favour of the dynamics of representation, and whatever little attention has been paid to reception has been directed towards the positionality of the writer, and reductive arguments over authenticity and exoticism. For instance, in *Indias Abroad*, Chetty and Piciuccio claim that South Asian diasporic writers 'play into the hands of the international reader who looks for the exotic, a kind of tourist/museum culture' (8). Similarly, Lisa Lau explicitly talks about 'the questions of authenticity, the motivation of the author, the question of realism in contemporary diasporic writing', repeatedly stressing these reductive constraints (15). These recent critical studies of diasporic literary and cinematic works have focused on 'authenticity' as a central paradigm through which the representation of native space is analysed against broader issues of native/non-native authorship and intimate exposure to indigenous experiences. These debates around the 'authenticity' of diasporic representations in South Asian diasporic literature and films have further complicated these analyses. There is no denying, however, that all these trajectories of analysis have hugely influenced the way diasporic narratives are analysed and then circulated in international and native markets, but with the current rise in international migration patterns and rising cultural familiarity and exchange, it is imperative to also address diasporic works from a literary vantage point and to look at the reception of these texts thematically and culturally. In so doing, my thesis not only deconstructs the claims of authentic representations that continually build upon the fixed relationship between 'homeland' as an originary place and 'host land' as the place of arrival, but also foregrounds

the fact that transposing 'home' or re-homing within diasporic frameworks is a process of cultural translation and relocation.

My thesis also problematizes and contests the 'cacophony' of this rhetoric of politicized reception, and this insider/outsider binarism, and counters this approach of questioning the legitimacy of diasporic representations based on the position of the writer and his/her proximity to the land that is being represented (Nasta 6).<sup>7</sup> In my thesis, the reception of South Asian diasporic literature and cinema is analysed in terms of popular reviews and feedback, alongside academic scholarship. This involves a comparative analysis with an emphasis on the critical, academic reception of diasporic literature and films, as well as a critical assessment of the popular reception of these diasporic texts. I will be beginning each chapter by foregrounding the popular and academic reception of each of the texts. In this manner, I will be able to assess the wider reception of these diasporic works, in order to foreground the way in which we understand South Asian diasporic identities and contemporary cultural patterns.

### **Structure of this study**

The thesis is divided into eight chapters. It begins with an introduction chapter, that presents an overview of the aims and objectives of my research, outline of the thesis and chapter introductions. This chapter is followed by Chapter Two, Decoding Diaspora that outlines a synchronic study of research done on South Asian diasporic literature and films and elucidates the key theoretical approaches and methodologies used. The thesis then progresses from focussing on diasporic authors and their representations of homeland socio-political events, realities and journeys, towards engaging with host-land dynamics and diasporic identities in a wider frame, highlighting an engagement with the concept of South Asian diasporic identities in a multi-disciplinary way, allowing for a theoretical engagement with anthropological,

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<sup>7</sup>The recent focus on reception theory has invited attention from all disciplines. Eagleton states that 'Reception theory examines the reader's role in literature'. In his book, Eagleton has roughly periodized the history of modern literary theory into three stages: a preoccupation with the author (Romanticism and the nineteenth century); an exclusive concern with the text (New Criticism); and a marked shift of attention to the reader over recent years. The reader has always been the most underprivileged of this trio – strangely, since without him or her there would be no literary texts at all' (42). Eagleton's theory of hermeneutics and reception privileges the position of the reader and critiques the modernist theories of Gadamer that tend to prioritize the author over content, form and reader response: as Eagleton writes, 'Literary texts do not exist on bookshelves... For literature to happen, the reader is quite as vital as the author' (65-66).

psychological, cultural and globalizing critical approaches. With this in mind, the third and fourth chapters focus on representations of the/a homeland, while chapters five, six and seven concentrate on representations of the/a host land, and the final chapter focuses on representing diasporic identities in diasporic cinema.

The structure of each chapter is also marked by an integration of analysis of reception and representation. As pointed out in the earlier part of the introduction chapter, each chapter begins by contextualizing the popular response and critical reception each of the texts has received. By engaging with the reception of the literary and cinematic works, the thesis is able to locate the texts within contemporary debates, and then move forward to an analysis relevant to the thematic and literary concerns of each text.

### **Outline of the Thesis**

Chapter One: Introduction: The Introduction states the objectives of my thesis, the key research questions, and contextualizes my research within the existing scholarship on South Asian diasporic literature and films. It also lists and explains the structure of the study and thesis outline.

Chapter Two: Decoding Diaspora: Chapter two elaborates upon the theoretical methodology used in the course of this study. It begins by outlining the theoretical and historical context of the key terms like ‘diaspora’, ‘South Asia’, ‘migrant identity’ and others. The chapter locates the debates around diaspora and diasporic identity, only to reveal my understanding of these terms and the way they will be used in the thesis.

Chapter Three, ‘Emergency Epics: Representing the Indian Emergency in Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* and Mistry’s *A Fine Balance*’, discusses a significant event in the history of India, the Indian Emergency of 1975, which was a turbulent period in the political life of the subcontinent. The aim is to show how, in addressing a crucial political event and adopting it as a vantage point from which to address India’s postcolonial journey, Rushdie and Mistry decentre national narratives and problematize a unified understanding of homeland. I begin the chapter by contextualizing the popular reception of the novels and critical responses to them, in order to understand their literary and cultural relevance. The chapter shows how both writers choose to understand and analyse this socio-political crisis from the diasporic vantage

point. In representing a crisis-stricken homeland, both writers re-mould the Indian epic frame to accommodate the nuances and volatility of India's growth as a nation, whilst approaching their representation of India from the vantage point of the political crisis of the Indian Emergency. The chapter shows that both these diasporic authors reconstruct the native space using the Indian epic conventions of the *Mahabharata*, in order to highlight the fraught political machinery of post-independence India and the consequent political downfall.

Chapter Four engages with the 'politics of returning home'. In this chapter, I analyse two literary works by Michael Ondaatje, *Running in the Family* and *Anil's Ghost*. This chapter engages with the dialectics of the displaced diasporic writer and his nervous return to his homeland. This chapter brings into focus the conflict between the established binaries of outsider/insider that operate within the diasporic framework. It begins by outlining the key critical debates concerning Ondaatje's representation of diasporic identity in both texts, then moves on to highlight the dearth of critical inquiry about Ondaatje's representation of diasporic return and its effects on his representation of his homeland. I aim to show how the diasporic return destabilizes the sense of self for the returnee. It interrogates the concepts of 'foreigner', 'prodigal' and diasporic identity with regards to the returnee. In the first part of this chapter, I discuss Ondaatje's semi-autobiographical text, *Running in the Family*, focusing on the journey of Ondaatje's return to homeland and the discourse of the filial past, whilst in the next part of the chapter I focus on the experience of the female diasporic returnee in *Anil's Ghost*. This latter section focuses on the politics of a gendered return against the backdrop of postcolonial trauma in a war-stricken nation. I show how through this space of dialogue and interaction between distinct diasporic identities, Ondaatje manages to redefine the concepts of 'return' and 'alienation' within the homeland in ways that build up new ways of understanding the concept of homeland.

The Fifth Chapter focuses on migration and metamorphosis in Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. This chapter focuses on the relationship between the migrant and the host nation by analysing the complexities of Rushdie's representation of migrant interactions in *The Satanic Verses*. One of the aims of this chapter is to divert attention from hegemonic discourses of the reception of *The Satanic Verses* that focus on the East Vs West dynamic, and to look beyond this debate and the furore of 'The Rushdie Affair'. I will then connect the issue of the novel's

reception to the larger part of the essay that analyses the representation of migrants in the text, especially the two protagonists, Saladin Chamcha and Gibreel Farishta, to show how migrant identity is dramatized and expressed through metaphors of metamorphosis. In so doing, the chapter explores how Rushdie represents migrant identities as being in a continuous struggle within the metropolis, and how he is able to articulate a space for the migrant that is continuously constructed by transformations and negotiations.

Chapter Six focuses on performance and generational identity in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*. This chapter furthers the discourse surrounding representations of the migrant relationship with the host land, via an exploration of diverse migrant identities in the novel. The chapter begins by interrogating critical trajectories that have analysed performance and identity in Kureishi's novel, foregrounding the need to address generation and identity within the same framework. The novel addresses inter-generational differences in diasporic positioning and is thus able to chart a graph of a gradually changing migrant identity in the host land. This chapter reveals how diasporic subjects interrogate their own ethnic identities and diasporic position, only to highlight the contemporary politics of generational conflicts and emergent representations of assimilation and integration (or the lack of it) within the host country.

The Seventh Chapter shifts the focus from the Britain of the eighties and nineties to post-9/11 America. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* moves the migrant narrative of assimilation, integration, survival and assertion of differentiated identity, to a politically engaging story of a thwarted American dream and an unpleasant disillusionment with the American ethos in the aftermath of 9/11. I begin the chapter by analysing the term 'fundamentalism' and how it has been interpreted in both popular reviews and critical research. I move on to show how Hamid's novel portrays the journey of a Pakistani migrant's problematic assimilation in America and his narrative of return to his homeland, foregrounding the need to address the immigrant's narrative of return as an equally powerful and contemporary take on migrant journeys in America.

I begin the final chapter with a brief introduction to South Asian diasporic cinema. As in the previous chapters; I highlight the gradual change in diasporic identity across first- and second-

generation migrants, and then develop this concept to foreground the fragile politics of assimilation and the changing frameworks of diasporic identity in contemporary literary discourse. I go on to analyse popular film reviews and critical writing on the two films, in order to analyse their global popularity and the assessment of them (or the lack of it) in terms of gender and generational conflicts. I go on to highlight the fact that the delocalized nature and the multicultural experiences of living and struggling in the host land offer new perspectives on identity issues that highlight the possibility of redefining newer identities in a changing diasporic scenario. This chapter attempts to show how diasporic films represent the homing desire of the diaspora, and the desire to preserve and sustain aspects of homeland cultures through women, within a diasporic household. I will further show how both films project the contemporary, evolving nature of South Asian diasporic homes, thereby underlining the critical role of women in these households and the changing conception of their identity.

The conclusion to the thesis presents an overall analysis of my research, attempting to provide a broad understanding of the growth of South Asian diasporic culture, and the contributions of these literary and cinematic texts to this process. I evaluate my own methodology and analysis in order to highlight the concomitant complexities of this discipline and the areas I have consciously ignored or evaded in the process. I will go on to highlight the relevance of my research to other related fields, such as transnationalism and the virtual growth of diasporic culture, in order to expand the rubric of South Asian diasporic texts. In this way, I am able to productively engage with, explore and extend several of the ideas that are central to contemporary diasporic debates and to South Asian diasporic culture.



## Chapter 2

### Decoding Diaspora: Theoretical Approach and Methodology

Migration and displacement have a long history, much longer than has been documented. The past century, with its large-scale globalisation, has witnessed an unprecedented rise in transnational movements and diasporic displacements. In addressing the concepts of diaspora and diasporic space, it is important to bear in mind the differences and similarities between several other related subjects such as migrants, refugees, exile, nomads and other travelling individuals. Susheila Nasta points out that, in recent literary and cultural research, diaspora has been uncomfortably placed with other concepts such as ‘migration’ and the ‘immigrant’ (7). Although diasporic movements are commonly understood as no different from migratory journeys, migration and diaspora are two distinct historical and sociological concepts. Both terms convey a sense of myriad trans-national and cross-border journeys, but they have different historical and epistemological roots.

The term ‘diaspora’ can be traced ‘back to its Greek root and to its appearance in the Old Testament (Deut. 28:25). As such it references God’s intentions for the people of Israel to be “dispersed” across the world’ (*OED*, 1989). In terms of its origins, the word is ‘related to the Greek gardening tradition (as is hybridity), referring simply to the scattering of seeds and some description of dispersal’ (Kalra, Kaur & Hutnyk 9). Although the term signifies growth and reproductive capacity, the historical phenomena most closely associated with the term are forced dislocation and exile from the homeland. The history of the term ‘diaspora’ can be traced to the historical mass-expulsion of Jews from the kingdom of Judah, which is commonly accepted to have begun in the sixth century B.C. The destruction of the First Temple and the subsequent exile of the Jews marked the first of their diasporic journeys. Robin Cohen suggests that the ‘Jewish archetypal’ should be used as the base for analysis, or as a reference point for analysing different diasporic communities (24-30). Cohen further describes a diaspora as communities of people living together in one country who ‘acknowledge that the old country – a notion often buried deep in language, religion, custom

or folklore – always has some claims on their loyalty and emotions’(9).The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines ‘diaspora’ as ‘the dispersion and subsequent mass expulsion of Jews after the Babylonian and Roman conquest of Palestine’, whereas ‘migration’ is defined as signifying ‘movement of birds from one region or climate to another for breeding and food’, and in general implying ‘a movement from one place, country or locality to another’. Theorists like Cohen have argued ‘that time has to pass’ before a migration becomes a diaspora, suggesting that historical continuity across generations or a sense of a stable permanence distinguish diaspora from international migration (185). This categorisation separates the first-generation migrants who return to their homeland, and counter-diasporic return, which only applies to second- or subsequent-generation migrants. Both terms represent practises of dislocation and movement from one region to another, but the nature of movement in both situations is different<sup>8</sup>. In the context of literary discourse concerning diaspora, for writers and filmmakers, the term ‘migrant’ is mostly associated with an individual journey of displacement from one region/country to another. The individual nature of the migrant movement stands in stark contrast to communal and collective experiences of diasporic dislocation.

I will be referring to the writers and filmmakers in this thesis, therefore, as ‘writers of the South Asian diaspora’ or ‘South Asian diasporic filmmakers’, as I perceive them as part of the community of South Asian diaspora spread across the globe, and I aim to analyse representations of South Asia in their works. In using this terminology, I emphasize certain social, cultural and psychological aspects of international movements which the term diaspora embraces. The writers and filmmakers included in the thesis are located in different continents and are part of the South-Asian diaspora in different locations; therefore their representations of homeland have more diasporic relevance.

The recent upsurge in theorisation of diaspora has also placed it uncomfortably alongside terms such as transnationalism. Critics like Faist and Schiller argue that ‘While the term “diaspora” always refers to a community or group and has been heavily used in history and

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<sup>8</sup> Cohen describes the ‘counter-diasporic turn’ as a process of return that only applies to second-generation migrants or subsequent generations. It is an act of attempting a return to the homeland of their parents (first-generation diasporic subjects). As ‘children of diaspora’, the second-generation migrants combat a more detached, more unresolved form of attachment to the homeland of their parents. Hence, ‘return, either as an individual event or as a sponsored movement, resolves the contradiction between the current situation in the diaspora and its imagined home and past’ (185).

literary studies, concepts such as transnationalism—and transnational spaces, fields and formations—refer to processes that transcend international borders and therefore appear to describe more abstract phenomena. By transnational spaces we mean relatively stable, lasting and dense sets of ties reaching beyond and across borders of sovereign states’ (Faist 2). Hence, transnationalism can be described as a ‘combination of ties or networks that cut across the borders of at least two nation states, interconnecting the migrant’s homeland and country of destination, and the migrant’s families and other ties, thus creating a triangular social structure, which can be expanded through the inclusion of countries of onward migration’ (Faist 13-14). This understanding of the triangular ties between the diasporic subject, host country and homeland is a useful vantage point to synchronically analyse outward and inward migration patterns. In fact, it needs to be pointed out that, besides the obvious layers of difference of multiple ties and non-teleological movements between nation-states that lie between transnationalism and diaspora, with the advent of globalization and the manifold increase in migration patterns, transnationalism is beginning to hold more relevance and significance in the contemporary scenario. My analysis of Ondaatje’s *Anil’s Ghost* and Mira Nair’s *Namesake* could very well be explored through the transnational lens, as their protagonists’ journeys signify a sense of continuous travel between nations (homeland and others); however, keeping in mind the larger structure and concerns of my research, my analysis focuses on exploring representations of homeland and diasporic identity in relation to these texts.

As stated earlier, the historical understanding of diaspora signifies an involuntary dislocation, but as a consequence of colonial expansion and with the advent of globalisation it has attained new dimensions in the cultural, political and literary realms. Early theories of diaspora appeared in Gabriel Sheffer’s book *Modern Diasporas in International Politics*. Sheffer argues that it is a mistake to maintain that the concept of diaspora only applies to Jewish people, because not only have many others existed, both before and after the Jewish example, in the present time the Jewish diaspora has changed its meaning and significance. Cohen, as mentioned above, suggests that the ‘Jewish archetypal’ should only be used as a base for analysis (*Global Diasporas* 24-30). Cohen’s definition of diaspora is far wider, describing diasporas as communities of people living together in one country who ‘acknowledge that the old country – a notion often buried deep in language, religion, custom or folklore – always

has some claims on their loyalty and emotions'(ibid.9).<sup>9</sup> Avtar Brah adds to this argument by stating that 'all diasporas are differentiated, heterogeneous and contested spaces, even as they are implicated in a common "we"' (184). Differences of race, class, religion, generation and language all add to the ever-changing dynamics of diaspora, and diasporic theorisation needs to be mindful of this heterogeneity and difference. Safran defines diasporas as expatriate minority communities that are dispersed from an original 'centre' to at least two 'peripheral' places, and sees the ancestral home as a place of eventual return when the time is right. Hence, the group's consciousness and solidarity are 'importantly defined' by this continuing relationship with the homeland (20).

Safran's analysis of the term foregrounds the fact that diasporic identity is constituted by defining relationships with homeland and self, and also insists on importance of issues of belonging and rooting, at the psychological level of 'belief' and 'restoration of homeland'. Clifford's understanding of 'diaspora', however, deconstructs the equation that Safran built between diaspora and homeland, arguing that the concept of 'eventual return'(Safran's phrase) to a homeland fails to explain the relations of many populations that have been described as diasporic, for instance the African American, Caribbean and Black British communities. Clifford argues that 'the process [of diaspora identification] may not be as much about being African or Chinese [or Indian] as about being American or British, or wherever one has settled, differently' (312). His theorisation is important because it signals an epistemological shift of focus from an 'originary' homeland to the existence of multiple homelands, an idea that also has resonances with Stuart Hall's definition of Black British diasporic identity and his warning against reducing diasporic identity 'to any national or ethnically based tradition'(262).

Amidst the cacophony of categorisations of diaspora and the sudden upsurge of anthropological, sociological and cultural interventions in diasporic studies, Steven Vertovec's categorical analysis of 'general meanings of diaspora' that have emerged in recent

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<sup>9</sup> Cohen who widens the definition of diasporas to include other historical processes, producing a five-fold typology. These types, with typical examples, are victim diasporas (Jews, Armenians, slave diasporas), labour diasporas (Indian indentured labour, Italians and Filipinos), imperial/colonial diasporas (Ancient Greek, British, Portuguese), trade diasporas (Lebanese, Chinese) and cultural diasporas (Caribbean). Since these categories are embedded within a historical framework and historical international journeys of migration, they tend to privilege the history of diaspora over its contemporary usage and relevance. As a result, I have chosen not to dwell on this categorisation.

literature provides a very useful paradigmatic framework for the analysis of diaspora(1-4). Vertovec analyses diaspora within four basic frameworks: ‘diaspora as a social form’, ‘diaspora as a type of consciousness’, ‘diaspora as a mode of cultural production’ and ‘diaspora as a problem’(ibid.).

The first category is the most basic definition of diaspora, deriving from the Jewish diaspora. This category emphasizes that diaspora is marked by an enforced, painful displacement and highlights the experiences of loss, distance and a sense of homelessness. This category highlights the collective trauma of this experience and the longing for ‘homeland’ as a crucial factor in the identity formation of Jewish diasporic subjects.

The second category is ‘diaspora as a type of consciousness’ (18-20). Describing ‘diasporic consciousness’ as ‘an awareness of multi-locality’ and decentred attachments, Vertovec argues that the diasporic identities that are formed by this are ‘grounded both in their society of origin and the host societies’ (ibid.). Vertovec highlights ‘the fluidity of constructed styles and identities’ and unravels the concept of hybrid diasporic identities. He goes on to state that the fluidity of diasporic identities results in ‘hybrid’, ‘syncretic or creolised cultural forms’ (20).

Vertovec’s third category is ‘diaspora as a mode of cultural production’. Yasmin Hussain elaborates upon this by describing the presence of South Asian influences in Britain: ‘In the British South Asian example, this might include Bhangra music or curry houses, neither of which could have come into existence without the interaction of different cultures’ (8-9). The diversity and intermingling of cultures regularly reshapes and reproduces newer forms of cultural values within the diaspora space, thereby unsettling the diasporic zone.

Finally, Vertovec’s final categorisation is ‘diaspora as a problem’. He writes: ‘Transnational communities may be, and often are seen, as problems or threats to state security and to the social order when seen from right-wing perspectives within the host-countries’ (Vertovec, qtd in Hussain 8-10). Hussain further explains this category by stating that ‘the existence of hybrid cultural forms and multiple identities are viewed as diluting or undermining the traditional norms of the indigenous population. This has taken its most recent expression in official concerns about South Asian communities in Britain since the 2001 “riots”’ (Hussain

& Bagguley 8). Vertovec's categorisation and analysis is extremely relevant to the present-day theorisation of diaspora, as he comprehensively addresses all the historical, political, socio-cultural and psychological aspects of diaspora.

Each of the four approaches that Vertovec has elucidated is analytical and comprehensive in its own right, and, as will be seen, the combination of all four categories is extremely relevant to the way diaspora is used in this thesis. Vertovec's categories of diaspora explain it as a geographical and social phenomenon that imbibes all traumas and pains of dislocation, but at the same time herald a process of re-defining the cultural and political identities of diasporized subjects by deconstructing notions of origins, homeland culture and the conditions of settlement in the host land. In addition, Vertovec builds upon diasporic identities in relation to homeland and host land spaces, stating that 'migrants maintain affiliations to families, communities and causes outside the boundaries of the nations-state to which they have migrated' (Vertovec 574). In so doing, Vertovec re-assesses the boundaries of diasporic identities and relations within and outside host countries, and refocuses attention on diaspora as a means of producing new cultural patterns. Simultaneously, by discussing diasporic cultural production and the concomitant problems that it generates, Vertovec stresses the necessity of understanding the ethnic, generational and transnational complexities of diasporic vantage points, and therefore refocuses our attention on recognizing difference and diversity.

Stuart Hall, in his analysis of diasporic identities and the experience of diaspora, reinforces this idea of recognition of diversity in diasporic identities, contending that 'diasporic identities are producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference' (*Questions of Cultural Identity* 235). In his analysis of Caribbean diasporic identities, Hall discusses the representation of cultural identities in the context of diaspora, and analyses diasporic space and identity construction as an intertwined process. He analyses the concepts of diaspora, cultural identity and multi-axial locationality through a detailed, historicised analysis of diasporic movements and the cross-border flow of people, cultures and ideas. He affirms that 'the diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of "identity" which lives with and through, not despite, difference' ("Cultural Identity and Diaspora" 189).

Hall is therefore able to foreground diasporic experience and identity as a site of ambivalence, contestation and syncretic juxtaposition, highlighting how diasporic identity often expresses the experience of migrancy and settlement, of ‘making’ one’s home, more fully than it does a fixation with a ‘homeland’ of diasporic culture. Removing homeland from the centre of diaspora, Hall argues that diaspora does not have to evoke ‘those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland to which they must at all costs return’ (ibid.401). In fact, Hall’s concept of diasporic identity being evoked in relation to a sacred homeland is extensively debated in this thesis, only to further reveal a more fluid and heterogeneous relationship between diasporic subjects and homeland, and to further problematize diasporic identities. In so doing, this thesis dismantles rigidified conceptions of homeland and host nations, and focuses on redefining the concept of home in diasporic narratives.

This redefinition of the concept of ‘home’, which is the main motivating factor of my thesis, is rooted in Brah’s exploration of ‘home’ and the diasporic identities it shapes. Brah has extensively used Hall’s definitions and explanations of diaspora and diasporic identities to argue that diaspora offers a ‘critique of discourses of fixed origins, while taking account of a homing desire’, which is not the same thing as a desire for ‘homeland’:

Where is home? On the one hand, “home” is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of “origin”. (190)

Brah’s conception of home in the diasporic imagination highlights the fact that ‘home’ is not a fixed, certain concept. In fact, the translation of ‘home’ from ‘origins’ to ‘away’ or ‘elsewhere’ disrupts cultural and ethnic moorings, thereby enabling a re-conceptualization of ‘home’. This is to suggest that transposing ‘home’ or re-homing within diasporic frameworks is a process of cultural translation and relocation. Blunt and Dowling also offer a critical geography of home, defining it as simultaneously material and imagined, and therefore constructed both from the actual space of dwelling and nationhood, and from the homelands that are produced by displacement and re-settlement (22-24). These definitions construct home as located between cultures and nations, as belonging to ‘both worlds without being completely of either one or the other’, pointing to the productive ambivalence of diasporic

displacements. In contrast, therefore, to the sense of belonging to ‘one culture, one setting, one home’, diasporic displacements result in a ‘contrapuntal’ inhabiting of cultures and identities, since the experience of home is stretched across plural, ‘simultaneous dimensions’ (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 55).<sup>10</sup>

As a result, the diasporic subject ‘is perpetually required to make herself at home in an interminable discussion between scattered historical inheritance and a heterogeneous present’ (Chambers 6). The migrant realizes that ‘reality is an artefact’ and resists all ‘absolute forms of knowledge’ (Rushdie, qtd in McLeod 215). This view maintains that a migrant who has been exposed to different cultures is only certain of the relativity of things. This statement reinforces Bhabha’s analysis of diasporic identities, in which he states that the culture that the migrant carries with him/her is intrinsically ‘partial’, since it is ‘neither the one nor the other but something else besides’ (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 54). In *The Location of Culture* Bhabha begins by stating that the interstitial space of the margins occupied by diasporic communities is a space that allows the overlap and displacement of areas of difference from which nation and cultural identity are negotiated. As he reiterates elsewhere: ‘it is at the level of the interstices that the inter-subjective and collective experiences of community interest, or cultural value are negotiated’ (172). In understanding and exploring diaspora as a space of shifting identities and indeterminacy of cultures, Bhabha emphasizes the malleability of cultural identities, especially in diasporic and migratory journeys, and emphasizes cultural difference over any form of fusion or collation. Bhabha suggests that the ‘partial’ culture symbolized in the figure of the migrant is an ideological tool with which to invoke the idea of the ambivalence of the concepts of home, nation states and belonging, a point which each of the literary and filmic texts I examine addresses, in their attempts to further problematize essentialist readings of homeland and host land.

The critical debates initiated by Vertovec, Hall, Brah and Bhabha about diaspora as a social and political phenomenon, and the concomitant complexities of understanding movement and fixity vis-à-vis ‘home’, have informed my understanding of ‘home’, and have allowed me to

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<sup>10</sup>Said first uses this notion of contrapuntal hermeneutics with regards to readings of a text. He argues that contrapuntal readings demonstrate a more evolved and ethical way of reading and interpreting texts in the postcolonial world, allowing us to discursively analyze the triadic relationship of knowledge, power and writing (history or literature). In so doing, Said’s aim was to integrate dissenting voices through mutual analysis, contestation and criticism rather than assimilation and segregation (140-60)



engage with differentiated and heterogeneous representations of home through the selected texts and films. For instance, chapters focussing on host-land dynamics, such as my analysis of Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, extensively use Hall and Bhabha's theories on diasporic identity and migration politics, whereas the chapter on Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* adopts a comparative approach between the first generation migrant, Haroon Amir, and his 'half-Indian, half-British boy', Karim, using key theories of 'hybrid positionality and mimicry' (Bhabha 3-4) to emphasize the in-between, liminal spatiality of the diasporic life. The other selected literary and cinematic texts also explore key issues, such as representations of a political crisis within the homeland or the host nation, the dynamics of journeys away from or towards the homeland, the complexity of diasporic assimilation and integration in the host nation, and the concomitant aspects of changing diasporic and national identities, by using these aforementioned theories in different and divergent ways. In this manner, these texts not only reconceptualize the category of home and deconstruct the unitary frameworks that confine its cultural and political relevance in diasporic writings; they also enable the development of new ways of thinking beyond the confines of the nation state.

This is not to suggest that all chapters of the thesis use these theorists in a comparable or homogenised manner. Chapters on Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* or Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* or the chapter on films extensively use Bhabha, Hall and Brah, as they focus on reassessing diasporic identities in host nations and are, therefore, able to negotiate with representations of diasporic experiences and realities post-migration. On the other hand, the first few chapters, which concentrate on representations of homeland, tend to dwell on conceptualizing and understanding the socio-political realities of the concept of homeland through the diasporic lens. For instance, the first two chapters discuss the postcolonial realities of India and Sri Lanka as represented and narrated from the diasporic vantage point; both chapters extensively use Rushdie's non-fictional work *Imaginary Homelands* in problematizing narrativizations of postcolonial histories and diasporic journeys. Rushdie's seminal collection of critical essays primarily discusses the diasporic positionality of the writers, the push and pull of diasporic journeys, and the complexities of assimilation, largely building upon debates initiated by Hall and Bhabha. Therefore, although the theories of diasporic identity, hybridity and liminality discussed by Hall and Bhabha are not explicitly applied in these first few chapters, they are implicitly explored and analysed.

Lastly, it needs to be stated that the concept of ‘South Asia’ as a geographical, cultural and political entity is largely provincial in its roots and origins, but has gradually developed to represent the countries India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka in one unified category. Nasta points out that the label ‘South Asia’ was:

introduced in Britain in 1970s[sic] as another ethnic label to divide and rule, yet [was] another physical signifier of racial difference which developed a political purchase...[O]ften used in government censuses as a means of distinguishing Britain’s Black and Asian populations, it inevitably flattens a diverse range of backgrounds which stems from complex religious, linguistic and regional histories. (6)

Aware of the socio-political relevance of this term, I use the labels ‘South Asia’ or ‘South Asians’ out of necessity, but with a degree of caution. First, for the lack of better terminology, I use the term ‘South Asia’ for authors and filmmakers from India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, instead of pronouncing each writer/filmmaker’s individual national affiliations. Moreover, the term South Asia provides a panoptic overview of this region and addresses the concerns of this particular region in a wider, global context. Secondly, since my thesis discusses diaspora as a process of collective displacement, the term ‘South Asian diaspora’ is able to convey the co-existence and collective spirit of the category<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> In terms of quantitative analysis, it can be pointed out that ‘South Asian diasporas encompass people (and their ancestry) who have emigrated from South Asia. There are approximately 20 million people in the Indian diaspora alone’ (Sengupta, qtd in Desai 5). Moreover, Desai points out that South Asian migration is not limited to the West; in fact many South Asians have migrated to ‘the Middle East, like the guest workers, distant like the indentured servants who settled in the Caribbean during colonialism’ (ibid).

### Chapter 3

#### **The Emergency Epics: Representing the Indian Emergency in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) and Mistry's *A Fine Balance* (1995)**

It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge – which gives rise to profound uncertainties – that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, no actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind (Rushdie 8)

Rushdie reveals here how the task of narrating the nation or re-presenting the homeland is significantly influenced by the instability of home as a signifier within the dynamics of diasporic positioning. The notions of belonging and unbelonging, the dynamics of a distanced present and native past problematize any simplified representation of the homeland within diasporic narratives. Within this context, a crisis-stricken homeland becomes a volatile space: both in terms of aggression, violence and abuse, and in terms of its representation. In this chapter, I attempt to show how two diasporic writers, Salman Rushdie and Rohinton Mistry, engage with a crisis-stricken homeland by charting the history of a newly-independent India, attending to the crisis of the Indian Emergency of 1975-77.

The Indian Emergency was a political and social crisis in the postcolonial history of India that was described by democratic loyalists within India and abroad as deeply traumatic and indeed the ‘most traumatic period of post-independence Indian history’ (Mathur 1)<sup>12</sup>. Critics like Ashis Nandy highlight the fact that the Emergency period was synonymous with the

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<sup>12</sup> The Indian Emergency was brought into force on 25 June 1975 and lifted on 21 March 1977. This twenty-one-month period was a dark, unsettling time for the subcontinent. This is when President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, upon advice given by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, declared a state of emergency under article 352 of the Indian constitution, bestowing on her the power to rule by decree, suspending elections and civil liberties. The Emergency was imposed because Indira Gandhi was charged for election malpractices in the Allahabad High court, which led to nationwide agitations against her. It is alleged that in order to preserve her political supremacy and power, Gandhi imposed the Emergency in 1975

suspension of civil rights and the death of democracy. Further he has questioned the ways in which the Emergency is remembered in India (ibid.). Like Nandy, Rushdie has also wondered how an event of such magnitude and violence was subsequently forgotten and dismissed from public memory in the election of 1980, when Indira Gandhi returned to power after an astounding victory. ‘The Emergency’, he observed, ‘represented the triumph of cynicism in Indian public life, and it would be difficult to say that the triumph has since been reversed...She [Indira Gandhi] told the world the horror stories about the Emergency were all fiction; and the world allowed her to get away with it’(Rushdie 52).<sup>13</sup>

The National Emergency was not only a powerful, political intervention; theorists like Pranav Jani have argued that the Emergency was a watershed in terms of diasporic writings as well.<sup>14</sup> Jani has categorized the diasporic novels that preceded the Emergency as indulging in ‘namak-halal cosmopolitanism – a cosmopolitanism that remained true to its salt’ (7); while the novels that came after the Emergency are seen as consciously critiquing the process of decolonization of India. Jani confidently asserts that this ‘shift occurs in the aftermath of the Indian Emergency’ (ibid.). These texts, that came after the Emergency, are integral to our understanding of the Indian Emergency and its ramifications, as they attempt to articulate a discursive space for the underrepresented aspects of the horrors of the Emergency as ‘enormous effort had gone into wiping out the Emergency as a live memory’ (Nandy qtd. in Tarlo, 21). Moreover, these texts tend to compensate for the burden of censorship that was imposed on press and literary writing during the days of the Emergency. Indeed, Tarlo suggests that these texts are a part of the ‘new wave of literature... [that is] remembering the Emergency in such a way that it cannot and will not be forgotten’ (31). In *Midnight’s Children* and *A Fine Balance*, the Emergency becomes the vantage point from which the entirety of post-independence Indian political and social framework is analyzed. As a result, these texts

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<sup>13</sup>Rushdie re-emphasizes these sentiments in an interview with John Haffenden, in which he admits that: ‘The book (*Midnight’s Children*) was conceived and begun during the Emergency, and I was very angry about that. The stain of it is on the book’ (54).

<sup>14</sup>Emma Tarlo in her brilliant historical analysis of the Indian Emergency, *Unsettling Memories: Narratives of the Emergency in Delhi*, highlights that there was upsurge of nationalist writing during and after the Emergency. Additionally, numerous pamphlets, articles, magazines and short books were published under Indira Gandhi’s regime to promote a non-threatening image of Emergency politics: ‘Government pamphlets like *Timely Steps* and *Preserving our Democratic Structures* spread the word. Meanwhile books and seminar proceedings lent the weight of academic approval with titles like: *Freedom is not Free*(1975), *Era of discipline* (1976), *Thank you, Mrs Gandhi*(1977)’. Such works attempted to consolidate Gandhi’s image as protector of democracy, whereas the few anti-establishment writings like B.M. Sinha’s *Operation Emergency* exposed the farce of the Emergency by revealing the horrors of those dark days(29-32).

have become a part of what Tarlo calls a 'post-Emergency counter narrative enthused with outrage and the desire to expose' (30).

In this chapter, I aim to show that, since the locus of attention is the political crisis of the Emergency, these diasporic writers are compelled to represent India's post-independence journey by analyzing the fragmentation of a nascent state. To do so, both authors use the Indian epic genre to reconstruct the story of India's nationhood. I will show how, both Rushdie and Mistry, re-mould the Indian epic frame to accommodate the nuances and volatility of India's growth as a nation from the vantage point of the Indian Emergency. Although both the texts differ in their literary styles and selection of genres, they are connected to each other in their desire to re-construct mutated or hybrid spaces in order to create imagined homelands and reinvent home space. In the process, these texts produce alternative identities of the homeland; discursively articulating the changing faces of homeland postcolonial by understanding historical events like The Indian Emergency (1975-77). I conclude by showing that by not providing any political resolution or any closure within the text, both the writers reinforce the fact that the socio-political atmosphere of India resists any form of breakthrough political intervention.

The pairing of Mistry and Rushdie is fruitful because of their comparable biographical histories and their similar textual concerns. Mistry and Rushdie were born in Bombay within five years of each other, in 1952 and 1947 respectively, and both lived within minority communities within the city before emigrating to the West. Mistry grew up within Bombay's Parsi community, moving to Canada in 1975; Rushdie was born into the city's Muslim community, leaving at the age of thirteen to attend Rugby School in England, where he settled until immigrating to the United States in 2000. Such biographical similarities tend to elide the differences in their diasporic experiences and in their changing relationships with their homeland after their migration. It will therefore be important to remember, in the course of this chapter that while Mistry and Rushdie both occupy migrant positions beyond India's borders, their experiences of migrancy and their relationships with India converge and diverge in significant ways. I would also like to state that although this chapter analyzes two texts, due to the wealth of critical research available on *Midnight's Children* and Rushdie's position as a prominent postcolonial diasporic writer, my research deals more with Rushdie's novel than

with Mistry's. This is primarily because of the ubiquity of research on Rushdie's work, and also his own commentary on India and postcolonial culture in the form of non-fiction works such as *Imaginary Homelands* (1991).

### **Receiving and Representing the Emergency and Epic in *Midnight's Children***

*Midnight's Children* was awarded the Booker prize in 1981. It was also subsequently awarded the Best of the Booker prize twice, in 1993 and 2008. Despite and partly because of the volatility of its content and emphatic political undertones, Rushdie's novel was a huge success. Shyamala Narayan states that publishers claim 'the novel has sold 4,000 copies in hardcover, and 45,000 in paperback (in addition to the pirated editions); these sales figures were unprecedented for an Indian-English novelist' (qtd. in Rege 156). The widespread popularity of the novel symbolized its connection with global audiences.

In terms of critical appreciation, *Midnight's Children* has been variously read and analyzed as an allegory of India's national independence (Kortennar 5-9), 'as a commentary on Indian political history, starting the with Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919 and focusing on such major events as the creation of Pakistan(1947), the Bangladesh war(1965)...and the Indira Gandhi Emergency'(Fletcher 10), as a postmodern novel(Hutcheon, 1988; Huggan, 2001) and as 'a critique of postcolonial modernity in South Asia'(Morton 15). Other critics, such as Booker, Brennan and Santos, have also formulated interesting analyses based on the historical engagement of Rushdie's text, and have connected representations of Indian political history in temporal and historical simultaneity with the life of the narrator, Saleem Sinai<sup>15</sup>. Amidst the ubiquity of critical research on *Midnight's Children*, I am interested in exploring how critics have read and understood the use of epic models in the context of this form of historical engagement with the Indian past in the novel, and in comparing and contrasting this aspect of the novel's global critical reception.

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<sup>15</sup> Keith Booker connects the historical representation of Indian political history to Rushdie's urge to 'restore the past'( 980) and hence argues that the text 'is so closely tied to history, Rushdie suggests that the authority of all our representations of the past may be somewhat questionable'(ibid.: 983), while Santos suggests that Rushdie uses this self-conscious 'narcissistic narrative in undermining the concept of historical truth as recorded fact', thereby opening up new ways of exploring and representing history. Due to the limited purview of this chapter and its focus on the Emergency and epic, a wealth of criticism on Rushdie's use of history and political representation needs to be side-lined, yet it must be stated that these critical inputs are highly valuable in assessing Rushdie's position within global academia and the relevance of his work in the present times

Amidst the limited readings of the Indian epic format and its influence on Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, three critical categorizations can be broadly identified: 'digressive Indian epic'(Miller 27), 'postmodern epic'(Brennan 100) and 'anti-epic'(Reder 230-31).David Lipscomb and Miller have emphasized that *Midnight's Children* 'draws frequently on Indian roots' (Lipscomb 165) and is therefore modelled on 'the seemingly endless and digressive Indian epics [such as] the *Mahabharata*... [and] the interminable tales'(Miller 27).Lipscomb and Miller have stressed the fact that the regenerative tradition and oral architecture of the Indian epic model has clearly influenced Rushdie's writing. In this way, they establish a link between the formal structure of Rushdie's text and the formal narrative strategies of the *Mahabharata*. However, this connection is primarily made at the level of formal technique, and they do not develop the connection further in order to understand historical content and national narrativizations.

Timothy Brennan further explores Rushdie's reliance on Indian epic frameworks of language, form and experience, in order to argue that Rushdie 'relies for his authenticity on his national origins, but regards those origins with a detached, cynical eye' (Brennan qtd. in Kortennar 4); Brennan feels that Rushdie's text produces only 'protests, not affirmations' (Brennan 100). As a result, Brennan states that Rushdie conceives of nation and nationalism negatively. Brennan, therefore, reads *Midnight's Children* as a 'comic 'postmodern epic' burdened by its pessimism' (ibid.). Brennan's argument highlights how the deconstruction of the epic model in the novel suggests a negative portrayal of the Indian postcolonial situation. Timothy Brennan in his first and perhaps best book-length study of Rushdie's work argues that Rushdie demonstrates a 'cosmopolitan sensibility' that acknowledges on the theoretical level the importance of nationalist movements to decolonization struggles (Brennan 166).Hence, Brennan is quick to add that Rushdie occupies a position of 'third world cosmopolitanism' (99); a position that enables him to engage with South Asian political and cultural realities despite being physically and culturally detached from them. This technique simultaneously allows him to adopt a 'cynical eye' (ibid.) towards South Asia despite his familiarity with third world problems. Hence, according to Brennan, Rushdie's text subverts the heroism and epic grandness of the newly independent nation in order to reveal the facade of false nationalism in postcolonial India. Micheal Reder goes so far as to argue that the novel, in fact, should be read and explored as an 'anti-epic', as the 'absence of Mahatma Gandhi' (Reader,

qtd. in John Su 4) from the text underlines the inherent, almost deliberate, tone of cynicism that Rushdie adopts. It suggests a deliberate move by Rushdie to circumscribe the epic grandness of purpose and to underplay the triumphant aspects of Indian independence within his novel.<sup>16</sup>

In an overall assessment of *Midnight's Children* in relation to the epic model, Kumkum Sangari suggests that Rushdie's use of 'an open epic structure... privileges faulty sights, peripheral or incomplete vision' (178), a vision that is not totalizing and not completely trustworthy: symptomatic of the turbulent times that Rushdie attempts to portray. She further states that Rushdie's attempt at parodying epic in the novel is a rather 'audacious move; one that signifies a step towards more incisive descriptions of interpenetrative cultural formations' (180), but it cannot be, or rather should not be, understood as the primary mode of engagement with Indian history.

Uma Parmeswaran also points out that Rushdie has a tendency to 'spooof' Indian mythologies and traditional history and suggests alternatives to the hegemonic historicizing of nationhood, as the text foregrounds the fact that the 'the autobiography of a common man contains and participates in the making of history' (41). Parmeswaran's use of the term 'spooof' suggests that Rushdie's technique of systematically re-historicizing the Emergency is done with an underlying tone of comicality in relation to the epic tradition. She further suggests that it is this ironic play with epic tradition that allows the narrative to accommodate the story of the common man. In so doing, Parmeswaran highlights the fact that this manner of representing national history is certainly novel and engaging, yet she too, like Sangari, argues that this way of working signifies a casual irreverence for the Indian epic model; a characteristic feature of Rushdie's writing that dismantles a positive celebration of the national epic form and the history of Indian independence.

These critics foreground Rushdie's familiarity with and knowledge of Indian epics to suggest that his ability to dismantle the epic form suggests his desire to show the political turmoil of

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<sup>16</sup>Critics like Keith Booker reiterate a similar sentiment as they argue that the failure of the text lies in Rushdie's inability to provide a heroic, almost mythical canvas to the representation of postcolonial life in India, whereas, Dubravka Juraga suggests that the novel should not be read in terms of a national epic, but rather that it most truly embodies the spirit of a postmodern novel (167-89)



the Indian Emergency and the general political climate in a negative light. Criticism, therefore, has definitely managed to assess the linguistic and narratorial strategies of Rushdie's novel in view of the epic genre in general, but little attention has been paid to how Rushdie uses the epic model to engage with his diasporic positioning or the homeland crisis, in order to present a wider framework for dealing with postcolonial political journey of India. In the next section of this chapter, I attempt to shift analysis towards Rushdie's representation of the socio-political crisis of the Indian Emergency 1975-77 as depicted through his literary re-working of the Indian epic model of the *Mahabharata*.

Given the literary framework of epic format in Rushdie and Mistry's text, it is crucial to understand the relevance of the epic model to diasporic writing in general, and particularly with reference to *Midnight's Children* and *A Fine Balance*<sup>17</sup>. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, articulated the importance of Indian epics to Indian values and the Indian ethos, in his seminal text *The Discovery of India*:

‘Everywhere I found a cultural background which had exerted a powerful influence on their [whose? The peoples?] lives. This background was a mixture of popular philosophy, tradition, history, myth, and legend, and it was not possible to draw a line between any of these. Even the entirely uneducated and illiterate shared this background. The old epics of India, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* and other books, in popular translations and paraphrases, were widely known among the masses, and every incident and story and moral in them was engraved on the popular mind and gave a richness and content to it. Illiterate villagers would know hundreds of verses by heart and their conversation would be full of references to them or to some story with a moral, enshrined in some old classic[.]’ (Nehru 67)

The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are considered India's ‘great stories’, and these ancient epics retain their status as culturally foundational texts which, apart from philosophical/spiritual values, and educational and religious instruction, contain and perpetuate ideas and ideals of ethical obligation (*dharma*), along with social norms and

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<sup>17</sup> An Epic is loosely defined as the ‘story of the nation writ large through the deeds of a single individual whose remarkable deeds mobilize the nation and whose leadership in a mythological age provides a metaphor for a modern nation's coming of age’ (Berger, Eriksonas 5). ‘In epics, the nation usually appears as unstable and in fragments’, but with the progress of time the collective identity of community is stabilized and re-consolidated and the nation re-affirms its place’ (Ibid.)

gender roles. Critics like Richman and Pollock have argued that both these epics have greatly impacted the Indian and the South Asian diasporic imagination because the texts are oral, regenerative and living tales. In fact, they point out that diasporic writers often employ linguistic forms of loss or dislocation, such as fragments or recollections of ancestral languages and epics, cross-lingual idioms, and mixed codes, to create new definitions of community and community memory in diaspora (5-8) This can be attributed to the fact that the existence of a diaspora is so intimately connected to cultural memory; diasporic writing articulates a real or imagined past of a community in all its symbolic transformations. Therefore, since epics embody a native cultural symbolism, they are used as key cultural texts to discursively engage with the homeland and native socio-cultural aspects.

By using great Indian epics such as the *Ramayana* or *Mahabharata*, a writer is able to bring in ancient Indian history, mythology and culture to the diasporic narrative space. Diasporic writers like Rushdie, Naipaul and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni have repeatedly stressed how the diasporic imagination and the retelling of homeland narratives have been deeply influenced by these epics.<sup>18</sup> Critics like Meenakshi Mukherjee have elaborated upon the relevance of the Indian epic format of the *Mahabharata* in the context of the modern diasporic novel. Mukherjee points out that ‘the *Mahabharata* presents no ideals. It is a record of a human struggle where the participants are human in their weakness, deceit and petty jealousies. No character in it is without a flaw, no character is totally villainous. It is more ruthlessly faithful to life than the *Ramayana*’ (165). Moreover, the *Mahabharata* is able to capture ‘evil in its various forms – adultery, deception, rape, treachery, pride, lust’ (ibid.166). War and struggle in the *Mahabharata* are presented as a personal struggle that annihilates the public semblance of political stability; a war that brings ‘desolation to the victor and the vanquished alike’ (ibid.). Mukherjee also states that all the characteristic features of this epic signify an immediate association with the modern-day novel: ‘certain concerns of the modern Indian novel – for example, conflict between an individual’s social function and personal predilection, questioning of caste as maker, transgressive sexuality, corruption in politics – all seem to be prefigured’ in the *Mahabharata* (603). The epic genre of *Mahabharata*, therefore,

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<sup>18</sup>Divakaruni retells the epic narration of *The Mahabharata* from the point of view of one of its heroines, Draupadi, thus reclaiming female agency in the famous tale of war between two families, hyper-masculine heroes and their devoted wives. The text highlights a crucial relation established between womanhood and vengeance. Moreover, it displays the struggle for identity in a mythological context, which is distinctly Indian, yet which transcends cultural borders, all the while showing the illusionary nature of those imposed by history and gender. See *The Palace of Illusions* (2008).

arguably provides the most fertile ground for a narration of India's post-independence journey.

The remainder of this chapter will consider *Midnight's Children* in relation to the *Mahabharata*. I begin by analyzing the use of epic conventions in Rushdie's text and its correspondences with the *Mahabharata*, in terms of narrative techniques and epic modalities. I will then go on to show that, despite this overt replication of the conventions of the *Mahabharata*, Rushdie deconstructs these epic conventions to show that the postcolonial political frameworks of India resist any form of epic grandness or narration. I will analyze the similarities between the text and the epic by focusing on three aspects of the narrative: first, I will show that *Midnight's Children* replicates the epic convention of projecting a connection between the hero and the nation that foregrounds his lineage; secondly, I will discuss how, through the character of Padma, Rushdie exploits the *Mahabharata*'s technique of addressing its audience or listener; and thirdly I will show that the fusion of myth and history in the novel reflects the *Mahabharata*'s method of conflating the fantastical with the ordinary.

In *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie acknowledges the influence of the *Mahabharata* in conceptualizing *Midnight's Children* and the journey of its protagonist, Saleem. Rushdie models Saleem on the figure of Lord Ganesha, who wrote down the *Mahabharata* from the dictation of the sage Vyasa. Like the scribe of the *Mahabharata*, Saleem, too, is portrayed as a historian of sorts (Rushdie 20). At the very outset, Rushdie positions the narrative hero as the centre of the action: 'To understand me', says Saleem, 'you'll have to swallow a world' (Rushdie 4). Rushdie compels the reader to look at Saleem as an all-encompassing symbol of post-independence India, 'handcuffed to history' (ibid. 11) in such a way that his life will be 'a mirror to the nation' (ibid. 122). The symbolic function of the hero, who is also the narrator of the tale, is critically laid out from the very beginning. Like the *Mahabharata* convention of venerating the national hero and the clan – 'pandavas, with godlike strength as well as power of suffering... Arjuna, the great and noble warrior' (Rajagopalachari 6-7)<sup>19</sup> – Saleem elevates himself, stating for example: 'soothsayers had prophesied me, newspapers celebrated my arrival, and politicians ratified my authenticity' (Rushdie 3). By according this national hero a

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<sup>19</sup>The Indian epic *Mahabharata* has had many interpretations and revisions. In the course of this chapter, I refer to C. Rajagopalachari's abridged English retelling. This version was first published in 1958 and is widely regarded as the most popular modern retelling of the epic.

semi-mythical status, Rushdie exploits the epic convention that demands that the narrative mythologize the presence of the national hero and establish an inextricable link between him and the nation: 'I [Saleem] had been mysteriously handcuffed to history, my destinies indissolubly chained to those of my country' (ibid.). Furthermore, Saleem decides to narrate the story of his clan, from his grandfather's day in pre-partition times, up to his own turbulent life in the post-Emergency phase of India, echoing the way the *Mahabharata* narrates the lives and histories of the entire Bharata clan: 'After the death of King Santanu, Chitrangda became the king of Hastinapur and he was succeeded by Vichitraviraya. The latter had two sons, Dhritrashtra and Pandu...Pandu had five sons who became well known as Pandavas...the Pandavas ruled the kingdom for thirty-six years. Afterwards, they transferred the crown to their grandson, Parikshit' (Rajagopalachari 4-6).

Rushdie uses a similar narrative framework, concentrating on the long, illustrious lineage of the epic hero, from Aadam Aziz, the founding patriarch, to Saleem, the hero and narrator, as bases for the personal and public narratives of national history. The text begins with the story of Aadam Aziz on a 'Kashmir morning in the early spring of 1915' (Rushdie 4) and ends sixty years later, after the beginning of the Indian Emergency in 1975. Saleem says that 'Even a baby is faced with the problem of defining itself; and I'm bound to say that my early popularity had its problematic aspects because I was bombarded with a confusing multiplicity of views on the subject' (ibid.147).<sup>20</sup> This 'confusing multiplicity of views' denotes Rushdie's way of negotiating with the multiple identities of the diasporic writer and the lack of tangible roots. Mathur furthers this connection and states that Rushdie's obsession with the filial framework and his desire to interweave this filial narrative with the nation re-echoes his desire 'to recreate his homeland, mixing memory and desire, fact and fantasy, reality and vision, time and timelessness' (170). Rushdie himself stated in an interview that 'everything has had to do with politics and with the relationship of the individual and history', and therefore 'the individual component of society' is always connected 'with the collective stream of history' (qtd. in Berger 210).

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<sup>20</sup>Even in the *Mahabharata*, Karana, the illegitimate brother of Arjuna, struggles with anxiety of being the illegitimate son of Kunti. Other characters like Bhishma and Pandu struggle to understand their own position with regards to the larger frameworks of kingship and dharma, whereas Draupadi is constantly battling her position as a wife to all the Pandava brothers.

Saleem makes his family the subject of national history, constructing a historical dialogue between his clan and the nation: 'it is my firm conviction that the hidden purpose of the Indo-Pakistani war of 1965 was nothing more nor less than the elimination of my benighted family from the face of this Earth' (Rushdie 469). This narcissistic narration and the inextricable connections made between the hero and the nation replicates the convention in the *Mahabharata* of venerating the hero and his clan. Rushdie also replicates the plot of a fratricidal feud by presenting Saleem and Shiva in a tumultuous, aggressive relationship, always in opposition to each other. In the *Mahabharata* Arjuna, the virtuous Pandava warrior is presented as a rival to his maternal cousins and his long-estranged illegitimate brother Karana. *Midnight's Children* also projects Shiva, like the character of Karana, as the 'warlord of tyranny' and 'birthright-denying war hero' (ibid.601-2), who eventually ends up killing or harming his own family and people.

The second crucial aspect is the character of Padma, the audience/listener to Saleem's narration, which draws upon the convention of narration in the *Mahabharata*. The preface to the *Mahabharata* mentions that 'Janamjeya, the son of great king Parikshit, conducted a sacrifice in the course of which Vaisampayna narrated the story at the request of the former. Afterwards, this story, as told by Vaisampayna was recited by Suta in the forest of Naimisa in the assembly of sages...' (Rajagopalachari 5). The figure of the listener or audience introduces the dynamics of dialogue, intervention and interpretation. Moreover, Padma often disrupts the narrative flow and facilitates the back and forth movement in time and place, replicating the narrative structure of the *Mahabharata* that also constantly shifts between the narrative, the narrator and the audience. 'I have been interrupted by Padma, who brought me my dinner and then withheld it, blackmailing me; "so if you're going to spend all your time wrecking your eyes with that scribbling, at least you must read it to me" (Rushdie 35). Saleem mythologizes the character of Padma: 'Padma, the lotus catlyx, which grew out of Vishnu's navel, and from which Brahma himself was born; Padma the source, the mother of Time!' (ibid.270). As a result of this mythical connection, Saleem also begins to identify himself as 'something more than a mortal-such as-yes, why not-mammoth-trunked Ganesh-nosed as I am-perhaps, the

elephant' (ibid.).<sup>21</sup> This form of quasi-mythical comparisons reinforces the influence of *Mahabharata* on the narration in particular and the novel in general.

The epic genre by itself demands the conflation of historical narration and fantastical elements; the merging of history and myth, and oral traditions and the written word. Saleem emphasizes that 'sometimes legends make reality, and become more useful than facts' (ibid.: 57) and 'reality can have metaphorical content; that doesn't make it less real' (ibid. 278). The narrative exploits the fusion of factual narration and the oral, folkloric traditions of stories associated with the hero's clan. In fact, Rushdie's use of magical realism can be understood in the context of the mythical texture of the Indian *Mahabharata* tradition, largely reflecting the very Indian tendency to dwell on exaggerated/mythical aspects of culture and also the epic pre-requisite of merging the real with the mystical: to exaggerate the fantastical and trivialize the real<sup>22</sup>. Rushdie himself states in *Imaginary Homelands* that one needs a form in which 'the miraculous and the mundane...co-exist. Most westerners find the reliance on fantasy is exceptional. For me it seems to be normative' (Rushdie 376). It can also be argued that this blend of epic and historical narration in *Midnight's Children* can also be attributed to the diasporic writer's suspicion of the grand narratives and absolute truths of national and historical stories that is evident in Saleem's world of 'chutnification of history' and 'inevitable distortions' (Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* 442-44)<sup>23</sup>. Rushdie, in his essay, also confirms that 'history is always ambiguous. Facts are hard to establish, and capable of being given many meanings' (*Imaginary Homelands* 25), thereby deconstructing the totalized image of Indian history.

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<sup>21</sup>Both these references also need to be understood through Rushdie's subtle use of irony. The play of irony in both these quotations highlights a humorous and ironical mythologizing of the characters of Padma and Saleem. Both these pivotal characters are shown as prone to elevating themselves and each other to quasi-mythical positions, a characteristic that the narrative undercuts with a tone of cynicism and disbelief.

<sup>22</sup> The term 'Magic Realism' was first coined in 1925 by Franz Roh, a German art critic, to support a new direction in European painting, a return to Realism after the abstraction of Expressionism's. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines magic realism as, 'a literary genre or style associated especially with Latin America that incorporates fantastic or mythical elements into otherwise realistic fiction – called also *magical realism*' ('magic realism'). It is a narrative technique that blurs the distinction between fantasy and reality. Magic realism is characterized by an equal acceptance of the ordinary and the extraordinary. Many critics consider Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* to be a classic example of the use of magic realism, as it is a political allegory that deals with events in India, before and after independence, partition and the Emergency, through a mix of mundane and magical narratives.

<sup>23</sup>Many critics have connected Hutcheon's label of historiographic metafiction to Rushdie's representation of history by foregrounding the text's ability to question the monology and objectivity of conventional historical representation. Hutcheon explains that historiographic metafiction as a technique that puts into question the grounding of historical information within exaggerated or fantastical self-referential narratives/texts(85-92). Many critics, such as Santos and Chakrabarty have looked at Rushdie's representation of Indian history through this paradigm.

Despite this dependence on the *Mahabharata* tradition, Rushdie is able to manipulate it to circumscribe the celebratory impulse of the epic format in two distinct ways. First, Rushdie disorients the epic narration by introducing the figure of an unreliable narrator. In *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie discusses the writing of *Midnight's Children* and the fact that he 'went to some trouble to get things wrong' (23). The narrator is presented as unreliable, often subjecting the narrative to memory, gossip and popular tales from the subcontinent. Saleem also acknowledges that 'most of what matters in our lives takes place in our absence, but I seem to have found from somewhere the trick of filling in the gaps in my knowledge' (Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* 17). This is reflective of Rushdie's perspective on the diasporic writer's outsider positioning. He states, as quoted at the opening to this chapter:

'exiles or emigrants or expatriates are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge – which gives rise to profound uncertainties – that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind' (15)

Rushdie, therefore, manages to subvert the epic tradition, personalizing the historical making of the postcolonial Indian state. Unlike the narrative of the *Mahabharata*, in which the dominant history of the Bharata clan is the dominant narrative, and the personal is marginalized for the official, public meta-narrative, *Midnight's Children* is able to completely deconstruct this convention. Rushdie asserts the limited purview of memory and the reconstruction of history through it. Yet at the same time he privileges personalized memory and the re-articulation of history through it. Micheal Reder observes that 'When Rushdie speaks of memory, he is not speaking of cultural memory or national consciousness but of individual memory...history in *Midnight's Children* is seen through the eyes of an individual; it is not the dominant, official "history", but a history that is personalized and therefore given life, significance and meaning'(226).By approaching events and history through personal memory, Saleem is able to distance the narration from official history and thus disorient the epic convention of privileging dominant, national histories. For instance, Saleem argues: 'the

story I am going to tell...is as likely to be true as anything; as anything, that is to say, except what we are officially told' (Rushdie 425); and further legitimizes the need for the creation of personal history by stating that 'in a country where the truth is what it is instructed to be, reality quite literally ceases to exist, so that everything becomes possible except what we are told is the case' (ibid.414). Rushdie de- and reconstructs the epic narratorial journey, by privileging the personal history over the dominant version of it. As he writes in *Imaginary Homelands*:

'Reality is a question of perspective; the further you get from the past, the more concrete and plausible it seems...re-reading my work, I have discovered an error in chronology. The assassination of Mahatma Gandhi occurs, in these pages, on the wrong date. But I cannot say, now, what the actual sequence of events might have been; in my India, Gandhi will continue to die at the wrong time'. (Rushdie 230)

I would like to highlight the fact that the self-consciously unreliable narrator works specifically to deconstruct his role as the 'national hero', a title he wrongly assumes for himself. The narrator very consciously moves between his role of narrating the Sinai family history in tandem with Indian national history, and being the subject of narration. Saleem's greatest gift is a telepathy that lets him listen to the 'inner monologues of all the so-called teeming millions' (Rushdie 172). Rushdie, thus, deconstructs the narrator's critical distance from the narration. Eventually Saleem is led to believe that he embodies a creative force: 'I had entered into the illusion of an artist and thought that the multitudinous realities as the raw unshaped material of my gift' (ibid.). This multiplicity of identities and Saleem's thwarted ambitions disorient the epic journey.

The second way in which Rushdie disturbs the coherence of epic narration is via the enormous diversity of the midnight's children; their telepathic connection with Saleem, and their turbulent relationship with the nation at large. Saleem admits that 'there are so many stories to tell, too many, such an excess of intertwined lives events miracles places rumours, so dense a commingling of the improbable and the mundane. I have been the swallower of lives...consumed multitudes are jostling and shoving inside me' (ibid.4). He does not let the reader forget that he embodies 'the polyglot frenzy...the flooding multitudes' (ibid. 166-172). Michael Gorra points out that 'Saleem stands himself as the site of struggle' (112). 'Please



believe that I am falling apart' Saleem says; 'I ask you only to accept that I shall eventually crumble into (approximately) six hundred and thirty million particles of anonymous and necessarily oblivious dust' (Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* 43).

This desire to encapsulate all is most acutely exemplified in Rushdie's construction of the 'multitudes' in the novel, symbolizing the immense plenitude and incommensurable nature of 'India' in general, a thought Rushdie himself expresses in *Imaginary Homelands*:

My India has always been based on ideas of multiplicity, pluralism, hybridity... to my mind, the defining image of India is the crowd and a crowd is by its very nature superabundant, heterogeneous, many things at once[.] (32)

His struggle to represent this 'multitude' represents his own fragmentation, physical and otherwise, and the apocalyptic intensity of this political chaos in the country is again voiced in the novel's final pages:

Yes they will trample me underfoot, the numbers marching towards one two three, four hundred million five hundred six, reducing me to specks of voiceless dust, they will trample my son who is not my son, and his son who will not be is, and he who will not be his, until the thousand and first generation, until a thousand and one children have bestowed their terrible gifts and a thousand and one children have died... into the annihilating whirlpool of *multitudes* [.] (Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* 446, emphasis mine)

The representation of the Emergency enables Rushdie to analyze the 'multitudes', the 'polyglot frenzy' of India as an equal and oppositional force. Rushdie is able to understand that the amorphous multiplicity within the country cannot be contained in any social or political form and therefore the narration constantly battles the 'Indian disease to encapsulate' (ibid.359). Rushdie's depiction of 'teeming multitudes' effectively reinforces the idea that the multitudes are a threat to the coherence of an epic national narrative, and therefore he presents the Emergency as an event that brought about the complete destruction of the multitudes. This form of heterogeneity, the 'teeming multitudes' in the text, contributes towards dismantling the epic fabric of narration. The multiplicity and enormous diversity within the group of

midnight's children itself spells the heteroglossic texture of the novel. Consequently, the text deviates from the monoglossic line of representation that is often ascribed to the epic genre.<sup>24</sup>

Although towards the end of text Rushdie tentatively presents alternative democratic forums, such as the Midnight Children's Conference (MCC), that attempt to consolidate this heterogeneity and set up an alternative establishment, they too are obliterated in the face of an overwhelming crisis. Gorra also argues that the MCC reflects a conscious attempt by the novelist to 'provide a vision of the country he wants India to be' (115). And yet, being fully aware of the political ambitions and social discrimination within the country, Rushdie is able to foretell the demise of the MCC even before it soars. Much like postcolonial India itself, the MCC is also unable to sustain its secular set up. It begins to fall apart because of rampant parochial and communal discords, and witnesses its final doom during the Emergency. 'No single member of the MCC can legitimately claim to represent India as a whole –not even Saleem'(ibid.). Thus Saleem's fantastical fear of disintegration, which is primarily affected by his desire to encapsulate the entirety of postcolonial history and his inability to do so, is aggravated by the onset of the Emergency. Saleem argues that the Emergency is primarily orchestrated for 'the smashing, the pulverizing, and the irreversible discombobulation of the children of midnight' (Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* 510). Rushdie painfully states that: 'we are nation of forgetters...the events of the Emergency were hidden behind the insidious clouds of amnesia; producing a time which damaged reality so badly that nobody even managed to put it together again'(ibid. 420).

Saleem realizes that even the post-Emergency phase in India does not provide any scope for political intervention or resolution. Thus neither the hero of the narrative nor other MCC members are able to adequately grasp the damaged nature of their reality. As a result, the destruction of the MCC re-affirms the annihilation of 'the postcolonial cultural simultaneity' (Sangari 911) that Rushdie sees as symbolic of newly-independent India. In this way, Rushdie's text shows how the national Emergency of 1975 acts as a potent catalyst to be able to critically analyze the Indian political framework post independence. Therefore, as Morton also points out that through this text, Rushdie is able to reveal 'the false universality of

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<sup>24</sup> Bakhtin analyzes the epic genre as 'monoglossic-stylistically fixed, elevated and narrated from the one entry point; of that of the aristocracy'. He argues that this component of epic narration is absolutely essential, primarily because it abstains from any form of communal participation and thus it re-affirms the authority of the epic.(1981)

national independence which is nowhere more pronounced than in Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's Emergency suspension of civil law in 1975'(Morton 47). The political chaos of post-independence, post-Emergency India deconstructs the narratorial journey of the Indian epic form, which in turn further unsettles Rushdie's representation of India's postcolonial journey.

## **Part II: Far from a Fine Balance: Receiving and Representing Mistry's *A Fine Balance***

Keith Booker in his analysis of the critical and commercial success of *Midnight's Children* argues:

'The critical and commercial success of *Midnight's Children* can be credited with playing a key role in the recent explosion of English-Language novels coming out of India, with writers as varied as Vikram Seth, Rohinton Mistry, Nayantara Sehgal, Shashi Tharoor ...all being sometimes grouped under the rubric of "Rushdie's Children" to indicate the path-breaking importance of Rushdie's most important novel (1-2).

Although, this sort of importance to any text can sometimes under-estimate other powerful critical approaches that "Rushdie's Children"(ibid.) may have developed in their writings, what I aim to highlight here is the fact that Mistry too belongs to this category and his novel *A Fine Balance* also deals with a similar subject as does *Midnight's Children*.

Within international literary circles, Mistry's novel *A Fine Balance* was shortlisted for the Booker and won the Commonwealth Writers Best Book prize in 1996. Mistry has been widely applauded for uninhibitedly revealing the squalor of the Indian political system. In his representation of the Emergency, Mistry's text represents the blatant misuse of the government's policy in the form of mass sterilization and slum demolition woven into the texture of the fictional tale and is relentless in its critique of Indira Gandhi's policies and therefore unabashed by the political repercussions of publicly deriding her image, make evident allusions to her: 'the widow' (Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* 501), the 'female Prime-Minister' (Mistry 353).

Makarand Paranjape notes that the representation of India as politically and socially fragmented and chaotic started in the 'trend-setting text' *Midnight's Children*. 'The narrator-protagonist Saleem Sinai is himself a fragmented personage; his digressive and disjointed narrative cannot encapsulate the chaos that is India', which he associates with Mistry's narrator in *A Fine Balance*, who unlike Mistry cannot leave the country, 'but instead commits suicide' (245). This manner of representation in which the reality of a crisis stricken homeland is unambiguously represented is critiqued by many Indian theorists. For instance, Uma Parmeswaran argues that:

'Indo-Canadians, especially of the second wave, romanticize the past, tending to see no evil and brooding no negative views about their native country. Given this sociologically proven observation, one is led to wonder why better known writers of diaspora studies such as Rohinton Mistry...tend to foreground some of the negative images of India'(34).

Although one will have to agree that Mistry's novel fails to provide any concrete positive resolution to the fraught Indian political system within the text as the novel concludes by showing that the damage done by the Emergency cannot be undone, Parmeshawaran's analysis tends to present a myopic view of Mistry's portrayal of Indian Emergency as it fails to take into account the bleakness of the political situation in India and the demands of the realist mode of representation deployed by Mistry. Other critical theorists like Vijay Mishra also follow Parmeshawaran's line of thought but explicates the content of the novel to signify an inherent pessimism in Mistry's representation. Mishra argues that 'The Emergency notwithstanding; one senses that the discourse is aware of a very Indian sense of fatalism; the reader senses that the end will always be tragic, no matter where we start, whether with the rent collector Brahmin or the student Avinash or the proof reader Vasantra Valmiki'(176-178).

In contrast to Mishra's comment about inherent pessimism, Peter Morey points out that Mistry's 'recurring treatment of India and especially Bombay, in the 1960's and 1970's, makes him a sensitive compassionate but at times acerbic commentator on the abuses of power associated in particular with Indira Gandhi's administration'(5). Morey furthers this analysis by pointing out that '*A Fine Balance* inverts the discourse of power to show that, although Mrs Gandhi's Emergency claims to be bringing order out of chaos, it does in fact

introduce chaos(and fear) into a situation which-while previously characterized by a degree of social disorder...'(ibid.109).

Likewise, John Mee brings in another political agenda in discussing Mistry's text by suggesting that 'through the Emergency and its suspension of democratic rights and judicial procedures the novel criticizes the Nehru idealism that has dominated Indian politics since independence where Nehru promised to 'build the noble mansion of free India where all children may dwell' (323). Mee's analysis focuses on the fact that the novel is able to capture that India continues to struggle with the residual effects of divisive politics and factionalism that the national Emergency produced and sustained, despite the triumph of Indian democracy in the temporary relief from Indira Gandhi's dictatorial regime after Emergency.

It can argued that although Mistry has been applauded for highlighting the political and social dimension of the whole emergency episode and interrogating the riotous state of politics and social welfare in India, the use of the epic genre in context of the Indian Emergency is largely neglected in favour of the more obvious tone of the text, socialist realism and Indian political history. In the following pages, I turn the focus towards analyzing Mistry's text in order to problematize the representation of the Emergency through his use of the epic conventions.

Rohinton Mistry, like Rushdie, missed the dark days of Emergency as he had immigrated to Canada for higher studies shortly after the Emergency was declared on 26 June, 1975. *A Fine Balance* was published twenty years after he left Bombay. The reconstruction of the Emergency days in his text reflects upon his predicament as a diasporic writer, who 'dusts off old cobwebs and catches up with the happenings in India during his absence from it' (Mistry 164)<sup>25</sup>. As a consequence, Mistry is obliged to 'deal with broken mirrors' (Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands* 11) and partial stories to reconstruct the narratives of a homeland in crisis. This is why Mistry's text brings together disparate characters such as Dina, a Parsi widow, Ishvar and Om Prakash- the untouchables from village who come to the city for work and Maneck Kolah, who comes from a mountain village and their lives inter-connect in Dina's flat during the Emergency period in India to understand, what Mathur calls an 'open

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<sup>25</sup> Geoff Hancock, 'An Interview with Rohinton Mistry', *Canadian Fiction Jaga*;III, 6) (1989), 143-50.

and wide sunlit world of contemporary Indian life with its entire historical, social and political ambience' (98).

In so doing, Mistry's novel also uses and redefines many of *Mahabharata*'s epic conventions. I begin this section by analyzing the similarities between the epic conventions of the *Mahabharata* and Mistry's novel to show how the text grapples with the epic. Mistry's text follows the *Mahabharata* tradition as it also begins with an epigraph and prologue. Moreover, like the epic, Mistry also captures the life and history of a nation over a span of five decades from the pre-partition days to the post-emergency period. After exploring the similarities, I will go on to show that despite certain stylistic and narrative similarities, Mistry astutely portrays the overarching theme of 'balance', which is integral to the *Mahabharata* tradition, and deconstructs it to depict the Emergency days in India and the crisis that changed its political landscape.

The epic convention of using an epigraph to start the narration is replicated in Mistry's text as the novel begins with an epigraph from one of Balzac's work:

'And after you have read this story of great misfortunes, you will no doubt dine well, blaming the author for your own insensitivity, accusing him of wild exaggeration and flights of fancy. But rest assured: this tragedy is not a fiction. All is true' (Mistry 1)

By using Balzac's quote Mistry aligns himself with the long standing tradition of realism (social or compassionate) and overtly spells out the range of literary influences that have shaped his text<sup>26</sup>. By using this particular quote, Mistry makes it clear to readers that although his novel is a fictionalized representation of the political crisis of Indian Emergency, it is based on fundamental political realities of the time witnessed, recorded or heard. This reflects the epic convention of foregrounding the mythologized narration as universal and also, reflective of universal truths of tragedies, kingship and statecraft.

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<sup>26</sup> Peter Morey have extensively written about Mistry and the influence of Camus, Naipaul and Balzac on his writing. Morey affirms that 'these influences...emerges as intertexts, as hints and whispers tugging at the reader, setting up reverberations that bring these other writers to mind, and situate Mistry's writing within global as well as local traditions'(18). Critics like Gabriel also argue that '*A Fine Balance* appears to have been influenced by the narrative concerns of nineteenth century European social realism...Mistry accedes to the representational power of the realist novel...' (87)

Furthermore, like the narrative technique in *Mahabharata*, Mistry is able to weave together the varied histories of its characters in attempting to create a tapestry of almost five decades of Indian history. Mistry follows the epic convention of capturing the history of the growth of the nation, the crisis and consolidation, from the pre-independence days of India to the fraught, turmoil-ridden nation after Indira Gandhi's assassination in 1984. Moreover, by using the figure of the omniscient narrator, like Ved Vyas in the *Mahabharata*, Mistry is able to reflect upon the histories and lives of all the characters in the novel. From Om and Ishvar's 'a village by the river' (5) to Maneck's modest beginnings in the 'mountains' and Dina's tumultuous life 'in the city by the sea' (ibid.2), Mistry contextualizes the lives of the characters within the larger history of the nation.

Although, in terms of the narrative structure and narratorial voice, Mistry's text does replicate and re-use some of the epic conventions of the *Mahabharata*, it also redefines the concept of 'fine balance' that the *Mahabharata* extensively propagates. The concept of 'balance' is integral to the epic format and narrativizations of the *Mahabharata*. During the Kurukshetra war in the *Mahabharata*, lord Krishna is seen imparting valuable life lessons to Arjuna. This part of the epic that was later compiled and termed as 'Gita', propagates the concept of 'balance'; the 'balance' in life, the 'balance' between personal ambitions and public duties and the 'balance' within society at large<sup>27</sup>. This idea of fundamental equilibrium within society that the *Gita* professes is the idea of 'fine balance' that Mistry also negotiates. Most critics have pointed out that the text begins by overtly reiterating the paradigm of 'balance' in terms of earmarking crucial identity characteristics of the protagonists, especially because they are struggling against the force of an overwhelming national crisis of the Emergency. For instance, Nilufer Barucha states that 'there is also the motif of 'balance'-fine balance. It is this fine balance which a person needs to master to help them to lead a relatively happy life...Maneck too has to learn how to 'balance' between the love of his parents, their mountain home and his need for independence. Ishvar and Om have to 'balance' between their low-caste origins and their new darji status...' (30)

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<sup>27</sup> *The Bhagavad Gita*, often referred to as simply the *Gita*, is a 700-verse Hindu scripture in Sanskrit. It is a part of the *Mahabharata*. Some Hindu traditionalists assert that the *Gita* came into existence in the third or fourth millennium. It refers to the long sermons that Lord Krishna imparted to his disciple, Arjuna when his resolve was shaken upon seeing his teachers, relatives, friends and other loved ones in the opposing army. The teachings address fundamentals like realities of life, nature of self, performing unselfish deeds, discipline and spiritual quests.

I suggest that this is a very literal reading of the concept of balance, in contrast to Mistry's representation of political and social balance in the text. In fact, as I also show, Mistry deconstructs this idea of 'balance' to problematize the depiction of socio-political realities during Emergency days. The idea of balance and stability within the *Mahabharata* is very much related to the concept of class, caste and the maintenance of the status-quo. The epic itself does not question any of the caste or class demarcation and neither does it allow any outside influence to penetrate and destabilize the power-hierarchies. In fact, on the contrary the epic narration and understanding of the 'balance' reinforces the continuance of caste and class based frameworks<sup>28</sup>. Therefore, the *Mahabharata* tradition of 'balance' itself colludes with the existent caste and class based frameworks and its attempt to capture the story of 'nation-coming-into-age' it marginalizes all visible signs of the history of the non-ruling strata or members of the society that could possibly influence the course of epic narration contrapuntally<sup>29</sup>.

In contrast to this, Mistry deviates from the epic vocabulary in two distinct ways. First, Mistry displaces the notion of 'balance' of the epic to accommodate the concept of social egalitarianism within the text. By doing so, Mistry questions the very foundations of 'balance' within the epic frameworks that propagate the idea of 'balance' that colludes with the existent caste and class based frameworks of society. This technique of social realism, of subalternizing the vocabulary of representation through the four protagonists who struggle for economic and social independence and sustenance is especially useful in this context. Unlike Rushdie's use of magic realism that enables his text to connect the miraculous and the mundane, enabling him to follow epic conventionality, Mistry's use of social realism powers him to deconstruct epic paradigms. Through the use of this technique, Mistry is not only able to provide an adequate and almost fitting vocabulary for his representation of the political squalor; it also helps him to deconstruct the epic conventionality of exclusively focusing on the intellectual and warrior class. For instance, within the text, Om and Ishvar give voice to opinions that fall out of the broader system of general governance and that consciously

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<sup>28</sup> For instance, in *Mahabharata*, Eklavya, a low-caste archer, is asked to cut his thumb and give it to Guru Dronacharya because he has the capability of superseding Arjuna in archery. This incident reinforces the epic tradition of maintaining and sustaining the hegemonic caste and class divides.

<sup>29</sup> Romila Thapar in her analysis of the *Mahabharata* and the tradition of itihaas states that the 'beyond the clan the non-caste was considered the 'other' and therefore episodes of Eklavya and Nishada in the narrative highlight the hegemonic, class-conscious fabric of the epic. See Romila Thapar's *History of India* vol1 (1996)



dismantle the epic fabric of the narrative. Ishvar and Om attend a rally where the Prime Minister is addressing the general public on the benefits of the Emergency. A party worker announces to the crowd: 'There will be a payment of five rupees for each person. Also, free tea and snack. Please line up outside at seven thirty' (Mistry 258). The next morning when the buses arrive to collect people, Ishvar and Om express strong annoyance: 'I wonder if the Prime Minister knows they are forcing us' and comment that 'nobody wants to be caught in the Prime Minister's embrace, and yet she tries to get on the top of everyone' (ibid.267) that Om and Ishvar expose the element of bribery and political skulduggery in the rally. They display a deeper understanding of the politics of Emergency and the manner in which it is propagated in the masses. Om brings to light the façade of 'beautification programme' that was started by Sanjay Gandhi, Indira Gandhi's son, along with the slum-demolition movement that resulted in widespread homelessness and violence. By representing the darkest and most painful effects of the Emergency through Om and Ishvar, Mistry is able to show the enormity of violence and lawlessness that the poor and disempowered suffered and survived. Jaydipsingh Dodiya argues that this depiction of the Emergency period 'throws light on the fact that no-balance exists in India society and the self-serving imperatives about the haves and have not's rule the day' (20)

A large part of the native intelligentsia and many political thinkers at the time of the Emergency believed that the kind of democracy that is practiced in India has brought about freedom for only the privileged class and thus any attempt ( like the Emergency) to curb this, would not impact the poor (Nandy 2). Tharoor also comments that this hypothesis was often used to disassociate the poor and marginalized from the brutalities of the Emergency, arguing that it never really harmed them (33-36). In the initial part of Mistry's text, one can observe that even Om and Ishvar perceive the onset of Emergency as a 'government tamasha' and often console themselves and others by stating that they are too poor to be affected by the mayhem. Dina confidently exclaims: 'Government problems-games played by people in power. It doesn't affect ordinary people like us' (Mistry 75). But in due course, Mistry displaces this logic by not only presenting them as victims to the large-scale criminalization practiced during the Emergency in the novel, but also as a class of people that eventually become more aware and sensitive to the political chaos.

Secondly, Mistry upturns the *Mahabharata*'s convention of emphasizing the notion of balance and dharma through the warrior and intellectual class by presenting them as incapable to understanding the chaos of affecting any change. This representation is accompanied by Mistry's representation of the intellectual class in the novel, Nusswan, Mrs. Gupta, Avinash and Valmiki, individuals who are portrayed as unable to fathom the pervasiveness of the Emergency. Unlike the *Mahabharata*, in which the idea of 'balance' is understood, assimilated and preached by the intellectuals like Krishna and other well read elders like Bhishma pitama, Mistry subverts the idea by presenting the intellectual class as incapable of understanding the 'balance' within the society and therefore incapable of affecting a change, if they desire to. For instance, Dina's elder brother Nusswan strongly advocates the implementation of the beautification programme and slum-demolition: 'two hundred million that surplus to requirements' that can be eliminated through 'a free meal containing arsenic or cyanide, whichever is cost-effective' (ibid.458). Mrs Gupta, Dina's affluent friend comments that the Prime minister is right 'The need of the hour is discipline...it wouldn't be a bad idea to stick a few posters on the Au revoir entrance. Look at these two rascals (Om and Ishvar) in the corner. Chatting away instead of stacking my shelves' (ibid.73-74).

Moreover, Mistry shows that Mr Valmiki Rao, the professor, and Avinash, the president of the student society, who represent the native intelligentsia lose their identity and agency by the end of the Emergency period. Mistry aims to highlight the impotence of the native intelligentsia and their inability to be incorporating the poor and disempowered within their struggle for equality and democracy. The lawyers, editors, writers and activists selectively ignore the repercussion of the Emergency on the poor. Mistry is able to project that this disconnect with the poorer section of the society delimits the scope of their analysis of the Emergency and their loss of voice at the end of the novel<sup>30</sup>. The chasm between the intellectual class who believe that 'to make a democratic omelette you have to break a few democratic eggs' and the terrible experiences of the poor and disempowered section who realize that 'a democratic omelette is not possible from eggs bearing democratic labels but laid by the tyrannical hen' (Mistry 372-373), dismantles the notion of 'fine balance' within the text.

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<sup>30</sup> For instance, despite the brutality and violence, Valmiki still believes: 'There is always hope-hope enough to balance our despair. Or we would be lost. After all our life is but a sequence of accidents- a clanking chain of events' (Mistry 652).

The novel ends with glimpses of the after-effects of Indira Gandhi's assassination. The taxi-driver that Maneck meets after his arrival in Mumbai, firmly believes that: 'She (Indira Gandhi) gave her blessings to the guns and bombs, and then these wicked, violent instruments began hitting her own government...' (ibid.604). Moreover, the after-effects of the assassination, the violence, homicide and arson that plagued the city symbolize that the Emergency dismantled the fine balance of the Indian democracy and even years after its suspension, political corruption and social injustice have significantly altered the foundations of the nation. Mistry highlights the deteriorated state of political situation in the post-emergency period:

'Of course, for ordinary people, nothing has changed. Government still keeps breaking poor people's homes and jhopadpattis. In villages, they say they will dig wells only if so many sterilizations are made. They tell farmers they will get fertilizer only after nussbandi is performed. Living each day is to face one emergency or another' (ibid 581).

Critics like Nilufer Barucha have read Mistry's representation of the post-Emergency period as symptomatic of balance and political stability:

'There is also a fine balance in the life of nations and the Indian nation had lost that fine balance during the Emergency. India however had hauled itself out of that dark abyss and Indian democracy had compelled Mrs Gandhi to call for fresh elections in which she and her party had been thrown out of office. The Fine-Balance had been restored no-matter how temporarily' (30)

However, Barucha's analysis that the balance is restored 'no-matter how temporarily' is in direct contrast with Mistry's understanding and representation of 'balance' as Mistry does not end the novel by projecting that the 'balance' is restored. The last scene presents Dina sharing a laugh with the castrated Om and the forcibly sterilized Ishvar, foregrounding their resilience despite life threatening tragedies. Dina's freedom-deprived life at her brother's house, Ishvar and Om's physical and emotional destruction and Maneck's total disillusionment of the socio-political system that led him to destroy himself highlight that 'balance' is not restored completely. Mistry shows that vasectomies of Om and Ishvar, the eviction of Dina and the death of Maneck are symbolic of the death of the middle-class, whose lives are corrupted by

the Emergency and who continues to suffer at the hands of economic development. Mistry reminds the readers that ‘may be Maneck was right, everything did end badly’ (546). Therefore, Mistry’s little family of Om, Ishvar, Dina and Maneck that ‘represents the fragile, secular bulwark against the multiple onslaughts of the power of the state under the Emergency...’(Neelam and Rashmi105) is unable to sustain the political chaos. By projecting the dismantling of ‘fine balance’, Mistry demands the reassessment of the foundations of secular, multicultural living and the politics of identity within democratic India, even in the post-Emergency phase.

Unlike the *Mahabharata* tradition, in which the nation-state is consolidated after the event of a war, Mistry ends the text with the brutal imagery of bloodshed, riots and massacre. Mistry ends the text without providing any social or political resolution to the national crisis within the narrative. In so doing, Mistry also shows that a politically fragile nation unable to sustain the demands of epic conventionality and therefore, engages with the postcolonial journey of India by deconstructing these epic paradigms.

## **Conclusion**

In exploring the representation of the Indian Emergency of 1975-77 in Rushdie’s *Midnight’s children* and Rohinton Mistry’s *A Fine Balance*, this chapter is able to analyze the reconstruction of home space within the diasporic texts and the constant negotiation within and outside the frameworks of ‘nation-building’, ‘homeland’ and ‘migration’. By analyzing the political turmoil of Emergency and postcolonial identity of India, both these texts attempt to re-construct mutated or hybrid spaces in order to create imagined homelands and reinvent home space. In the process, these texts produce alternative identities of the homeland; discursively articulating the changing face of homeland postcolonial by understanding historical events like The Indian Emergency (1975-77) or emergent postcolonial identities by analyzing the process of return to one’s homeland.

In this chapter, I have shown that both the diasporic authors use the Indian epic conventions found in the *Mahabharata*, but eventually deconstruct the Indian epic genre in order to show the fraught political machinery of post-independent India and the event of the National

Emergency. I show that *Midnight's Children's* multi layered narrative in terms of historical narrativizations, the turbulence of Indian political climate before and during the Emergency and Rushdie's use of the epic model problematize an easy assessment of the novel and also reject simplified conceptions of Indian history after independence. Rushdie's representation of the Emergency disrupts the narrative of growth of the nation and therefore disorients the teleological movement of the epic narration allowing us to view the national project of nation-growth and consolidation contrapuntally. On the other hand, Mistry understands and presents the Emergency as a tool that in fact orchestrated the rapid decline of the Indian political fundamentals that the state aimed to achieve and that were degraded by the arbitrary use of power, which the Emergency sanctioned. As D'Cruz rightly points out that 'Mistry goes so far as to use the Emergency as powerful vehicle to demonstrate government collusion and participation in the outright thuggery that confirms the continued disenfranchisement and displacement of depressed groups'(65). For Mistry, the multiple and contending realities ethnicities, cultures and classes that are constitutive of national space are integrated through the reworking of the Indian epic format.

In so doing, both the texts have interrogated representations of a crisis stricken homeland through material, communal, and cultural framework of an indigenous epic model, and have been able to discursively unravel the subjective interplay of cultural frameworks and diasporic writing. In this way, both the texts emerge as crucial interventions in interrogating the dominant narrative of the nation/state by problematizing the strategies of closure and containment which are perpetrated through the discourse of the homeland, the nation and the signs of its cultural life that emerge as necessarily constituted of unresolved contradictions and dilemmas. To this end, the texts problematize unified political understanding of the Indian Emergency and also, deconstruct unitary temporal and spatial relations of socio-political realities of India, post-independence.

## Chapter 4

### The Prodigal Returns: Understanding Narratives of Return in Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* (1982) and *Anil's Ghost* (2000).

In *Imaginary Homelands* Rushdie recounts the journey back to Bombay before his seminal novel *Midnight's Children* was conceptualized and published:

A few years ago I revisited Bombay, which is my lost city, after an absence of something like half my life. Shortly after arriving, acting on an impulse, I opened the telephone directory and looked for my father's name. And, amazingly, there it was; his name, our old address, the unchanged telephone number, as if we had never gone away to the unmentionable country across the border. It was an eerie discovery. I felt I was being claimed, or informed that the facts of my faraway life were illusions, and that this continuity was a reality [...] (Rushdie 9)

Rushdie offers this insightful take on his visit to Bombay before *Midnight's Children* was published. His visit to his house evokes a certain disillusionment compelling him to think that maybe 'the facts of my faraway life are illusions and that this continuity was a reality' (9). Rushdie describes this revisit with a sense of overwhelming amazement at the loss of his 'home' and the immediate rush of memories that this return brings forth. This experience marks the inception of *Midnight's Children*; it was in the moment he 'realized how much [he] wanted to restore the past to [himself], not in the faded greys of the old family-album snapshots, but whole, in cinemascope and glorious technicolor' (ibid.:9-10). This experience resonates with Ondaatje's own journey to Sri Lanka and his realization: 'I realised I would be travelling back to the family I had grown from-those relations from my parents' generation who stood in my memory like a frozen opera. I wanted to touch them into words' (*Running in the Family* 16). Although the modes of expression and circumstances of travel might be different in both the cases, the inherent sentiment behind rearticulating the experiences of their homeland in written form is emotionally similar, stemming from a visceral experience

of travel. For a diasporic returnee, such as Rushdie, the desire to look for remnants of the past and the overwhelming feeling of being able to witness and then articulate these fragments is inevitably destabilizing: 'eerie' (to borrow Rushdie's phrase). In such cases, the dynamics of the relationship between the diasporic subject, diasporic return to one's homeland and the desire to capture this journey and 'touch them into words' (Ondaatje, *ibid.* 16) is complex and unsettling.

Clifford has rightly pointed out that within diasporic discourse, 'the immigrant experience' is primarily defined by 'loss and nostalgia... felt only "en route" to a new place, a new home' (*Diasporas* 250) and therefore the phenomenon of diasporic return has been conceptualized as an experience that 'provides the comfort of the familiar and a renewed fulfilment' (Maria & Oliver 92). In the book *Identity, Diaspora and Return in American Literature*, Maria and Oliver's analysis foregrounds the fact that a diasporic return is based on the politics of accepting the homeland as a familiar but distant native space and thereby understanding that the journey of return involves a complete rebirth of self. This concept of re-birth as postulated by them is a renewal of one's native identity when the journey of return occurs (*ibid.*). In this manner, they understand the journey of return as a process that renews and fulfils the returnee. In this sense, contemporary narratives of diasporic return invoke a dialogical relationship between attachment to and nostalgia towards the homeland, and the antithetical centripetal force of a forgotten past.

In the following chapter, I analyze Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* (1982) and *Anil's Ghost* (2000) to show that return cannot be simplistically understood as a process that can replace the already sedimented diasporic identity with a newly invigorated native sense of self. Instead, it interrogates both these conceptions of identity and highlights an awareness of self that is complex, contradictory and disoriented. I begin by analyzing *Running in the Family*, to explore how Ondaatje's desire to seek reconnection with his father is articulated through a genealogical quest. I will further this analysis to show that, in representing return, Ondaatje manages to discursively rearticulate the diasporic identity of the returnee by interrogating the concepts of 'foreigner', 'prodigal' and the process of return itself. In so doing, the text is able to foreground the politics of a shifting diasporic identity in the homeland, and therefore

problematizes a unified understanding of the homeland for the diasporic returnee and his sense of belonging to it.

### **Part 1: Receiving and Representing Return in *Running in the Family***

In the fictionalized memoir *Running in the Family* Ondaatje sets out on an exploration of his Sri Lankan past as well as a genealogical quest that opens up the discourse of diasporic return within the text, a theme that is revisited in *Anil's Ghost*, published about two decades later in 1999.<sup>31</sup> While the texts differ greatly in plot, context, genre and setting, they both explore the textualised identities of the diasporic returnee as prodigal and represent a destabilization of self within the larger public discourse of a filial past.

Michael Ondaatje left Sri Lanka (referred to as Ceylon by the author in the text) at the age of 11 to study in England and then finally settled in Canada.<sup>32</sup> *Running in the Family* is based on the retrieval of memories of Ondaatje's extended family and friends. It is a rare example of a type of work that resists generic categorisation as it fits into many genres at the same time: fictionalized memoir, autobiography, travel fiction and many more. Sam Solecki has categorized *Running in the Family* as 'an experimental autobiography in prose' (141), Davis has called it a 'fictionalized memoir' (267); it has also been called a 'travel memoir' (Huggan, 118), a 'non-fiction novel' (Russell 23), a 'biographical and autobiographical novel' (Snelling 22) and a 'biotext' (Saul 260). *Running in the Family* has been exposed to debates around genre and discourse so much so that almost all critics who study the text categorize it into different generic modes. By avoiding generic fixities Ondaatje manages to show how identity can be fluid, indeterminate and hyphenated. This lack of generic fixity is integral to Ondaatje's writing style as it reflects the author's attempt to highlight the fluidity of his homewards journey, a postmodern aversion to fixity of genre and narrative and his approach towards scripting his return. Despite the ubiquity of generic and literary critical debates that surround *Running in the Family*, ranging from lack of cultural authenticity, over-exoticization, tourist voyeurism and postcolonial traumas of identity in Sri Lanka, there is a

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<sup>31</sup>*Anil's Ghost* touches upon similar issues of prodigality, foreignness and distant attachment towards the homeland though the presence of a female diasporic returnee, a complexity that I will address in the next section.

<sup>32</sup>Like Rohinton Mistry, who also settled in Canada in 1975, Ondaatje too migrated to Canada for educational and economic reasons and subsequently became an important contributor towards the growth of South Asian diasporic writing in Canada. In fact, Mistry's *A Fine Balance* and Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* have often been compared and critiqued as both the novels focus upon the fragile socio-political situations of their respective home countries and analyze the volatility of a homeland crisis.



conspicuous gap, as the politics of diasporic return is scarcely studied within the larger context of the form and content of this text.

I begin by analyzing the critical reception of Ondaatje's texts in terms of assessing the politics of the 'foreign', 'prodigal' and diasporic status of the returnee. In so doing, I am selectively analyzing critics that tend to dwell on the ramifications of the politics of diasporic return, the issues of belonging and the ambivalent space of the returnee. I will show how in most analysis and criticism, Ondaatje's prodigal and foreigner status is only and almost exclusively attributed to his ethnic background. These analyses turn away from connecting the conflict of ethnic positioning with Ondaatje's constant awareness of his position as diasporic returnee.

Marta Bladek argues

'Ondaatje conceives of the past in spatial terms as a labyrinth navigable by memory. Accordingly, Ondaatje 'runs' through the island, trying to locate the past in specific places. As he moves from place to place, he oscillates between the occasional comforts of recognition and frequent surprises of unfamiliarity. Time and again he experiences the discord between intimacy and distance (392).

Bladek comprehensively analyzes this 'dual awareness' (ibid.) of recognition and unfamiliarity in a way that suggests that Ondaatje's complexity of position is enhanced by his travels within his homeland. This argument posits Ondaatje's diasporic identity as intensively engaged in the process of re-discovering his homeland and relocating his past through this journey. After tentatively pointing out Ondaatje's status as diasporic returnee, Bladek's analysis swiftly moves from his diasporic position to his ethnic lineage and the displaced status of Burghers in Sri Lanka.<sup>33</sup> She further cites a relevant example from the text to that develops this line of thinking. 'In the section, Don't Talk to me about Matisse', she argues, 'Ondaatje interchangeably presents himself as a native and a foreigner; "we own the country

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33 The Burghers are a 'hybrid' population who are descendants from European (Dutch), Singhalese, Tamil and Moor populations. Predominantly English speakers, the Burghers held privileged social and occupational positions under British colonial rule. The intermixing of the native Sri Lankan, the Dutch and the British produced a number of changing racial categories and ethnic identities. The Burgher 'ethnic' minority group emerged as a particular product of Sri Lanka's confrontation with the occupying forces till its independence in 1948. The Burgher identity challenged hegemonic notions of race and ethnicities in Sri Lanka by challenging notions of ethnic and genetic purity and hybridity. For further information, see Tissa Fernando 'The Burghers of Ceylon' in Gist Noel & Dworkin Anthony (eds.), *The Blending of Races: Marginality and Identity in world perspective* (Wiley Interscience New York, 1972), 61-78.

we grew up in or we are aliens and invaders”, gradually realizing that the problem of belonging and alienation also characterised his ancestors’ relationship to the land’ (3-4). Bladek highlights the fact that Ondaatje’s contradictory positionality ‘*also characterised* his ancestors’ relationship to the land’ (emphasis mine), stressing the fact that Ondaatje’s problematized ‘in-between’ position in some way echoes the conflicted position of his ancestors, suggesting that the tenuousness of his position as a returnee is directly related to/a product of his conflicted ethnic identity and Burgher lineage.

Other critics like Chelva Kanaganayakam and Daniel Coleman have also pointed out that this ‘tenuous, middle of the road position’ (Kanaganayakam 34-35) is due to Ondaatje’s Burgher lineage. Kanaganayakam further argues that ‘Micheal Ondaatje, in *Running in the Family*, returns to a country he left twenty five years ago, and his perception of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) is no less profound, no less complex, for it entails returning to a past characterised by the duality of being both ‘native’ and ‘foreigner’ to a known middle of road position that served as a constant reminder to the British of the unfortunate effects of miscegenation; for the Sinhalese and the Tamils, the Burghers symbolized the residual vestiges of the colonial domination and therefore an extension of British, metropolitan culture’(134-5). Similarly, Gillian Roberts begins by casually earmarking Ondaatje’s identity as the diasporic returnee but invokes Ondaatje’s ethnic roots and his prodigal status in tandem, detached from his diasporic status: ‘As a returned migrant, Ondaatje is a guest in his nation of origin, hosted by members of his own family who have remained there. But as Burghers, Ondaatje’s family occupies a fragile host position in Sri Lanka. Ondaatje’s self-representation as a guest...reveals a negotiation of migrant identity and the tenuousness of claims to belonging...his travels with his sisters underscores the duality of his location; his sisters are his hosts at home in Sri Lanka, touring him around the country’(325-327).

The narrative mentions that the first Ondaatje who settled around 1600 in Ceylon ‘was rewarded with land, a foreign wife and a new name which was the Dutch spelling of his own’ (Ondaatje 64). Ondaatje goes on to inform the readers that in the 1920s and 1930s his grandfather Philip Ondaatje ‘made huge sums of money in land deals’ (ibid. 55) working for the British at that time. Daniel Coleman explains that the privileged status the Ondaatje’s

enjoyed in Ceylon gradually faded in the socio-political new world after World War II. Ondaatje's parents' divorce and his family's ensuing emigration were accompanied by a massive mass migration of Ondaatje's from Sri Lanka (Coleman 111). In this context, Gillian Roberts forthrightly argues that '*Running* offers an assertion of Burgher presence both in history and in the present...Ondaatje's family is Sri Lankan and at home, he is not technically a born foreigner; his Burgher lineage lends him a kind of foreignness despite the location of his birth'(327). Roberts recognizes a kind of duality in Ondaatje's positioning and chronicles this 'between the world position' (qtd. in Heble 189) against the background of a diasporic return, but largely ascribes the conflict or tension in his position to his Burgher lineage

These critical commentaries show that critics have not ignored the dimension of diasporic return in Ondaatje's text, but have worked to stress Ondaatje's complex ethnic history. Although the analyses are comprehensive and succinctly argued, there remains a tendency to connect Ondaatje's lineage with the colonial history of Sri Lanka, in order to highlight his subtle engagement with overarching frameworks of political and social history. For instance, Minoli Salgado argues that *Running in the Family* 'does not so much delineate a colonising impulse or an act of postcolonial reclamation and recuperation, but rather reveals the instability and permeability of the migrant self' (131). Salgado's assessment of Ondaatje's book is a critical response to theorists such as Mukherjee who critique Ondaatje's work on the basis of its (lack of) engagement with postcolonial realities in Sri Lanka<sup>34</sup>. Her analysis sheds some light on the recurring motif of the returning 'migrant self' of the narrator/author in *Running in the Family* and unravels the politics of the shifting identities of the migrant self and the dialectics of familiarity and detachment between the returnee and his homeland. Although this analysis is relevant to understanding the representation of migrant identities in Ondaatje's text, nonetheless the issue of prodigality and diasporic return are not part of the discussion, and therefore needs to be extensively explored. These critical trajectories show that the dynamics of return and migrant identity have been studied in relation to broader social and cultural concerns and have been distanced from an analysis of Ondaatje's engagement

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<sup>34</sup> Arun P. Mukherjee has accused Ondaatje of rootlessness and lack of political posturing and asks 'How has Ondaatje managed to remain silent about his experience of displacement or otherness in Canada when it is generally known to be quite a traumatic experience?' (50). For further information, see Arun P. Mukherjee, 'The Poetry of Michael Ondaatje and Cyril Dabydeen: two points of Otherness' in *Towards an Aesthetics of Opposition. Essays on Literature, Criticism and Cultural Imperialism* (1988).

with his filial past. My analysis intervenes in the existing body of scholarship to understand the politics of return and prodigality through Ondaatje's text. In this manner, I will be able to analyze how reconfiguration of the filial past enables the returnee to interrogate his identity and his understanding of homeland.

In an interview conducted in the late 1970s, Ondaatje described himself as being 'in a way... a very displaced person', further admitting that he 'really env[ied] roots' (13). In 1954, after the divorce of his parents, Ondaatje left Sri Lanka and moved to England for a few years and then finally settled in Canada. After 25 years, Ondaatje decided to explore his filial past and return to Sri Lanka. *Running in the Family* was in fact the product of two journeys to Sri Lanka in 1978 and 1980 by Ondaatje. 'Haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt' (Rushdie 10), like most other displaced diasporic writers, Ondaatje, too, paints a portrait of his homeland, through remembrance and recollection. It is only after these visits to Sri Lanka that Ondaatje manages to articulate his experiences through merging travel journal, photographs, family stories, archival information, and fragmentary childhood memories in the memoir.

Moreover, Ondaatje's novel is told from the first-person perspective of a character. As Peter Stich observes that the slippage between the authorial voice and narratorial voice is often confusing. He states 'the author masks himself with the persona of a third-person narrator' (83). As a consequence, narrative assumes a personal tone, but at times the first-person narrator seems to be distancing himself from events through sarcasm and humor, even suddenly referring to himself in the third person. Additionally, throughout the non-linear structure of the narrative, Ondaatje consistently reminds us that we are reading his creation by mentioning the writing process and by using other meta-linguistic techniques of self-reference and overlap of author/ narrator character. Ondaatje also indulges in using names of places and people from his childhood and past memories, further problematizing the divide between author of the text and the narrator in the text.

For instance, throughout *Running in the Family*, Ondaatje refers to the country he is visiting as Ceylon (the former colonial name of Sri Lanka), thus signalling the psychological and emotional difficulties encompassed by his return journey. Ondaatje describes Ceylon as an island 'that seduced all of Europe. The Portuguese. The Dutch. The English. And so its name is

changed, as well as its shape –Serendip. Ratnadipa (island of gems).Taprobane. Zeloan, Zeilans, Seyllan, Ceilon and Ceylon – the wife of many marriages, courted by invaders who stepped ashore and claimed everything with the power of their sword or Bible or language’ (Ondaatje 60).

Ondaatje refers to invaders ‘who stepped ashore and claimed everything with the power of their sword or bible or language’ (ibid. 64). He highlights the fact that the colonial history of Sri Lanka problematizes an easy understanding of national history. Ondaatje, states that his homeland is ‘the wife of many marriages’ (ibid.), and with each marriage and conquering, its identity has changed.

Ondaatje realizes that his own temporary and potentially distanced position as an observer of his former native land is precariously similar to those ‘foreigners’ who stepped in and admired the landscape, disliked the ‘inquisitive natives’ and ‘left’ (ibid. 60). By foregrounding this cartographical re-mapping of the island, as aligned with the history of invasions, Ondaatje problematizes his sense of belonging within his homeland. He therefore proclaims, ‘we own the country we grow up in or we are exiles and invaders’ (ibid. 81). Ondaatje’s ‘schizophrenic sense of simultaneously belonging and not belonging to th[e] magical place’ (Barbour 81), calls upon him to reassess his relationship with his homeland. As a result, in the chapter titled ‘Karapothas’ Ondaatje exclaims ‘I am the foreigner. I am the prodigal who hates the foreigner’ (Ondaatje 79)<sup>35</sup>.

Ondaatje’s use of the term prodigal is particularly interesting and instructive. It is a term that has pertinent religious undertones derived as it is from the New Testament: the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15 of the New Testament (11-32). In this parable, the younger son asks for his share of his inheritance before all others and after having been granted it leaves his father and squanders his wealth. He comes to regret his actions and asks for his father’s forgiveness and is taken back by the father into the family. In this reference, prodigality has also come to represent someone who is a wasteful, extravagant and who has in some sense rejected filial bonds. Interestingly, the reference to the prodigal status of the returnee invites

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<sup>35</sup> Karapothas’: the term refers to a kind of beetle and is used as a derogatory term for foreigners in the text. Ondaatje’s aunt uses the term for foreigners ‘who stepped in and admired the landscape, disliked the “inquisitive natives” and left’ (*Running in the Family* 80).

readers to look at the returnee as the one undeserving of being taken back into the family (as in the case of the biblical parable) but who is nevertheless accepted generously by his father and family. However, critics like Gillian Roberts contend that:

Though the biblical associations of wastefulness and lavishness do not apply to Ondaatje here, the return of this younger son to his family (and his ancestral home at Rock Hill) after a long absence makes the label of the prodigal appropriate [...] (328)

Ondaatje's reference to prodigality is appropriate in the sense that it refers to the diasporic returnee who is attempting to re-connect filial bonds by capturing stories of his past; nonetheless, he is left imaginatively searching for his father, Mervyn, who even before his death was divorced from his family, both legally and geographically. In Christopher Ondaatje's account of his own first return journey to Sri Lanka, he describes his brother's novel *Running in the Family* as 'in many ways... a love letter to the father [Michael] never knew, a large and glamorous man away in the distance'(cited in Jewinski 14).

In this context, Ondaatje's usage of the term deconstructs the fixed conception of his prodigal identity within the narrative. Ondaatje shows that for the diasporic returnee the ability to re-establish the strained father-son relationship is sometimes not possible because his father is no longer alive to provide a sense of closure to the prodigal narrative.<sup>36</sup> Roberts links this explicitly to prodigality: 'His (Ondaatje's) foreignness in Sri Lanka, to the country and his family, and distance from his father in particular are central to Ondaatje's prodigality; migration has produced his absence, cut short his relationship with his father, and removed a straightforward sense of 'at hominess' in Sri Lanka' (ibid.).

Ondaatje attempts to remedy this fraught relationship by gathering photographs and stories about his father through relatives and distant friends, only to realize that gossipy conversations and exaggerated stories impede this re-connection:

There is so much to know and we can only guess. Guess around him. To know him from these stray actions I am told about by those who loved him. And yet, he is still one of those books we long to read whose pages remain uncut. We are still unwise. It

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<sup>36</sup>The term 'prodigal' is only used in the context of referring to the 'prodigal son', thereby highlighting a limited gendered connotation of the biblical story. This is very much a father-son relationship. In the next chapter, the gender aspect (or the absence of it) shall be discussed in relation to Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*.

is not that he became too complicated but that he had reduced himself to a few things around him and he gave them immense meaning and significance. (Ondaatje, *Running in the Family* 200)

Even in the introduction of the chapter 'The Ceylon Cactus and Succulent Society', there is a photograph of Ondaatje's family in Ceylon, where he, his mother, his brother and sister stand against a waterfall. This is the narrator's only childhood photograph in the text. The picture shows the four of them looking at the camera and smiling. The absence of his father from this family picture not only anticipates Mervyn's absence from the family, it also circumscribes Ondaatje's attempt to reconnect with him.

This desire to seek a connection with his deceased father is interlinked with Ondaatje's desire to re-connect with his homeland through this journey. In the opening pages of the novel, Ondaatje claims that, for him, the incentive to return formed 'the bright bone of a dream...I saw my father, chaotic, surrounded by dogs...It was a new winter and I was dreaming of Asia...I was running to Asia and everything would change'(Ondaatje, *Running in the Family* 22). The notion of running has many undertones within the text. Ondaatje names the action of his journey back to Asia, his family and his childhood, 'running' (Ondaatje, *ibid.*22). His action of running towards the family invokes a dialogical space where 'running from', 'running to', 'running away' and 'running in the family' are all possible preposition combinations applicable to his narrative. When he runs in his family, he is running both toward it and away from it. The 'running' creates the effect of a complex search in which identity needs to be discovered in all its various forms. Aware of this complexity, Ondaatje alerts the readers and himself by stating 'everything would change' (1) once the journey is undertaken. Although this scene begins by presenting an already dishevelled, tired and disoriented figure of the narrator who is fast asleep on a friend's couch, his realization of a far deeper impending transformation evokes a rather disconcerting picture of this journey. The narrator confesses that, back in Canada during a party, drunk and relaxed, he 'knew' he was 'already running' (*ibid.* 22), and 'during quiet afternoons' he 'spread maps onto the floor and searched out possible routes to Ceylon' (*ibid.* 22).

This journey towards re-discovering the homeland 'and the maze of relationships in [his] ancestry' (*ibid.*25), begins with a partly-filled map of Sri Lanka. Ondaatje admits: 'The maps

reveal rumours of topography, the routes for invasion and trade, and the dark mad mind of travellers' tales appears throughout Arab and Chinese and medieval records' (ibid. 64). Therefore, in using a half-filled map, Ondaatje tells us that his intention was to 'establish a kind of map... to make clear that this was just a part of a long tradition of invasions and so forth. So the map and the history and the poetry made a more social voice, became the balance to the family story, the other end of the see-saw' (qtd in Hutcheon 201). In the context of this text, Huggan argues that the half-filled map represents 'the novel's central theme of hidden truth' (24), signifying the narrator's attempt to identify himself spatially and culturally with his homeland. Moreover, this map acts as a significant form of shaping the land about to be visited, and is therefore used as a figurative device in the text to (re)shape the journey to the narrator's father. In other words, by writing through verbal description or any other sign system – like maps or photographs – the narrator intertwines the tales told about his family and homeland, and turns them into the emotional (re)mapping of his past so as to rebuild his father's identity and to be able to connect to him.

Huggan also points out that maps also act as 'symbols of imposed political authority or as metaphors for territorial dispossession' ("Decolonizing the Map" 32), signifying a colonial cartographic impulse. Therefore, Ondaatje once again realizes that he is oscillating between his identity as the prodigal, attempting to re-connect with his deceased father and his homeland, and the 'foreigner', who is exploiting colonial names and cartography to rediscover his native land. Further in the text, we see Ondaatje constantly oscillating between these contradictory positions, sometimes embracing the realities of the homeland and other times resisting it with equal fervour. He begins by stating his pleasure with Sri Lankan weather: 'We are back in Colombo, in the hottest month of the year. It is delicious heat' (Ondaatje, *Running in the Family* 79), and then complains about the same: 'heat disgraces foreigners... my kids, as we drove towards lowland heat, growing belligerent and yelling at each other to shut up, shut up, shut up' (ibid. 80). This parallel passage foregrounds Ondaatje's ambivalent positioning, implicating him in both the scenarios, highlighting Ondaatje's awareness of an unresolved contradiction and dismantling unified conceptions of his prodigal status in his homeland.



Amidst this chaos and contrasts of identities, Ondaatje discovers a confusing and contrasting oddity in his ethnic lineage. Ondaatje comes to learn that his 'father always claimed to be a Ceylon Tamil, though that was probably more valid about three centuries earlier' (ibid. 41). He further dwells in 'the maze of relationships in [his] ancestry' (ibid. 25) in order to learn about the confluence of many cultures in Ondaatje's forebears and their complex relationship. He states: 'Everyone was vaguely related and had Sinhalese, Tamil, Dutch, British and Burgher blood in them going back many generations' (ibid. 41). The narrator mentions the origin of the family name, crediting it to an intermarriage of the Dutch governor's daughter with a doctor, a foreigner, who after curing the young girl received her as wife, thus being 'rewarded with land and a new name' Ondaatje (ibid. 64). After his wife's death, his ancestor married a Sinhalese and remained there. Kanaganayakam sheds light on Ondaatje's Burgher identity and argues that 'as the country moved closer to Independence, the tenuousness of a community whose strength and its weakness lay in its cultural syncretism become increasingly apparent' (132-34). Ondaatje also highlights how the Burgher Community had distanced itself from the native population in terms of ethnicity and culture and was closer to the ruling power, and hence, for Ondaatje, the issue of belonging and acceptance becomes all the more complex.

Ondaatje is deeply aware of the conflicted position he occupies in terms of his Burgher lineage and the family's colonial history and outsider status in Sri Lanka. Ondaatje's awareness of his fraught and complicated status is deeply reflected through the narratorial voice, which frequently acknowledges his constructed ethnicity and an already fraught sense of diasporic identity: that of the 'prodigal' and 'the foreigner'. In so doing, the narrative foregrounds plural notions of prodigality and deconstructs the already established fixed conceptions of it. Moreover, one can observe that the constant tension between the narrator's prodigal status and his position as the 'foreigner' nuances his narrative in such a way that it disturbs the stability of his diasporic or native identity and the fixed conceptions of the returnee's relationship to his homeland.

This stiff juxtaposition between his status as the 'prodigal' and the 'foreigner' provides for constant tension within the text, primarily foregrounding an unresolved complexity that Ondaatje struggles with; a complex positionality that resonates with Rushdie's evocation of

diasporic positioning: ‘Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times that we fall between two stools’ (15). Due to this complex identity negotiation of ‘the prodigal-foreigner’ status, the text presents Ondaatje’s return as inherently paradoxical, undercutting the idea of a comforting return to homeland and also complicating our understanding of ‘homeland’ and ‘belonging’ for the diasporic returnee. In so doing, one can recognize that the self-consciousness of the text unravels how this tension between marginality and integration within the homeland severely problematizes notions of belonging and locatedness for the returnee.

## **Part 2: Anil’s Homecoming: Understanding the Gendered Prodigal Narrative in *Anil’s Ghost***

How long has it been? You were born here, no?

Fifteen years...The return of the prodigal.

I’m not a prodigal. An hour later he shook hands energetically with her at the door of the small house they had rented for her.

(Ondaatje, *Anil’s Ghost* 6)

In this section, I explore the dynamics of return to the homeland through Ondaatje’s fictionalised prodigal subject Anil in *Anil’s Ghost* (2000). Although it might seem that the reference to Anil’s homecoming in Sri Lanka as the return of the prodigal echoes Ondaatje’s self-positioning in *Running in the Family*, the texts deals with diasporic return differently. In *Anil’s Ghost* the narrative is complicated by the fact that Anil’s return to her homeland is driven by professional reasons, as a consequence of which she displays a resistance to addressing filial desires and to being addressed as the prodigal. The added complexity of a professional journey to her homeland amidst overpowering political unrest and violence further problematizes Anil’s homecoming.

Furthermore, in contrast to the previous part, in which Ondaatje's personal journey in *Running in the Family* is analyzed in terms of Ondaatje's search for his father, in this chapter the focus is on Anil and the politics of a gendered return to homeland. In this part of the chapter, I will show that this return to a troubled homeland destabilizes Anil's personal and professional life during her stay in Sri Lanka. I will explore Ondaatje's engagement with the gendered prodigal identity against the backdrop of Anil's human rights-based forensic project in the war-stricken land of Sri Lanka. I will show that this text addresses and scrutinizes the ramifications and complexity of a gendered prodigal narrative and foregrounds the need to widen the rubric of representing homeland realities through a professional homecoming.

### **Receiving and Representing Return in *Anil's Ghost***

*Anil's Ghost* is indeed one of Ondaatje's most overtly political texts and has met with diverse critical responses. Chelva Kanayakagam lists the novel's achievements:

For almost a year, the novel was on the bestseller's list in Canada. And the list of it gathered is impressive. Within a matter of months it received several prizes, including the Governor-General's prize, the Prix Medicis for foreign literature, and the Kiriyaama Pacific Rim Book Prize; it was also the co-recipient of the prestigious Giller Prize[.]  
(2)

Apart from the popular awards and recognitions, the novel was largely celebrated within critical circles as well. Most critics have highlighted how the novel 'compels a reopening of debate over literature's relation to politics through its overt preoccupation and complex political backdrop' (ibid.5). As a consequence, the novel has provoked rigorous debate on the politics of postcolonial conflicts, human rights and global networks.<sup>37</sup> Amidst the dominant discussions on terror, the Sri Lankan war and the ethics of human rights, the thematic concern

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<sup>37</sup> Heike Harting has analysed the novel's ethics as a 'critique of failure of global justice' (43), while Katherine Stanton has focused on the novel's concern with justice in a globalized world. Manav Ratti has focussed on the 'aestheticization of Human Rights' (1) in *Anil's Ghost* and S. Knowles further supports this by stating that, 'published after close to two decades of civil war, *Anil's Ghost* is, on one level, the response of a Sri Lankan writer to the island's troubled histories of ethnic division' (Knowles 431).

with Anil's diasporic return has been marginalised.<sup>38</sup> In this section, I will focus on the critical debates pertaining to Anil's status as a diasporic returnee and her negotiation with her past and professional work in her homeland. Anil's arrival in Sri Lanka is often conceived and understood in the light of her identity as a diasporic returnee, who unlike the narrator in *Running in the Family* is returning to her homeland for a professional project. While some critics Woznialis have tended to oversimplify her status as a foreigner, by arguing that 'She (Anil) seems to have decided to go to her motherland as a foreigner' (280) and even if she says 'she wanted to come back', she looks at the island with 'long distance gaze' (11). Further, Anil's Western education and her virtues of 'privacy and anonymity' (72) confirm her status as 'foreign celebrity'. Woznialis' argument offers a very literal and simplified understanding of Anil's position, undermining the complexity of her homecoming and the political climate of her homeland that destabilizes the process of return.

Other critics like Stanton, Ryan Mowat and Lehnman have argued for a more complex understanding of Anil's diasporic identity. Stanton problematizes Anil's diasporic identity and return by highlighting the fact that 'travelling with a British passport with light blue UN bar, she [Anil] returns to Sri Lanka as a forensic anthropologist for a Geneva based HR Organisation' (25). Anil's complex position, her professional responsibility as a UN representative and her emotional distance from the realities of war problematizes Anil's homecoming and complicates her sense of attachment towards her homeland. She is caught between her professional duties and personal inclinations and is attempting to manage both with an air of steadfastness and Western ethics of truth and justice that gradually prove irrelevant in the face of an overwhelming political crisis in Sri Lanka.

Similarly, Lehmann argues that in her conversations with Sarath, Anil encounters 'problems...of belonging because as soon as she takes up the nuanced changeable notion of truth Sarath offers, she is in conflict with her western self-understanding which is above all dependent on her being a scientist' (315). Anil's position of straddling scientific rationalism and a truth-seeking drive and a metaphysical concern with truth compels critics to study diasporic return in terms of essentialized binaries of 'Western outsider' and 'the native

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38 Only recently, a researcher, Heidi Steals, has analysed the theme of diasporic return in context of psychoanalytic theory and has studied Anil's diasporic status through this lens.(977).

insider'. Kertzer argues Anil's inclination towards Western notions of truth and justice 'appears to determine' her position as 'partly an outsider' (12).

In an interview with Maya Jaggi about Anil's Ghost, Ondaatje warns us against such homogenizing critical readings:

'What worried me is that this book would be taken as representative; I do back flips to avoid that. There is a tendency with us in Canada to say, this is a book about Sri Lanka. But it isn't a statement about the war, as if it is the true and only story'. It is my individual take on four or five characters, a personal tunnelling into it '(6).

Thus he warns to readers to not take the novel as representative of Sri Lankan war and not indulge in literal simplification of journeys that the characters undertake. In agreement with Ondaatje's view, critics like Ryan Mowat, also foreground Anil's position as 'representative of the "in-between" location of the postcolonial consciousness with insight into both East and West and yet fully exemplary of neither' (Mowat 1). Cook also recognizes this duality and foregrounds this duality as integral to her identity as a 'transnational with "doubleness" ' (106). These readings show how, through his representation of Anil, Ondaatje explores the figure of a decentred, alienated diasporic returnee. Moreover, they highlight how Ondaatje's representation of Anil also evokes contemporary critical debates about global politics and changing diasporic identities. In fact, Cook acknowledges Anil's position as that of a returning diasporic professional, highlighting the conflicts between her professional motives and homeland realities.

Hence, it can be argued that most critical commentary on Anil's identity and homecoming presents a characteristically ambivalent and complex narration of diasporic return in the face of an overwhelming political framework, in order to problematize the diasporic journey. But, comparatively, less attention has been given to Ondaatje's negotiation with the concept of 'prodigality' in terms of a gendered return. In this section, I focus on analyzing how Anil's return spells a more complex and fraught sense of belonging; thereby demanding a reassessment of returnee's relationship with her homeland.

In *Anil's Ghost* Ondaatje's representation of a gendered return deconstructs what Gayatri Gopinath argues are the 'patriarchal and heteronormative tropes of the term "diaspora", in which women are often displaced as agentive subjects in narratives of diaspora: all too often diasporas are narrativized through the bonds of relationality through men'(5), jettisoning female diasporic experiences. She goes on to argue that 'the centrality of this [male-male or father-son] narrative as the primary trope in imagining diaspora invariably displaces and elides female diasporic subjects' (5). In other words, as I will also show that Anil's return to her homeland alters the conventional frameworks of prodigal narratives by focusing on gender and prodigality within the same narrative. I will show that by focusing on the female diasporic returnee, Ondaatje shows that the absence of a filial connection in the homeland and Anil's professional choices interrogate her prodigal status and foregrounds a sense of unbelonging in her homeland. In this way, Ondaatje's text is able to dismantle notions of prodigality and reconceptualize them to understand the return of a female diasporic subject.

In the opening pages of the novel, Sarath mocks Anil's visit to Sri Lanka after 15 years of being away as the 'return of the prodigal', to which she sternly replies 'I am not a prodigal' (*Anil's Ghost* 6). The introductory exchange between Sarath's recognition of Anil as prodigal and Anil's refusal to be recognized as such dichotomize and problematize Anil's identity. In so doing, the text shows that Anil is forthright in acknowledging her return as devoid of any personal or intimate dimension and therefore detached from the conventional notions of prodigality. The absence of a filial framework in Anil's case complicates her social interactions within the homeland. Furthermore, aware of her fraught positioning in her homeland, Anil displays a desire to willingly forget and discard her past life in her homeland:

"So- you are the swimmer"! A broad-chested man in his late forties was approaching her casually, with his hand out. She hoped this wasn't Mr. Sarath Diasena, but it was.

"The swimming was a long time ago"

"Still...I may have seen you at Mount Lavinia". "How?"

"I went to school at St. Thomas. Right there. Of course I'm a bit older than you are"

"Mr. Diasena... let's not mention swimming again, okay? A lot of blood under the bridge since then"[...]

“Are you married? Got a family?”. “Not married. Not a swimmer”. “Right”.(Ondaatje, ibid. 12-13)

This refusal to remember or the will to forget, and her connection with the past, connote Anil’s deliberate attempt to erase her native self. This form of willing detachment and disconnection is also reflected in her desire to ignore ‘[her] early celebrity’ – her ‘[winning] the two-mile swim race that was held by the Mount Lavinia Hotel’ (ibid.10-11), a gesture of severing herself from the past. We are told that ‘The island no longer held [Anil] by the past’(ibid.).

In an interview with Maya Jaggi, Ondaatje remarks that ‘Anil’s return is ironic because she doesn’t know the country very well; she has to relearn it’ (6). Edward Said reiterates a similar premise while discussing this idea of return by arguing that ‘no return to the past is without irony or without a sense that a “full return” or “repatriation is impossible”’ (*Reflections on Exile* 35). The journey or diasporic return, as Said foregrounds, dismantles the myth of full return and highlights the inherent tension between spatial and temporal discontinuity and the emotional inclination towards the homeland. This evokes a complex understanding of ‘home’, a certain contradiction, as revisiting ‘home’ is akin to travelling back in time and space. It can be defined as an experience that inherently dichotomises the return by constantly playing up spatial and temporal dynamics.

This complexity of return is also reflected in Anil’s inability to linguistically connect with Lalitha, Sarath, Palipana and others, hampering her professional and personal interactions: ‘On this island, she realized she was moving with only one arm of a language... there was less to hold on to one arm’ (Ondaatje, *Anil’s Ghost* 54) as ‘she had forgotten the subtleties of the language they once shared’ (ibid. 166). At the same time, the narrative informs us that Anil is constantly looking ‘for some communication from the West...from her American bud’ (ibid.212) so as to ground her, further signifying her inability to accommodate herself in her homeland and ironically explaining how her connection with the West sustains her visit to the homeland. In this way, the text highlights the fact that language barriers disturb her connection within her filial space, thereby further problematizing her emotional and linguistic connection with the homeland.

This loss of connection within the filial space, on some level, reiterates the prodigal parable in which the humbled son goes back to the father to rekindle the relationship and is eventually accepted back. But in contrast, in the case of Anil, Ondaatje shows that Anil's return to her homeland is even more complex. The reader is informed that during Anil's study period in England, she falls under the 'spell' of her 'future, soon to be, and eventually ex husband' who enters her life 'in bangles and on stilts' (Ondaatje, *Anil's Ghost* 142) symbolizing her only connection to Sri Lanka. In divorcing him, she loses more than her husband; she loses her only lingual and emotional connect to Sri Lanka. Although Anil does not address this widening cultural and linguistic chasm between her and her homeland as something significant, it is on her arrival in Sri Lanka that she begins to realize its effects.

Ondaatje manages to overturn the critical underpinnings of the term 'prodigal' which invoke the burden of repentance after living a life of excess, allowing the prodigal to display remorse and plead acceptance, as Anil displays a resistance towards her childhood memories and past life in Sri Lanka. In deconstructing this notion through Anil's return, Anil is represented as a returnee without any intention of re-establishing filial or intimate bonds in her motherland.

The only glimpse of filial affection we see in Anil is through her meeting with Lalitha. On her return to Sri Lanka, Anil realizes that she no longer shares the same language and vocabulary to talk to Lalitha: 'When Anil let go, the old woman seemed stranded...Anil sat next to Lalitha and held her hand in silence, feeling an ache in herself' (ibid.22). She is further distanced from the conversation by Lalitha's granddaughter who speaks to Lalitha in Tamil and does not bother to translate it for Anil. She notices that 'Lalitha had fallen asleep' during their conversation; foregrounding Anil's incapacity to re-establish a connection with Lalitha. This interaction with Lalitha severely impedes her connection with her homeland as she painfully comes to terms with the fact that there exists a defining boundary between her and the only motherly connection she has in her homeland. This representation of the mother-daughter equation alters the conventional wisdom of prodigal narratives, taking it away from 'enactment of the diasporic, patrilineal narrative through male-male, father-son bonds' (Gopinath 5), thereby redefining biblical notions of prodigality. In this way, the text also moves away from the biblical reverberations of the term and deploys it in a postmodern way so that epistemological frameworks are questioned and redefined.



The only other significant connection Anil attempts to re-establish is with Dr. Perera at Kynsey Road Hospital, an old friend of her father. The narrative informs us 'she had wanted to talk to him about her father, knew she had been skirting the memory of him since her arrival on the island. She apologized for not calling and meeting him before she left Colombo. But on the phone Perera seemed muted and wary. You sound sick, sir. You should take a lot of liquids. A viral flu comes like that 'She would not tell him where she was. Sarath had warned her of that, and when he asked for the second time she pretended she could not hear, said, "Hello... hello? Are you there, sir?" and hung up' (Ondaatje, *Anil's Ghost* 186). This scene and the lack of any conversation represents her losing the last strand, which was her hold on her past in Sri Lanka, that of her father's memory. In a way, her last filial strand is shattered and proven to be utterly irrelevant. Hence, Anil's inability to establish any form of lingual or emotional connection with Lalitha thwarts her attempt to rekindle her connection. In so doing, the text foregrounds that this loss in connection unsettles Anil's identity in the homeland, dismantling an already fraught sense of belonging.

The narrative further shows us that Anil's 'lack of connection' or intimacy with her homeland is strongly reflected in her distantly removed position as a forensic anthropologist from a Geneva-based human rights organization. The novel points out:

Anil has been sent reports collected by various human rights group before leaving United States...Everything was grabbed and collected as evidence, everything could be held on to in the windstorm of news was copied and sent abroad to strangers in Geneva[.] (Ondaatje, *ibid.* 40)

She is positioned as the distant, disconnected prodigal who is only able to draw connections with the homeland through news and reports sent to her: 'Anil had read documents and news reports, full of tragedy, and she had now lived abroad long enough to interpret Sri Lanka with a long distance gaze' (*ibid.* 10-11).

In the face of overwhelming homeland crisis, Anil only values the objectivity of reported information and begins her journey towards Sri Lanka with the aim of 'truth seeking'. It is her insistence on finding out the 'truth' that further aggravates the destabilization of self in her

homeland. In a conversation between Sarath, Palipana and Anil, the ‘sense of interpretive indeterminacy’ (Salgado 138) emerges:

Even then there was nothing to believe in with certainty. They still didn’t know what truth was. We have never had the truth. Not even with your work with bones.

We use the bone to search for it. “The truth shall set you free. Believe that. Most of the time in our world, truth is just opinion”[.] (Ondaatje, *Anil’s Ghost* 102)

By quoting the Bible in the context of forensic science, Anil highlights her western training and education, simultaneously complicating the interplay of religion and science. Further, this discussion with Palipana foregrounds the relative nature of ‘truth’ in the face of a crisis. This indeterminacy of ‘truth’ in her homeland complicates her position as a scientist who has a rational conception of truth: she can neither be objectively sure of the findings or her research, nor can she fathom the complexity and gravity of the truth of crimes being committed. Salgado rightly points out, ‘Anil, Sarath, Palipana and Ananda are all in search of the “truth” and casual connections appear radically uncertain. Violence is disturbingly anonymous – neither perpetrators nor victims are easy to identify’ (141)

This realization is deeply unsettling for Anil as her previous belief system and certitudes are gradually eroded through her professional interactions in her homeland. The text highlights her discomfort: ‘She needed communication with the outside world. There was too much solitude in her head. Too much Sarath. Too much Ananda’ (Ondaatje, *ibid.*176). Amidst the chaos of innumerable deaths and silenced voices, Anil is insistent on unravelling Sailor’s death through forensic science. She believes that by identifying Sailor, she can establish a link connecting these innumerable murders: ‘Who was he [Sailor]? This representative of all those lost voices. To give him a name would name the rest’ (*ibid* 56).

Anil’s approach towards Sailor’s skeleton privileges a rational Western framework that foregrounds nomenclature, identification and an empirical inquiry that uncritically applies her forensic training to the chaotic situation in her homeland. She reiterates her teacher’s dictum, ‘One village can speak for many villages, one victim can speak for many victims’ (*ibid.*172), thus applying western epistemic frameworks of assessment and statistical rubrics to a place she is just beginning to ‘re-learn’. In so doing, Anil tends to oversimplify the realities of war,

using and applying foreign knowledge or values to her crisis-stricken homeland. Derrickson also argues that the 'domestic and political situation' of Sri Lanka is unrecognized and unidentified by Anil, who lacks 'a proper understanding of the context of the domestic and political situation' (141).

Anil's irreverence towards homeland realities redefines her prodigal identity so much so that accusations are hurled at her of being a 'visiting journalist' (Ondaatje, *Anil's Ghost* 27), and therefore not being able to understand that 'it's different here. Dangerous. Sometimes the law is on the side of power not truth' (ibid.44). Even Sarath constantly reminds her of her incapacity to understand her homeland: 'You [Anil] know I[Sarath] would believe your arguments more if you lived here. You can't just slip in, make a discovery and leave' (Ondaatje, *Anil's Ghost* 44). She is constantly reminded of her disembeddedness within her homeland even in her professional space. Critics like Victoria Burrows have also pointed out that Anil displays a lack of 'intimate connection to localized trauma' (171) and is not able to fathom the intensity of public chaos and private woes in the homeland. Gamini, Sarath's brother, analyzes Anil's position of superficial engagement and the freedom to leave the war-stricken homeland, and provides a 'meta-commentary on the novel's status as a cultural witness to political events' (Salgado 137):

American movies, English books...remember how they all end? Gamini asked that night, "The American or the Englishman gets on the plane and leaves. That's it. The camera leaves with him. He looks out of the window at Mombasa or Vietnam or Jakarta, some place now he can look at through the clouds. The tired hero. A couple of words to the girl besides him. He's going home. So the war, to all purposes, is over. That's enough reality for the West. It's probably the history of last two hundred years of Western political writing. Go Home. Write a book. Hit the circuit"[.] (Ondaatje, *Anil's Ghost* 282)

Gamini's observations reveal that, like a 'foreign celebrity', Anil's involvement in her crisis-stricken homeland symbolizes a detached, almost superficial engagement that ensures her professional identity remains unaffected in the process, thereby questioning her return and the extent of her involvement and awareness about her homeland. The text informs us that as the situation worsens she realizes 'she wouldn't be staying here much longer, there was no wish

in her to be here any longer' (ibid.283). Her ability to immediately cut cords with the crisis foregrounds Anil's withdrawal as symptomatic of a fragile relationship between the returnee and her homeland. Minoli Salgado informs us that in an interview Ondaatje also reflects upon Anil's position as the 'returning stranger', offering a telling insight into the politics underpinning his own strategic location:

You have someone who is part of the country, and in a way, has to betray it. It is an odd state to be in, blowing the whistle on your home country. What exactly is the morality? What is your responsibility to the place you come from? Obviously that is something that concerns me. (qtd. in Salgado146)

Ondaatje problematizes the 'odd state' of Anil's position in Sri Lanka by invoking a tension between her professional duties and her personal native affiliations, a conflict that the text constantly plays up and leaves unresolved. In fact, Ondaatje's statement and questions serve as a 'meta-commentary' (Salgado's phrase) upon his own act of writing a political novel about his homeland; a tenuous morality that he understands as complex and unsettling. The politics of diasporic positioning in the West and writing about the grief-stricken realities of the homeland problematizes Ondaatje's position in a way that resonates with Anil's awkward position as a UN forensic expert investigating and confronting the gruesome realities of her homeland. Moreover, Anil's downright refusal to accept or acknowledge her prodigal status and her ability to leave her homeland amidst a crisis interrogates her prodigal status in order to show how the absence of a filial framework and a professionally motivated return deconstructs Anil's prodigal identity. Anil's inability to re-establish a bond with her native place in terms of language and principles of truth and trust reflects Anil's resistance towards a coherent sense of belonging within her homeland. The text concludes by showing Anil's departure from her homeland and her journey towards her impending forensic assignment in another country, thereby highlighting Anil's lack of intimate connection within the homeland and her estrangement from the people and environment she once belonged to. In so doing, the text not only redefines Anil's diasporic identity during and after her return, it also problematizes Anil's sense of belonging. In a way, *Anil's Ghost* captures and represents an emergent, contemporary narrative of returning to a homeland, deconstructing essentialized

notions of belonging by analyzing and representing diasporic identities that are redefined after the journey of return is actualised.

## **Conclusion**

In my analysis of both the texts, I hope to have shown that Ondaatje's representation of diasporic return is deeply complex and provokes a rigorous engagement with the politics of narrating home and the past. In the memoir, *Running in the Family*, it is the author who takes a personal journey back to homeland, whereas in the novel, *Anil's Ghost*, the public and the private are intertwined through Anil's homewards journey. In exploring the narrator's journey towards homeland in *Running in the Family*, I have shown that the overwhelming stress on genealogical recovery enables Ondaatje to negotiate this sense of a conflicting positionality within his homeland. As a result, the antithetical pulls of 'prodigal' and 'foreigner' statuses build up a productive tension that rearticulates the polemics of diasporic return and foreground a fragile sense of belonging for the returnee. Through this space of dialogue and interaction between these distinct diasporic identities, Ondaatje manages to redefine concepts of 'return' and alienation' within the homeland and to build up new ways to understand homeland and the tenuous relationship for the diasporic returnee.

In the second part of this chapter, I have argued that Anil's search for the 'truth' further disrupts her 'connection' with her homeland and further thwarts her already fraught sense of belonging. Therefore, on the one hand, where Ondaatje has represented his return and prodigal status as stemming from a compulsive destabilizing of the returning self,<sup>39</sup> in *Anil's Ghost* Anil's return is defined by her inability to understand and communicate in her mother tongue and by the way she uncritically applies Western values of science to the realities of a war-stricken homeland. As a result, in *Running in the Family*, Ondaatje recognizes the ambivalence of prodigality and the foreigner status, whereas Anil completely refutes the prodigal status.

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<sup>39</sup>Critics have contrasted Anil's withdrawal from the homeland after this crisis with the opening scenes of the novel in which she is describing her experience in Guatemala where she religiously toiled with families in order to arrive at a sense of closure and grief. The narrative shows us that Anil is in a position that allows her to choose an adopted country of her choice and thus enables her to preserve her anonymity and alienation in the homeland (Cook 20, Steals 33-35)

Ondaatje has successfully managed to adopt a more deconstructive approach towards analyzing return narratives and has been able to interrogate key ideas of 'diasporic return' and 'prodigality' through these texts. As a result, the notion of 'belonging' and 'homecoming' are discursively interrogated through these texts, so as to critically probe the contemporaneity of return narratives.

## Chapter 5

### Migration and Metamorphosis in Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988)

Rushdie's popular and controversial text, *The Satanic Verses*, is a useful novel to begin my analysis of migrancy in the host nation, as *The Satanic Verses* reorients the diasporic gaze from the homeland to the host nation, so as to engage with the postcolonial journey of migrants in the host land. Rushdie's re-presentation of immigrants, their post-colonial identification within the host land and their journey of migration are narrated through stories in *The Satanic Verses*. Moreover, the overwhelming politics of the reception of this novel in itself demands a reassessment of the global politics and emergent diasporic subjectivities that define contemporary narratives of the migrant's relationship with the host land.

Spivak, in her essay on Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, begins by stating that 'In the first part of my paper, I will attempt the impossible: a reading of *The Satanic Verses* as if nothing had happened since late 1988' (Spivak 219).<sup>40</sup> Temporarily trying to analyse the 'impossible' and offering a literary analysis of the text discreet from the knowledge of the cultural and political reception of Rushdie's novel, Spivak is aware of the enormity of the task. She points out that the 'cultural politics' (ibid.) of the debate between 'free speech and secularism Vs Islam' that has been the context for the Rushdie Affair has inevitably led to the 'impossibility' of disassociating the political and cultural history from this text.

My analysis works from a similar premise. My chapter attempts to disassociate the political contexts of the Rushdie Affair from the novel and understand it by largely concentrating on the migrant characters in the novel and their journey of metamorphosis. Having said that, I am very aware that one cannot overlook the politics of the sensationalism that has surrounded the novel and Rushdie after the fatwa, and hence I begin the chapter by analysing the reception of

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<sup>40</sup>Spivak's essay *Reading The Satanic Verses* is one of the most engaging analyses of how postcolonial discourses of representation and intellectual positioning wrestle with the political realities of the globalizing world. The essay adopts the deconstructivist approach towards the Rushdie affair, trying to negotiate a dialogue between the 'Khomeini anti-democratic, anti-enlightenment' fundamentalism and the 'Western martyrship for freedom' (Spivak 221-24). She argues that this context has become the mainstay of the debate surrounding the novel, but taking a step outside it might just be the kind of literary investigation the text deserves.

the text and then intervening in existing scholarship on the subject by focussing on the representation of the migrants<sup>41</sup>. In the first part of the chapter, I will study the popular and journalistic reception of *The Satanic Verses*, focussing on the East Vs West dynamic, and then nuance the debate by looking at critical reception that has addressed migrancy as a central theme in the text. I will show that this aspect of reception needs crucial attention as it foregrounds a third dimension to the binary of East/West reception. I will then connect it to the larger part of the essay that analyses the representation of the migrants in the text, especially the two protagonists, Saladin Chamcha and Gibreel Farishta.

At this point, it needs to be pointed out that, unlike the other chapters in the thesis where ‘diasporic subject’ is the most commonly-used terminology, I tend to repeatedly use the term migrant with reference to Gibreel and Saladin. This is primarily due to the fact that Rushdie himself describes the text as ‘a migrant’s-eye view of the world...written from the very experience of uprooting, disjuncture and metamorphosis (slow or rapid, painful or pleasurable) that is the migrant condition’ thereby underlining Saladin and Gibreel’s identity as that of a migrant in the host nation (Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands* 394). Moreover, as Susheila Nasta also highlights, Rushdie’s representation of both characters acutely suggests a sort of disembeddedness, as they ‘do not belong to any community. They do not belong either in Brickhall or the pastiche representations of the media and film world...[therefore they] exist ultimately in a more threatening and postmodern migrant world’(160). Hence, unlike Saleem in *Midnight’s Children*, who is firmly embedded within the social community life of homeland, Rushdie manages to explore the issues of migrancy through Saladin and Gibreel’s dislocatedness within their host country.

In this chapter, I will show that this migrant’s identity, represented through Gibreel and Saladin, is dramatized through metaphors of metamorphosis. I will show that these metaphors

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<sup>41</sup> The term ‘fatwa’, as it is used in the media, indicates a death sentence that has been dealt to someone or a group of people. The Islamic origins of this term suggest that the term was originally used as an Islamic legal pronouncement, issued by an expert in religious matters. In the case of Rushdie’s novel, Khomeini’s statement of fatwa was issued on 14 February 1989 in the form of a long sermon. The autumn of 1988 saw the beginning of a tumultuous era of political and religious debate after the publication of *The Satanic Verses* in the same year. Muslims in the British city of Bradford declared the book blasphemous and subsequently burned several copies of the text. Following this episode, in 1989, Ayatollah Khomeini, the religious leader of Iran, declared the death sentence on Rushdie. The fatwa stirred an outcry from the protectors of religion for whom Rushdie became the devilish blasphemer of Islam and a demonstration of outrage from Rushdie’s supporters who boycotted censorship and advocated freedom of speech. The fiery protests were subsequently amplified through media coverage which gave both these sections conservative monolithic identities and further solidified the debate between them.



are decisive for an analysis of the novel, as they allow for an understanding the act of migration as one of metamorphosis, from physical deformation and marginalization to renewed agency and self-assertion. In this manner, I will show that the text engages with the boundaries of the mutated identity of the migrant so as to show that the process of the metamorphosis of the migrant redefines their relationship with the host land.

### **Migrant and Metamorphosis: Understanding Reception and Representation**

Interestingly, the first journalistic reviews of *The Satanic Verses* left the 'Islamic' sections virtually unmentioned, and concentrated on the 'immigrant' aspect. Angela Carter in her review in the *Guardian* talks happily about representations of the 'city' in both London and Jahilia, and the transformations that 'expatriates, immigrants, refugees' (np) inflict on it and themselves, concluding that 'you must read this populous, loquacious, sometimes hilarious, extraordinary contemporary novel' (ibid.12).<sup>42</sup> Nisha Puri also praised the novel, saying: 'it would hardly be rash to insist that *Midnight's Children* merely foretold the gusting, profound inventiveness of *The Satanic Verses*'. As for the dream sequences, Puri mentions them as a 'sideways brush with the Word in the Desert or the coming of Islam in the fabled city of Jahilia' (Puri qtd. in Appignanesi & Maitland 10). Soon after, *The Satanic Verses* was swamped with debates about its audience, its conflictual positioning in the media and its status as a literary work. Pre-empting what Huntington in his famous essay called 'The Clash of Civilizations' (1992), *The Satanic Verses* was at the receiving end of a never-ending conflict between freedom of expression and religious (maybe at some level cultural) intolerance. Huntington's analysis builds upon a similar argument: 'the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic'<sup>43</sup>. The great

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<sup>42</sup> Carter's review was published in the *Guardian*, June 23, 1988. The article was titled 'Angels in Dirty Places'.

<sup>43</sup> Samuel Huntington's article was quite a sensational breakthrough in terms of political writing and academic knowledge of world politics. Huntington's argument reinforces the division between civilizations and goes on to demarcate eight crucial civilizations: 'Western Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindi, Slavic-orthodox, Latin-American and possibly African'. Huntington has enumerated the following factors as causes of the clash of civilizations: 'First, differences among civilizations are basic because civilizations are differentiated from each other by history, language, culture, tradition and religion. Second, the world is becoming a smaller place. Due to increasing interactions between people of various civilizations, civilizations' consciousness is being intensified. Third, processes of economic modernization and social change are separating people from their local identities. Fourth, the dual role of the West has enhanced the growth of civilization consciousness'(5-8). The article was revised and expanded upon and was published under the name 'The Clash of Civilizations and Remaking of World Order' in 1996.

divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural...the clash of civilisations will dominate global politics' (22).

Although, on one level, one has to agree with Said's statement that points out that Huntington's argument posits 'civilisations as monolithic and homogenous and he assumes the unchanging character of the duality between us and them' (Said 4), but, on another level, one has to contend that Huntington's essay was clearly influential in terms of its political ramifications and its global currency as a precursor to world events like 9/11 and the bombings of 7/7. Moreover, as Mondal rightly points out, in the context of the Rushdie Affair, Huntington's essay 'gave it a shape and currency, marshalling the amorphous amount of sentiment swirling around "the Rushdie Affair", giving it semblance of coherence, a smattering of contemporaneity, a macro-political context and an aura of authority'(15). As a result, the reception of the novel was further politicised as an inevitable conflict between Western liberalism and Eastern fundamentalism. The discussions around Rushdie's novel were largely built around this polemical play of civilizational differences and religious intolerance.

In fact, as a result, not only did the expression of freedom come to be associated, exclusively, with Western cultures and liberalism as markers of cultural supremacy, this form of reception foregrounded the problematic position of the Asian-British Muslim migrants within Britain, compelling them to take a side and thus making it more difficult for this section of the population to liberally engage with Rushdie's representation of them in the novel. For instance, Shabbir Akhtar in an article that came out in the *Guardian* emphatically stated: 'there is no choice in this matter. Anyone who fails to be offended by Rushdie's book ipso facto ceases to be a Muslim...Those Muslims who find it intolerable to live in United Kingdom[sic]contaminated with the Rushdie Virus need to seriously consider the Islamic alternatives of emigration'(239-40).<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> This article was followed by his book *Be Careful with Muhammed! The Salman Rushdie Affair*, published in 1989. In this book, Akhtar vociferously argues that due to Rushdie's background and knowledge of Islam, his book was 'calculated to shock and humiliate Muslim sensibilities' (Akhtar 20).

As well as journalistic responses, critical commentary also reflected this kind of attack on Rushdie's position and intentions. For instance, Talal Azad targeted Rushdie's position as a celebrated diasporic writer and because, in representing Islam the way he has, Rushdie reiterated Western conceptions about the faith. In a way, he accused him of pandering to a Western audience. Although this line of argument is misleading, as it ignores the widespread furore amongst the British Asians and Muslim populations in the West, it shows how the primary focus of reception has been Islam and Rushdie's engagement with it (290-93). Moreover, critics like Mufti, who have attempted to analyse the Rushdie affair in terms of a broader debate about the meaning of Islam and political ideology, have inadvertently focussed on Rushdie's representation of religion and have argued that the controversy that followed Rushdie's novel is an 'accurate indication of the anger generated by its insistence on a sweeping re-arrangement and rethinking of the terms of Muslim public culture' (38-39). Critics like Peter Jones have also attempted to analyse the controversy and the fatwa from a literary standpoint, highlighting Rushdie's portrayal of Islam and how he has been considered 'wrong' in his treatment of it studying historical details and investigating the allegations hurled at the novel (Jones 321). Although, in some ways, the shift has been made, the focus of attention has primarily been on Rushdie's representation of Islam, which has led to shifting the focus from the literary aspects of the novel.

Nonetheless, a few critics like Shailja Sharma, who have extensively focussed on the issue of migrancy in Rushdie's novel, have begun their analysis by stating that there is no avoiding the fact that 'the weary binaries of secularism Vs religion, progress Vs traditionalism, and enlightened elite Vs uneducated masses were dutifully evoked and underlying them all were all the stereotypes of West Vs East, [or] the determinedly Orientalist character of the diatribes' (613). Sharma continues to argue that, despite this controversy, it is imperative to acknowledge that the novel's focus is on the migrant experience and the manner in which ideas of migrancy, home and faith are grappled with in the host land. She invokes Rushdie's own statement about the novel through which Rushdie has suggested that the novel is primarily about migrants and their problems in the host country:

Standing at the centre of the novel is a group of characters most of whom are British Muslims, or not particularly religious persons of Muslim background, struggling with

just the sort of great problems that surround the book, problems of hybridization and ghettoisation, of reconciling the old and the new...*The Satanic Verses* celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combination of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs[.] (Ibid.)

Bhabha also suggests that the text's engagement with the representation of diasporic populations leads it to more trouble: 'the central problem in *The Satanic Verses*...is Rushdie's painful and problematic encounter with the most intractable and intimate area of his imaginative life. What the book uniquely reveals a life precariously on the cultural and political margins of modern society, where once we could believe in the comforts and continuities of tradition, today we must face the responsibilities of cultural translation' (225). As a result, Bhabha argues that:

The conflict of cultures and community around *The Satanic Verses* has been mainly represented in spatial terms as binary geopolitical polarities – Islamic fundamentalism Vs. Western literary modernists, the quarrel of the ancient (ascriptive) and modern (ironic) metropolitans. This obscures the anxiety of the irresolvable borderline culture of hybridity that articulates its problems of identification and its diasporic aesthetic in an uncanny, disjunctive temporal that is at once, the time of cultural displacement and the space of the untranslatable[.] (Ibid.)

Bhabha acknowledges the fact that Rushdie engages with the boundaries of cultural translations by introducing migrancy as the core concern. In fact, Rushdie's portrayal of migrant hood in terms of the identity crisis of the migrants and assimilation conflicts in the host land further unravel the complexities of cultural translation. Bhabha highlights Rushdie's representation of the transgressive capacity of migrancy and the need to address this aspect in academic scholarship. Morton also builds upon this analysis and suggests that *The Satanic Verses* 'seeks to interrogate the dichotomy between the civilisations of the West and the so-called Islamic world', by foregrounding this third dimension of migrancy in the Western metropolis (67).

By looking at some of the above-mentioned journalistic and critical responses, one can observe the representation of the migrant in the text needs much more critical attention, especially to contextualize it within the politics of migrant hood in the UK, and the novel's engagement with this theme. Thus, instead of reifying the binaries of East/West, liberalism Vs conservatism, that are achieved by 'allowing one form of cultural hysteria (the Fatwa) to be narcissistically mirrored by another (the West as a putative seat for Liberty)' (Suleri 200), more attention should be focussed on Rushdie's representation of migrant identities and how the identities of the migrant are expressed through metaphors of metamorphosis in the text.

The opening of the novel introduces the audience to the themes of metamorphosis and migration as inextricably intertwined with each other: 'Just before the dawn one winter's morning, New Year's day or thereabouts, two real-fully grown, living men fell from a great height...out of thin air'(Rushdie 1).<sup>45</sup>With the allusions to the transition of the annual cycle, the beginning of the New Year, to overemphasize of the fluidity of the airspace, the opening scene dramatizes the process of migration through overt and cinematic tropes of metamorphosis and transition. The fall is associated with the metamorphosis, foregrounding a change in the people's essence: 'Higher Powers had taken an interest, it should have been obvious to them both, and such Powers (I am, of course, speaking of myself) have a mischievous, almost a wanton attitude to tumbling flies. And another thing, let's be clear: great falls change people' (Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* 133). Furthermore, this dynamic between emigration and their fall suggests permeability and deterritorialization of notions of self and identity that get expressed through metamorphosis. In an interview with Sean French, Rushdie reiterates this idea of impermanence of identity and transformation:

Sean: "Why do the characters change so much?"

Rushdie: "That really is at the heart of the novel. Do we change our natures or do we in some essential way remain the same under all the pressures, whether we actually grow horns or not? I'm not sure myself. I feel different things on different days that are one of the problems of having multiple natures. But certainly the sense of a

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<sup>45</sup> Gibreel and Saladin fall from the airplane Bostan 420. Fischer and Abedi draw a comparison between the Bostan hijacking in the novel and a real-life hijacking that occurred in which 'AIR India Flight 420... was blown up from Canada en-route to England by Sikh terrorists in revenge of for the Indian government's 1984 Bluestar invasion of the Golden Temple in Amritsar' (Fischer 420). For further analysis, see Fischer, *Debating Muslims*.

homogenous, self-contained character is something I can't accept any more. The way I look at a person now is composed of all sorts of irreconcilable elements, and I'm getting more and more interested in writing about them[.]” (Interview in Lisa &Maitland 9)<sup>46</sup>

This dichotomy of ‘do we change our natures or do we in some way remain the same’ reiterates the classical metaphor of metamorphosis. The etymology of the term ‘metamorphosis’ can be traced back to late Middle English, from the word ‘metamorphein’, which means to ‘transform or change shape’. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines metamorphosis as ‘the change of form or nature of a thing or a person into a completely different one’. The term also boasts a classical literary lineage from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and *The Golden Ass* by Apuleius. Both classical texts are quoted in Rushdie’s novel to provide a relevant context to the connection between the migrant’s condition and the metaphors of metamorphosis. The misadventures of the protagonist Lucius (who has the same name as the author) in *The Golden Ass* provides the basic theoretical framework of a fantastic plot in which the first-person narrator and protagonist Lucius, who, after being changed into a monkey by a miscarriage of magic, manages to return to his shape of a man.<sup>47</sup> This form of metamorphosis, of complete transformation, underlines the journey of Rushdie’s protagonist Saladin Chamcha who undergoes a similarly degrading grotesque satanic goat transformation.

The text elucidates this Lucretian metaphor of metamorphosis through the metropolitan experiences of Saladin Chamcha, a voice-over artist whose arrival in the metropolis with his assimilationist immigrant attitude is translated into his grotesque, physical transformation. On his second entry into the ‘dream vilayet’ (Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* 37) Saladin is taken into custody from Rosa Diamond’s house, and it is at this instant that his experience of brutal marginalization begins<sup>48</sup>. Not only does this particular moment in the text highlight the monstrosity inflicted on the immigrant by the police and other state agencies, it also reflects upon the ramifications of a grotesque metamorphosis and demonization. Despite the absurd

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<sup>46</sup> An excerpt from the interview is available in Lisa Appignanesi and Sarah Maitland, *The Rushdie File* (1989).

<sup>47</sup> See Lucius Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*. Trans. R.G. Walsh. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

<sup>48</sup> The text tells the readers that Saladin was born in Bombay, but educated in England, and he ends up living there for several years as he wishes to remain away from the controls of his father and detests the chaotic Indian life. As a result, he marries an Englishwoman and becomes a voice-over artist. At the point where the novel begins, in *medias res*, Saladin is returning from India after having a very painful encounter with his father.

humour of the situation in which he is described as having hairy goat legs, a tail and an oversized phallus, Saladin Chamcha's slow mutation into a demonic half-man, half-goat figure is not viewed as anything alien or unnatural by the police. In fact, they display a visible sense of casual acceptance of this metamorphosis. Chamcha asks the other immigrants in the detention centre about the Police's casual behaviour and he is told:

"There's a woman over that way," it said, "who is now mostly water buffalo. There are businessmen from Nigeria who have grown sturdy tails. There is a group of holidaymakers from Senegal who were doing no more than changing planes when they were turned into slippery snakes. I myself am in the rag trade; for some years now I have been a highly paid male model, based in Bombay, wearing a wide range of suiting's and shirting also. But who will employ me now?" he burst into sudden and unexpected tears...

"But how they do it?" Chamcha wanted to know.

"They describe us," the other whispered solemnly. "That's all. They have the power of description, and we do succumb to the pictures they construct" [...] (Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* 168)

This exchange between Saladin and the nurse reiterates the key theoretical paradigms that Said laid out in *Orientalism* (1978). The discussion of how the dominant Western culture constructs an alien image of the 'other' within the discourse of knowledge and control over them underlines Saladin's realization that the power of description lies in the hands of the British (Said, *Orientalism* 23-35).

Through this scene, the novel is able to establish a hierarchy between the migrant and the host community, foregrounding that the power of description in the form of institutionalized racism that literalizes that the dominant regimes of representation, who have the 'power to make people see and experience (themselves) as the "other"' (Hall, *Questions of Cultural Identity* 394). Moreover, through this incident, Saladin is able to understand his demonization and the dominant host society's unchallenged power to ascribe images and attributes to the migrant. In a way, his metamorphosis enables the text to foreground the conflicted

relationship between the migrant and the host land, subtly indicating the established power hierarchies that objectify, demonize and alienate the migrant.

On the other hand, the novel's other protagonist, Gibreel Farishta, undergoes metamorphosis in a way that follows a pattern of identity doubling or reduplication. He follows the model of Ovid's theory of metamorphoses that is based on the irreversibility of the process of change. In an interview with the London Consortium, Rushdie eulogizes the impact of this classical text in his novel:

*Metamorphoses* was quite useful. It's one of my favourite books and after all this is a novel about metamorphosis. It's a novel in which people change shape, and which addresses the great questions about a change of shape, about change, which were posed by Ovid: about whether a change in form is a change in kind. Whether there is an essence in us that survives transmutation...the book discusses that, it uses the ideal of physical metamorphosis in order to discuss that[.] (55)

Gibreel's metamorphosis follows Ovid's trajectory of transformation to a more pronounced spiritual change, in contrast to Saladin's drastic physical transmogrification. Gibreel's new-found angelic self and the halo on his head suggest a very superficial transformation in which the essence of identity is retained. After a mysterious disease, Gibreel constructs a dream world, which he frequents while assuming the mythological personalities of the Archangel Gabriel, Mohammed, God and Shaitan/Satan. In this way, his identity begins to multiply as he assumes the position of dreamer, the spectator and the subject of his dreams, all at once.

Within this dream sequence the play between these representations of the reduplication of his identity furthers the urgency of metamorphosis in the text. Apart from this hallucinating existence, Gibreel's dreams also conjure up the imagery of a dream city, Jahilia, in which the context and setting blends in characteristics of various metropolitan cultures. The dream-like 'hot certainties' of Jahilia, a city made through the 'shifting sands of the dessert' (Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* 370), disillusion Gibreel. He is not able to differentiate between his dream episodes and his real life in London and as a result he enters a state of 'paranoid schizophrenia' (ibid. 429). Gibreel's dreamscape reflects upon his growing religious metamorphosis, and he is unable to reconcile his contradictory identities. Rushdie also



comments on this widening chasm of Gibreel's metamorphosis by signalling an impending identity crisis: 'He can neither return to the love of God, nor succeed in replacing it by earthly love' (398).

Rushdie's representation of metamorphosis and the physicality of transition are reflected through his use of magic realism – which combines heightened language with elements of the surrealism through this literalization of metaphors. Furthermore, through this magic-realistic use of metaphor, Rushdie explores the ongoing conflict between reality and fiction. Seminck also contends that Rushdie 'consciously exploits and even enhances the tension between the text's evident fictionality and the reader's knowledge that it does deal with real-life entities all the same' (30). Through this technique of magic realism, Rushdie is able to present and explore the metamorphosis of Saladin and Gibreel. The physical transmogrification of both characters, and the episode in the prison and van, highlight the overlap of realism and fiction, enabling the narrative to engage with migrant presence and identity in the host land in a novel way. Moreover, it can be asserted that metamorphosis becomes one of the most rigorous metaphors, visualizing the operation of the colonial discourse, racism, and religious discourse on the one hand, and the migrant's disturbing and conflicted relationship with the host nation on the other. Hence, through this magic-realist technique Rushdie is able to build an effective means to offer a satirical, sometimes humorous and exaggerated, commentary upon the xenophobic and racist discourse in the host nation.

Rushdie's elaborate use of metamorphosis broadly represents the migrant's survival in the new host land, which is dramatized through this transcending of physical, geographical and personal boundaries of self and identity. Their borderline existence that results in a doubling of identities, regeneration and impermanence is overtly dramatized through metaphors of metamorphosis. The novel also elaborates this theme through Sufiyan's long speech:

"questions of mutability of the essence of self", he began, awkwardly, "has long been subject of profound debate. For example, great Lucretius tells us, in *De Rerum Natura*, this following thing: *quodcumque Suismutatum finibus exit, continuo hoc morsestilius quod fuit ante*. Which being translated, forgive my clumsiness, is "Whatever by its changing goes out of its frontiers," – that is, bursts its banks, – or, maybe, breaks out of its limitations, – so to speak, disregards its own rules, but that is

too free, I am thinking... “that thing”, at any rate, Lucretius holds, “by doing so brings immediate death to its old self”...He avers thus: “As yielding wax” – heated, you see, possibly for the sealing of documents or such, – “is stamped with new designs And changes shape and seems not still the same, Yet is indeed the same, even so our souls,” – you hear, good sir? Our spirits! Our immortal essences! – Are still the same forever, but adopt in their migrations ever-varying forms. He was hopping, now, from foot to foot, full of the thrill of the old words. “For me it is always Ovid over Lucretius,” he stated. “Your soul, my good poor dear sir, is the same. Only in its migration it has adopted this presently varying form.” (Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* 252)

This speech re-emphasizes Rushdie’s concept of change as every metamorphosis symbolizes a rebirth, and, therefore, the question of metamorphosis should not or, cannot be, limited within the debates on the change of body or mind. In fact, the text foregrounds the idea that metamorphosis should be perceived as the means to create newness, to be able to deconstruct and redefine the habitual ways of thinking. The text shows that although both Gibreel and Chamcha experience unpleasant and unsettling forms of transformations, Chamcha is able to overcome his confusion and resume his life. However, Gibreel continues in a downward spiral towards insanity until he finally kills both himself and his lover Alleluia Cone. Therefore, in contrast to Saladin, who is presented as ‘a creature of *selected* discontinuities, a *willing* re-invention...Gibreel, for all his stage-names and performances, and in spite of born-again slogans, new beginning and metamorphosis; has wished to remain, to a large degree, *continuous* – that is, conjoined to and arising from the past’(Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands* 427).

At the more obvious level, it can be seen that Rushdie presents Gibreel’s metamorphosis as elusive and socially reclusive, whereas Saladin’s transformations are public, vivid and intercultural. Further, Gibreel’s metamorphosis can be read as a resistance to mutation and hence a failure to regenerate new identities. On the contrary, Chamcha’s Kafkaesque transformation into a half-devil, half-animal figure and his acceptance of this new identity foreground new ways of embracing hybridity and productivity of cultures. Srinivas Aravamudan also views the ‘Saladin-Gibreel mutability as an Ariel-Caliban binary – the

former parts of the binary as being positive (malleable), whereas the latter as negative (stubborn)' (5-7).

This is why Rushdie shows that Saladin's journey of metamorphosis, which is constructed through transformation, negotiation and the acceptance of hybrid positionality, is able to articulate a space for him and redefine his identity within the host land. The narrative allows Saladin to purposefully question hegemonic systems of representation in the host land. For instance, in the scene in Club Hot Wax, Saladin and other migrants decide to melt down the waxwork of a reviled public figure. This club includes life-size wax effigies of prominent British parliamentarians, famous migrants of the past as well as anti-colonial and civil-rights activists. The text shows that most nights the wax figure of Margaret Thatcher is chosen from the 'tableau of hate-figures' (Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* 293). Andrew Teverson also states that 'Saladin takes an educational Odyssey... to the Shandaar cafe... where effigies of racist politicians such as Oswald Mosley and Enoch Powell are ritually melted on a nightly basis, and where wax effigies of Asian and Afro-Caribbean men and women who have made a significant contribution to British culture "since-de-Rome-occupation" are reversed' (Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* 148). This can be interpreted as a significant indicator of crucial migrant intervention, through which hegemonic British systems of meanings are disrupted by the migrants. Katherine Donn agrees, when she states that metamorphosis enables the migrants 'not only to cross but also to temporarily displace borders; their chimerical forms interact with the narrative structure and multiple voices of the text to question the value of cultural hierarchies and divides'(5). In this way, Rushdie shows that metamorphosis acts like a defining 'transformatory force, which topples hierarchies and binary oppositions' (ibid. 102).

In this way, the use of metamorphosis, especially in the case of Saladin, works to question cultural constructions of rigidified diasporic identities. It foregrounds openness and advocates change; it is a mode which emphasizes creative critique and of re-invention.

## Conclusion

In the article ‘A Bit of This and a Bit of That: Rushdie’s Newness’, Quadri Ismail explains that *The Satanic Verses* is a book about ‘the loss of identity and certainties, and the search for replacements... About how – and this is raised, rather than explored – if cultures “leak” into one another, instead of imposing one upon the other as they now do, new and hopefully better cultures, better and more tolerable ways of life, could come into being’ (118). The two central characters of *The Satanic Verses*, Saladin Chamcha and Gibreel Farishta, represent this ‘leak’ of cultures through two possible trajectories of metamorphosis. In comparing their journey of metamorphosis, I have shown the different and divergent ways Rushdie engages with the notions of transformation of self and identity. The use of metamorphosis in the text not only signifies transcending physical and spiritual boundaries, it also reflects upon the identity crisis and the fluid self of the migrant in the host land. In a way, Rushdie is able to show how the journey of metamorphosis, physical or spiritual, initiates and sustains a connection between the migrant and the host land. Hence, Rushdie is able to show that by becoming the subject of mutation, the text engages with the boundaries of the mutated identities of the migrant so as to show that the process of metamorphosis of the migrant redefines their identity and their relationship with the host land.

## Chapter 6

### Performance and Generational Identity in Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990)

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated how Rushdie shows that a changing migrant identity is crucially important to the discourse of representing the host land, as the process demands that the migrant intervene in hegemonic cultural practises. This chapter furthers the discourse of representing the migrant's relationship with the host land by exploring diverse migrant identities in Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*. As opposed to Saladin and Gibreel's (both first-generation migrants) dialogical negotiation of migrant identity and host land cultures that reveal to readers the instability and fluidity of their position as migrants in host society, frequently referring back to their cultural roots and origins, exposing themselves to an enduring tension between contrary homelands and a tenuous identity, Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* primarily foregrounds the complex identity negotiations that first- and second-generation diasporic individuals struggle with within the host land.

This puts Kureishi's depiction of diasporic identity at a different angle from other diasporic representations discussed in this thesis, as the diasporic writer's view of the host land is largely mediated through the second-generation British Asian protagonist Karim, for whom Britain is no newly adopted host land, like Britain is for Saladin and Gibreel or, for that matter, how America is for Changez in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Instead, it echoes Kureishi's own place in Britain: 'for me [Kureishi] and the others of my generation born here, Britain was always where we belonged, even when we were told – often in terms of racial abuse – that this was not so' (Kureishi, "Bradford" 135). This is a natural outcome of Kureishi's diasporic positioning as he is able to foreground that, for a second-generation migrant, 'their diasporic identity is a conflicted tenuous zone; one that is wedged between the challenges posed by their parents' notions of home and belonging and by the members of the host community whose historical and nationalist affiliations constantly play against the immigrant's sense of belonging in the host land' (Hussain 40-45).

Although it is a given that Kureishi's text primarily deals with the life and diasporic journey of a half-Indian, half-British boy, Karim, in Britain of the 1980s, this chapter offers a broader

engagement with British Asian migrant identities by showing that Kureishi's representation of the diasporic subject is played out by exploring both the first generation Asian migrant Haroon Amir and his son, Karim Amir.<sup>49</sup> This is achieved by showing how performances and theatre (Haroon's Buddha persona and Karim's acting stints and theatre performances) manage to deconstruct the notions of unified ethnic identities and create new hybrid identities. Through my analysis of Haroon and Karim's performance, I will show that Kureishi is able to highlight their sense of identification and belonging in the host land, so as to foreground the difference in generational positioning and the changing conception of diasporic identity.

In so doing, Kureishi is able to show that, for the first generation migrant Haroon, attempts at assimilation into British society are thwarted, and the only form of stable sense of self identification is granted through a symbolic return to native roots, but for the second-generation diasporic subject Karim, the negotiation of identity is much more complex and conflicted in the host land.

### **Understanding Performance and Inter-Generational Identity: Reception and Representation**

In terms of popular reception, it needs to be highlighted that this novel was adapted into a TV series of the same name, which 'became an established classic of international post-millennial popular culture intimately capturing the "feel" of the times' (Redhead 69). Kureishi and Roger Mitchell, the co-writers of the TV series, stayed loyal to the book and, as a consequence, the TV series was a big success. Naseem Yousaf comments that 'most notably, the TV series successfully captures the atmosphere of the 1970's; the mise-en-scene is full of cultural and period markers' (73). In fact, many journalistic reactions to the series acknowledged that *The Buddha of Suburbia* TV series 'seeped into popular consciousness as the risqué, must-watch TV series of 1993, capturing all the tensions and energy of Thatcherite Britain' (*Telegraph*, Dec. 13, 2012). Having won 'the Whitbread award for best novel in 1990

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<sup>49</sup>The final decades of the twentieth century witnessed an unprecedented inflow of migrants from new commonwealth countries such as India, Pakistan, West Indies and others to England. Karim mentions this migration pattern while talking about his father: 'This was to ensure there would be no confusion between Dad and the swarms of Indian peasants who came to Britain in the 1950s and 1960s...Unlike them, Dad was sent to England by his family to be educated...Like Gandhi and Jinnah before him. Dad would return to India as a qualified and polished English gentleman Lawyer'(Kureishi13).

and sold almost half a million copies the same year' and having been 'translated into twenty more languages' (Moore-Gilbert 189), the literary text too gained immense popularity. The text has been understood as a 'scathing satire on race relations in Britain' (Yousaf 60). This form of satire has been greatly appreciated by many critics and, in fact, the combination of political satire and 'inherent comicality' (Yousaf 34) in the representation of Karim and Haroon's diasporic struggles has added to its popularity.

Even in terms of critical appreciation and analysis, Kureishi's text has been widely read and scrutinised. Migrant identities in general, and Haroon and Karim's relationship with Britain in particular, have been studied from various socio-political perspectives, such as class conflicts, racial struggles, sexual ambivalence and more. For instance, critics like Buchanan, Felski and Ball have addressed this power play between the migrant and the host land by looking at class issues and by arguing that Kureishi's characters always try to expand their sense of self, 'struggling against an original sense of class that they're trying to throw off' (Buchanan 112), foregrounding 'the permeability of class divisions and the new possibilities of social mobility in post war Britain' (Felski 37). These critics have rightly pointed out that Karim's journey from the suburb towards the city contributes to the problematizing of class struggles and social mobility in the text.

Another way in which the migrant relationship with the host land has been analysed is in terms of race and racism. Susie Thomas has commented: 'In all Kureishi's work there is an emphasis on how race can affect class and vice versa. Migrants lose status on arrival in England, like Jeeta, a princess, who is seen as just another "Paki" in a corner shop and looked down on by white Londoners. But Kureishi also shows that upper-class Indians, like Changez, can feel little solidarity with poor immigrants from India, whom they despise for failing to speak English' (74).

Only a few critics like Ranasinha, Nasta and Yousaf have attempted to engage with performance and identity in this text. Ranasinha points out that Haroon's turn towards Eastern wisdom is celebrated and readily accepted by the host society, which can be attributed to the host land's desire to contain the migrant identity within ethnic and oriental stereotypes that they readily ascribe to the migrant. Ranasinha also reiterates a similar argument, as she argues that, initially, Karim is compelled to perform oriental stereotypes without being able to

convincingly identify with the ascribed imagery (63). In other words, Kureishi's construction of Karim's stage performances is done to 'mirror the way society attempts to define racialized minorities in terms of reductive identities' (70). In acknowledging this, Ranasinha recognises that Haroon and Karim's experiments with theatre and acting expose the host land's desire to contain migrant identities and also reflect upon Karim and Haroon's desire to be accepted.

Barbara Korte and Claudia Sternberg also support this analysis, as they argue that the casting of Karim for the roles he is given emphasizes a 'physically harmless but ideologically pernicious form of racism' because during his acting career in the theatre companies, Karim is given roles that are always limited in their definition; he is always 'an "ethnic" character', even if he is cast by directors who 'consider themselves progressive' (187). Although Korte and Sternberg limit their analysis to Karim's performances and acting stints, nonetheless their argument highlights the need to address his positioning as resistant to ethnic stereotyping. Berthold Schoene also pays critical attention to Karim's performances, and argues that by viewing Karim's Mowgli performance as not caricaturist, but as one in which 'Karim [has] become unidentifiable...his indeterminacy questions the conceptual accuracy and purpose of all epistemological attempts at ethnic identification' (112-16). This is why his identity resists all forms of rigidified ethnic identification and he emerges as 'a radically deconstructive presence in a world obsessed with clear-cut definitions of cultural and ethnic identity' (qtd in Moore Gilbert 198). Schoene's analysis highlights Karim's fragile, almost incoherent, sense of identity and belonging. In fact, Schoene highlights the fact that Karim's performance demands a re-assessment of Karim's conceptions about self and the social milieu he is embedded in.

Hence we see that critics recognise and analyse most aspects of migrant identity and the issues of race and class. In fact, Ranasinha and Schoene's analysis interconnects issues of racism, class and performance in a cohesive manner, so as to show Kureishi's representation of theatricality and performance as potentially deconstructive forces. In so doing, they are able to foreground the fact that Kureishi's representation of Haroon and Karim 'uncovers many of the ironies that underlie the British people's recognition of Britain as a multicultural society and of Britons as racially diverse and culturally heterogeneous citizens' (Yousaf 1). In the following pages, I shift the focus from race and ethnicity to analysing these performances



as instrumental in developing diasporic positioning through two generations. This will be done by connecting performative identity with Kureishi's depiction of generational differences through two distinct and conflicted diasporic identities in the host nation.<sup>50</sup> I will conclude by showing that Kureishi uses theatricality and the performance of identity to structurally foreground the changing dynamics of South Asian diasporic identity.

The use of theatricality and performance in the text not only disrupts the power dynamics between the host land and Haroon and Karim (as shown above in the reception section), it also helps to interconnect both their identities and positions, in order to understand South Asian diasporic identity through generations. This framework of performance of identity and display is pivotal to the identities of Karim and Haroon, whose suburban identity is only reinstated and re-articulated through the prism of social performance in the host land. In his seminal sociological work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman argues that identity is projected theatrically in everyday life: 'When an individual plays a part he implicitly requires his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered in front of them' (28). Goffman further points out those performances of a particular identity are not just realized, but also idealized, to be able to show conformity to prevalent societal and cultural norms. This 'performative concept of identity' is illustrated throughout the novel, especially through Haroon and Karim, whose theatrical acts and performances reiterate, to different degrees, their conflicted diasporic identities.

With performance and identity being the central locus in this chapter, it is difficult not to make use of Homi Bhabha's theory of mimicry as well. Bhabha writes:

Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite. This is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference...The effect of mimicry on

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<sup>50</sup>*The Buddha of Suburbia* evidently reflects upon other migrant subjectivities during the course of the narration. Conflicted characters such as Anwer, Jamila, Changez and Tracy all signify diverse migrant subjectivities and exemplify different degrees of political and cultural affiliations with Britain and with their respective homelands. Moreover, the heterogeneity of migrant positioning and experiences is built upon to discursively engage with the changing face of South Asian diasporic culture in England. However, due to the structure and broader arguments of the thesis, the line of argument in this chapter is centrally focused on Haroon and Karim, in order to explore the diversity and difference of two generations of South Asian migrants.

the authority of colonial discourse is profound and disturbing[.] (*The Location of Culture* 86)

Bhabha is convinced that colonial discourses inadvertently rearticulate identities that operate in an 'area between mimicry and mockery, where the reforming, civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double' (ibid.). Bhabha's analysis is fitting for Kureishi's text, as we are confronted with Haroon and Karim, who are not only well aware of their hybrid ethnic identity, but who, through their performance and acting; foreground varied mimic identities and diasporic positioning in the host land.

For instance, Haroon Amir, Karim's father, whose 'radical trajectory of growth' gives the book its title (Stein 117), finds many inventive ways of dealing with his identity in Britain. He is initially described by Karim as wearing 'a black polo-neck sweater, a black imitation-leather jacket and grey Marks and Spencer cords', but who becomes someone who comes home in his 'bespoke Burton's suit, a yellow waistcoat with a watch on a chain... and stripped tie in pink and blue with a knot as fat as a bar of soap' as he turns into 'a porky little Buddha', someone who is no longer plain but 'vibrant' and 'life itself' (Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia* 48,84).<sup>51</sup>

By embracing the stereotypical ideas of Indianness that the white British people have and with help from his mistress Eva, who plays a large role in his Buddha transformation, Haroon uses these stereotypes to develop the persona of an Eastern spiritual mentor. As the narrator says at the beginning of the novel, Haroon 'spent years trying to be more of an Englishman' and 'to be less risibly conspicuous' but during his Buddha phase he suddenly starts to put his Indianness 'back in spade loads' by 'hissing and exaggerating his Indian accent' (ibid.21). By indulging in eastern meditative techniques and insisting: 'I will never be anything but an Indian' (263), Haroon indulges in mimicking what he perceives to be an authentic Indian identity. Hence, as Schoene observes, 'forced 20 years previously to mimic stereotypical Englishness in order make a living in Britain', Haroon, 'now prospects on what he can retrieve of his Indian past, conflating it with Eva and her friends' spurious conception of

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<sup>51</sup> As Karim puts it, 'perhaps Daddio [Haroon] was really a magician' because he 'transformed himself by the bootlaces... from being an Indian in the Civil Service who was always cleaning his teeth with Monkey Brand black toothpowder manufactured by Nogi & Co. of Bombay, into the wise adviser he now appeared to be' (Kureishi 31). In other words, Haroon becomes visibly different as he starts to wear gaudy clothes and appears more energetic.

Indianness' (116). In showing this, Kureishi foregrounds the fact that Haroon occupies a liminal space between his Asian self and British identity. But rather than negotiating his identity within this space, Haroon adopts a persona constructed by, and even acceptable to, the nativist narrative.

In so doing, Haroon counters what Hall addresses as 'pressures of assimilation', by assuming the 'fixed and pre-existent essences or characteristics' (28) of an Eastern spiritual guru/teacher. Through this impersonation, the text highlights the fact that Haroon is firmly trapped in his hybrid identity and lives what McLeod calls the 'border life' – in other words, he is stuck 'on the margins of different nations, in-between contrary homelands' (217). Haroon comes to occupy a conflicted position, one that exposes his fraudulent persona and emphasizes his turn to native roots as symbolic and fraught. Hence, through this impersonation, the text foregrounds the fact that this employed device of imitation/mimicry deconstructs Haroon's positioning in the host land, interrogating his longing for a pure native identity.

It is worth pointing out that the descriptions of Haroon and his journey as the eponymous Buddha figure are narrated through Karim. The novel is told in the first person and it is a *Bildungsroman*, coming-of-age novel that recounts the growth of the central character and narrator through his adolescence into adult age. The coming-of-age novel narrated through the protagonist's eyes comes to represent his negotiation with identity with a postmodern spin. In fact, Karim's narration of his life and struggles sustains itself by the skilful deployment of humour, the constant caustic and satirical view of socio-political settings and the juxtaposition of multiple voices in the text. The use of the first-person narrator creates a privileged relationship between the protagonist, Karim, and the reader. However, according to Brah, this form of narration unsettles the position of the narrator, as it 'continuously interrogate(s) and problematize(s) the very notion of a stable and essential identity by deconstructing the narrator's own position' (14). Although this use of first person invites the audience to identify with Karim, Kureishi immediately exposes the complexity behind Karim's ethnic, national, class, and sexual identity. At the very outset, Kureishi shows that the narrator Karim constantly throws light on the complexity of his own position as the second-generation

diasporic subject, whose class and national and ethnic struggles come to represent the flaws and fraudulence of the larger socio-political context, of which he is a small part.

In fact, Kureishi's representation of Karim's *Bildungsroman* captures what Huggan labels as the 'contradictions of the decade, its often caustic combinations of conservative prudery...of inbred racism and self-congratulatory multicultural openness...[and its accentuation of]provincialism'(The *Postcolonial Exotic* 96-97). These contradictions are nowhere more exemplified than Karim's struggle with theatre and performance. The text tells us that the first acting job that is offered to Karim is to play the character of Mowgli from *The Jungle Book* in a play directed by Shadwell. Karim's initial resistance to play a colonized character is met with reassuring faith by Shadwell in Karim's 'native roots'. Karim's resistance is borne out of his diasporic positioning and his relationship with Britain as 'home', unlike Haroon's position as a first-generation migrant. Ballard also highlights that 'the locally-born offspring(of first generation migrants) – have been profoundly affected by their exposure to English social, cultural and linguistic conventions: indeed most members of the second generation are just as much at home in British as in South Asian cultural contexts'("The Family in Question" 201).

As a consequence of this, Karim begins to feel stifled when he is demanded to produce 'an authentic accent' (Kureishi 147) and is reminded: 'Karim, you have been cast for authenticity and not for experience' (ibid.). Shadwell's insistence on the authentic accent and Mowgli's body language attempts to designate rigid stereotypical ethnic representations, demanding of Karim that he exclusively, and unwillingly, build on his Asian heritage. Moore-Gilbert furthers this analysis by pointing out that 'It is Shadwell... who is responsible for Karim's demeaning mock-Indian accent and the director's choice that Karim go on stage looking "like a black and white minstrel"'(125). In this regard, Shadwell assumes the position of 'cultural overseer' (Hooks 9), a position that facilitates construction and re-articulation of the images and identities that the host land can ascribe to the migrant. By virtue of his position, Shadwell's focus on the non-existent native accent of Karim highlights his attempts to erase elements of his Suburban accent and upbringing. Karim's experience with Shadwell underlines what Paul Gilroy has identified as 'cultural racism', a form of discrimination premised upon a power relationship based on the perceived cultural practices engaged in by a particular ethnic group (5-7). Through these interactions between Karim and Shadwell,

Kureishi is able to draw a striking satire on the politics of cultural racism in the host nation. In fact, Kureishi further shows that, after a series of performances, Karim begins to understand this objectification and his own discomfort about this overwhelming imposition. This is more acutely reflected in Karim's failure of not being able to understand and replicate Changez's body gestures while playing the role of an immigrant from India, and yet he notices that the British director and the audience 'warmed up to' him:

As I continued, gusts of pleasure lifted me. I was wretched and comic character. The other actors had loaded lines, the many-syllabled political analysis...but it was me the audience warmed up to. They laughed at my jokes, which concerned the sexual ambition and humiliation of an Indian in England [...] (Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia* 220)

In this case, again, what becomes apparent is that the disadvantageous position that is hurriedly ascribed to Karim is based on false appropriation of his native ancestry. Moreover, amidst this struggle for power of representation, Karim is able to establish his incapacity of achieving either form of the visual or bodily aspects of ethnic nativity. Through Karim's attempt to mimic the distant native, Changez, the text is able to deconstruct Karim's own position of ambivalence that renders him incapable of the mimicry. In so doing, the text foregrounds Karim's awareness of the liminality of his position and his inability to fit into categorical ethnic definitions. The text further shows that, unlike Haroon, Karim acknowledges his failure at mimicry and accepts his hybrid positioning as a bi-racial diasporic subject, only to highlight his struggle against imposition of 'colonized false identities... racial clichés and imitated behaviour'(Carey 121).

In the light of this generational difference between Haroon and Karim, Hall's analysis of Kureishi's *My Beautiful Laundrette* is strikingly useful and can be effectively applied to Kureishi's representation of Asian migrant identities in *The Buddha of Suburbia* as well. Hall in his essay 'New Ethnicities' describes Kureishi's cultural representations in *My Beautiful Laundrette* as 'riveting', as they deconstruct the 'essentially good black subject' (in Morley 444). According to Hall, 'the movement from black groups asserting their right to represent themselves and countering negative images with positive ones, to a more complex agenda of a new "politics of representation"', eschews positive images and 'engages rather than

suppresses difference'(ibid.). This entails 'the end of the essential black subject', the idea that a subject is constituted by 'authentic', fixed, pre-existent essences or characteristics. It registers instead 'the recognition of the extraordinary diversity of subjective positions, social experiences and cultural identities which compose the category "black"' (ibid.).

Kureishi, too, foregrounds Haroon's position through rigidified metaphors, highlighting the limited potential of his migrant hood in comparison to a more dynamic engagement with Karim's position. Yousaf also points that the text foregrounds the fact that 'Haroon's generation either attempted to disregard a projected "negative identity" or learned their Otherness in Britain' (46). Even Karim tells us that Haroon, the eponymous Buddha, moves from 'a cage of umbrellas and steely regularity' (Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia* 27), a self-acknowledged 'imagined India' (74). As Karim puts it 'For years they were both happy to live like English men...Now, as they aged and seemed settled here, Anwar and Dad appeared to be returning internally to India, or at least to be resisting the English here' (ibid.74). This phenomenon of 'returning internally to India', at the more obvious level, signifies what Ballard labels as 'undoubtedly partially rooted emotional feelings of nostalgia'(ibid.197) and also denotes a crisis of assimilation and a sense of un-belonging for Haroon.

More than that, it signifies Haroon's turn towards a final, self-sustained assertion of identity, which is achieved through a superficial turn towards stereotypical imagery. Since a physical return is neither possible nor actualized, he recreates it for himself by inventing himself as a Buddhist guru. In other words, 'Haroon starts off as the mimic Englishman, and when this fails, he becomes a mimic Indian' (Schoene 65). In so doing, the text depicts Haroon's attempt at an affirmative, albeit imaginary connection with the homeland culture.

Karim, too, recognises this oddity in Haroon's identity and aptly describes Haroon as 'a renegade Muslim masquerading as a Buddhist' (Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia* 16), reiterating the falsity of this persona and showing that as a 'lapsed Muslim improbably posing as a Buddhist Guru' he is hardly 'authentic in any way' (Ross 239-40). Karim begins to acknowledge that his father's development of the Buddha persona is foundationally fraught and yet it seems to be attracting much attention from the white British community: 'Dad was teaching this several times a week at a nearby Yoga Centre. I'd always imagined that Dad's guru business would eventually fall off in London, but it was clear now that he would never

lack employment while the city was full of lonely, unhappy, unconfident people who required guidance, support and pity' (Kureishi 279). This form of realistic analysis enables Karim to see through Haroon's false persona and also understand the complexity of his own bi-racial, diasporic positioning in the host land.

Karim admits: 'I am often considered to be a funny kind of Englishman... But I don't care – Englishman I am (though not proud of it)' (Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia* 3). Although Karim is quick to point out his hybrid state of identity of being 'English... almost', his repeated use of 'Englishman' stresses his affinity with his British identity. As a result, he claims that if he ever wanted 'an additional bonus of an Indian past, he would have to create it' (ibid. 212-13). Karim Amir's description of 'a proper Englishman – almost' (ibid. 3) 'evidences his hybrid existence and emphasizes the condition of 'an ambivalent cultural attachment' (Stein 12). The fact that he emerged from 'two old histories', Indian and British, places him in a hybrid in-between position which makes him bored and restless very easily: 'Perhaps it is the odd mixture of continents and blood, of here and there, of belonging and not that makes me restless and easily bored' (Kureishi 3). Karim's conflicted and complex diasporic identification marks his heightened sense of awareness about himself, his ethnic lineage and his relationship with Britain.

Hence we see that while Haroon's character exemplifies the instability of an immigrant's identity, as it never stays the same, because it is always in motion, and that there is the possibility of swapping one form of mimicry for another, Karim's identity is defined by his inability to successfully mimic an authentic Asian subject. Karim is involved in a more complex negotiation of identity through which the myriad subjectivities and diverse experiences of evolving as a biracial second-generation child are foregrounded. Like Rushdie's representation of Mishal Sufiyan's position as a British Asian in Britain who 'as Saladin openly admits, is differently constructed from his own. It derives from another story, the story of having lived within the context of the often conflicting signs and shifting cultural codes of an Asian British childhood' (Nasta 177), Karim's strategy of survival is aimed at effecting change from within the geographies of the host land, which comes to redefine the boundaries of his own position. This process also reveals Kureishi's demonstrations of a changing migrant identity from the first-generation Haroon Amir to the second-generation

Karim, locating the first generation migrant as capable of a symbolic return to native moorings, in contrast to Karim, for whom identity politics is more conflicted and tenuous. Perhaps this is why 'Kureishi's choice of Bildungsroman as a genre is particularly significant, given that it is one which insistently presents identity as a developmental, unstable and shifting process' (Moore-Gilbert 127), as this developmental concept of identity is able to reveal the subjective histories of the first- and second-generation diasporic subject and distinguish between their respective historicity and diasporic identifications.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have shown that Kureishi puts the emphasis on individual lives and choices of hybridity. Through Haroon's impersonation of the Buddha and Karim's theatrical performances, Kureishi foregrounds their inability to fit into categorical definitions of ethnicity and migrant hood. I hope to have shown that by positing a journey of growth and change through this inter-generational model of diasporic identity (unravelling through Haroon and Karim), the novel instigates the creation of identities as relational rather than essentialist models. In so doing, the text privileges the migrant's assertion of identity and a hybrid self, addressing the complex dynamics of survival and sustenance within the host nation. In this manner, Kureishi reconfigures Haroon and Karim's ruptured pasts in their living reality and affirm their cultural values and difference. Such recognition and affirmation enables him to reveal the complexity of Haroon and Karim's changing diasporic identity through the generations.

Additionally, this text furthers my engagement with the issues raised in the previous chapter about the migrant's relationship with the host land, and problematizes this relationship by exploring it through two generations. In so doing, Kureishi's text not only exposes the inability of the host land to acknowledge its own failures of mis-representation, it also shows the way diasporic subjects interrogate their own ethnic identities and diasporic disposition only to highlight contemporary politics of generational conflicts and the emergent representations of assimilation and integration (or the lack of it) vis-à-vis the host country.



## Chapter 7

### Deconstructing the Fundamentals: Reading Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* as a 9/11 Immigrant Novel

The last two chapters revealed the process of cultural and social transformation that has been brought about through migrant interventions in the host land, foregrounding the fact that notions of migrant identity and national affiliations are becoming indistinct, ambiguous and complex. In the previous chapter, I showed how Kureishi's novel addresses issues of ethnicity, location and belonging, among others, through first- and second-generation migrants, to decode the politics of living and assimilating in Britain. The fragility of this relationship is scrutinised only to reveal that perceptions of migrant and national identities are unstable and in constant transformation.

This chapter shifts the critique, both geographically and temporally, unlocking the dynamics of the relationship between North America and its South Asian migrant population post-9/11. Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) narrates a tale of disillusionment with America and depicts an eventual return to the homeland, simultaneously foregrounding the complex and messy relationship between the migrant and the host land, and the fading possibility of assimilation and integration in America.

The socio-political context of Hamid's novel, the terrorist attacks in New York on September 11, 2001, radically and almost instantly altered global geo-political equations and the relationship between North America and the Muslim East.<sup>52</sup> Sociologist Pnina Werbner argues that 9/11 was a truly definitive event in terms of redefining the relationship between the US and its South Asian migrants; it was, she argues:

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<sup>52</sup>Less than a month after 9/11, US troops invaded Afghanistan in an attempt to dismantle Al-Qaeda, the terrorist group that claimed responsibility for the attacks, and to remove the Taliban government. About two years later, the United States invaded Iraq and deposed President Saddam Hussein. This invasion was orchestrated to move forth with their mission of the War on Terror. It was believed that Hussein's government was secretly producing weapons of mass destruction (although none were ever found). America's military involvement in Afghanistan turned into the longest-running war in US history. And although formal US combat operations ended in late 2014, it is believed that the US military still has stations in Afghanistan in order to help stem the ongoing Taliban insurgency.

particularly tragic for the Pakistani diaspora because in the decade since the Rushdie affair and the Gulf War, the majority had to move on, away from religious radicalism to more positive activism for multicultural rights. Young South Asian migrants were increasingly taking their full place in society. With the first generation of immigrants at the point of retirement, the days of strangerhood seemed to be over for many. But the radical estrangement that September 11 and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq challenged this path of integration for the next decade, at least in the perception of the majority society[.](1)<sup>53</sup>

The resulting ‘xenophobic and racialized stigmatizing of Muslim diasporas in Europe and America highlighted’, at the obvious level, ‘the vulnerability of diasporas to historical events beyond their control’ (ibid.), and also indicated the development of a self/other discourse according to geographical, racial and religious divisions. Western mass media began to juxtapose the self (the US and its supporters) against the ‘other’ (the Islamic world) to develop the binarism, treating the other as something different (Pei Chen Liao 9-10). This unexpected ‘troubled relationship with the host society, suggesting a lack of acceptance’ (Cohen 26) led diasporic subjects to engage in a broader, deeper examination of their relationship with their host lands. Hence, after 9/11, and as a result of the rhetoric of the ‘War on Terror’, Asian Muslim diasporic subjects began to address the ways in which definitions of home and identity continued to be re-inflected and renegotiated within diasporic writing<sup>54</sup>. Aroosa Kanwal also highlights the importance of migrant narratives about 9/11 by arguing that ‘indubitably, fiction based on the “war on terror” has been undergoing a constant process of evolution over the last decade, and it is important to document the way that Pakistani

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<sup>53</sup>In her brilliant article ‘Diaspora in History: Reflections on 9/11 in the aftermath of the Arab Spring and UK Riots, 2011’ Werbner quotes her earlier essay in which she argued that ‘Most British Muslims in the diaspora witnessed the collapse of the World Trade Centre’s twin towers on television, sitting in their living rooms, with the same helpless sense of horror as Western spectators. As it emerged that an obscure Islamist, Osama Bin Laden, and his Al-Qaeda clandestine global network, were probably responsible for the devastation, it seemed that the clash of civilizations predicted by Huntington between Islam and the West had finally materialized. At that moment diaspora Muslims in the West became symbolic victims of a global mythology, caught in a spiral of alienation and ambivalent identifications that no local protestations of innocence could counter’(4).

<sup>54</sup> The War on Terror was a military campaign waged by the Bush Administration in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks from Al-Qaeda. It was launched on September 20, 2001, in the President’s speech to Congress, in which he stated ‘Our war on terror begins with Al-Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated’ (Bush Addresses Nation, *Washington Post*, September 20, 2001). Cainkar in her study *Global Impacts of September 11* describes how large groups of innocent people were ‘othered’ and targeted so easily that it raised serious concern ‘about the capacity of pluralistic societies to integrate difference and about the elasticity of this capacity given the relationship between foreign policy and domestic racialization process’ (155). In this context, the ‘dehumanization of Arabs and Muslims’ became the ‘de facto component of the “war on terror”’ (ibid.).

writers are “writing back” to these dominant Western discourses in order to redress the relative marginalisation of Muslims in the West’ (1-2).<sup>55</sup>

This aspect of deconstructing dominant Western discourse in post-9/11 fiction is crucial to understanding the place of Hamid’s text. This is so because early literary responses to the terrorist attacks were introspective in nature, primarily focussing on despair and melancholia post-9/11. Kanwal acknowledges as well that:

the earliest Western, and especially American literary responses to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks i.e. the so-called post 9/11 novels written between 2003-2007 have by now been defined as introspective, even well-regarding...they tend to focus on the personal, psychological reactions of an individual and on the family. In other words, they have concentrated...on the personal grief rather than global repercussions of what Jean Baudrillard called “the first symbolic event on a world scale”[.] (ibid. 57-58)

This comment highlights the dearth of literature on 9/11 from an international or non-American standpoint.<sup>56</sup> In this regard, it needs to be reinforced that Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is possibly ‘the first novel in the 9/11 canon to feature a non-American central protagonist and it is the first of these novels to explore 9/11 and post 9/11 from a genuinely international perspective’ (Keeble 118).

*The Reluctant Fundamentalist* draws upon the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and portrays the journey of a Princeton-educated, ambitious, corporate star, Pakistani migrant Changez, who begins to question his allegiance to his firm, his newly acquired identity, his love for Erica and his relationship with America. The novel explores the deeply permeating global

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<sup>55</sup>Other diasporic writers such as H.M. Naqvi(British Asian) also published narratives about 9/11. Naqvi’s *Home Boy* was first published in the US in 2009, to an enthusiastic review from the *New York Times*. A year later it entered India’s list of top 10 fiction bestsellers, and won the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature. The novel tells the story of three young Pakistani-Americans in New York in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. The narrator, Chuck, is an immigrant from Karachi. After 9/11, he sets off on a mission, along with his friends AC and Jimbo, in search of a missing compatriot known as the Shaman. But the three young men quickly discover that their adopted country has changed, and soon enough they find themselves under the scrutiny of the FBI.

<sup>56</sup> American novels such as *American Widow*(2008) by Alissa Torres, *Between Two Rivers*(2004) by Nicholas Rinaldi and Philip Roth’s *Everyman*(2006) focus on the personal tragedies that transpired after 9/11, and how it dramatically and painfully altered the lives and realities of the American population. This personal gaze towards 9/11 dominated most American writing post-9/11, as the country was still recovering from the enormity of the tragedy, both in terms of personal losses and more public economic and political losses.

ramifications of the tragedy, suggesting that 9/11 dramatically altered America's relationship with the rest of the world and especially with the Muslim migrant living in America.

In this chapter, I use two lines of inquiry to show how Hamid's representation of the fragile relationship between America and a disenchanted lover of America eventually leads to a return to the narrator's homeland. First, I will show that Changez assertively uses visual/facial markers to accentuate his 'othered' position in the host land to protest against the sweeping racial profiling of Muslim residents of America. I will go on to argue that Hamid's representation of Changez's striking espousal of ethnic identifications asserts the migrant's right to a choice of identification. I will further connect this to Hamid's use of the dramatic monologue through which he makes America hear, symbolically and literally, the migrant's story. I will conclude by arguing that Hamid is able to cut through the single-mindedness and the homogenized view of 9/11 of the War on Terror, and to foregrounds the migrant's narrative of disenchantment and eventual return.

### **Reading the Immigrant's Tale: Receiving and Representing**

In terms of its popular reception, Hamid's novel was published in three languages in 2007 and went on to become an international best-seller, with over a million copies sold in print. It won several awards, such as the Ambassador Book Award, the Asian American Literary Award and the South Bank Show Award for literature, and was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize and the James Tait Black Memorial Prize. It was also named Book of the Decade by the *Guardian*. Recently, in 2012, the novel was adapted in the form of a movie by South Asian filmmaker Mira Nair. The movie was adapted from Hamid's novel and from unpublished manuscripts of the novel.<sup>57</sup>

In the following pages, I begin by analysing popular and critical commentary on the novel in order to understand Hamid's representation of migrant hood in the context of 9/11 and the changing meaning of 'fundamentalism' post-9/11.

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<sup>57</sup>The movie stars Riz Ahmed and Kate Hudson in the lead roles and won several international honours, such as the German Award for Peace and the IFFI Century Award in 2012.

Many popular journalistic reviews largely focus on and analyse aspects of ‘fundamentalism’ with regards to the cultural binaries of the ‘host’ and the ‘other’. For instance, in the *Seattle Times*, Paula Bock begins by critiquing the American facade of tolerance and acceptance: ‘that 9/11 should trigger rage – against America – in the soul of a Princeton soccer star who once embraced America is Hamid’s seething commentary on America’s reputation in the non-western world today’; but she continues to reinforce nationalist binaries to provide reasons for this drastic detachment by stating, ‘So why is Changez lashing out against America? It’s because, at his core, Changez still considers himself as a man from Lahore, a foreigner whom America will never truly accept’ (*Seattle Times*, April 10 2007). Bock’s review highlights Changez’s ‘otherness’ by invoking the binaries of cultural conflicts and asserting that these binaries problematize the migrant’s identity and place in the host land. Tabish Khair problematizes Changez’s identity and otherness further so as to argue that his identity is ‘not to be confused with that of the madrasa student (like the Taliban), or the small-town worker in Riyadh, London or Delhi...Changez comes to the point where, as a result of the “war on terror”, he realizes that “the lives of those of us who lived in the lands in which such killers [the terrorists] also lived have no meaning except as collateral damage” – and he switches his allegiance’ (Khair, *Outlook India*, April 23 2007). These reviews foreground the fact that Hamid’s text is ‘a quietly told, cleverly constructed fable of infatuation and disenchantment with America, set on the treacherous fault lines of current East/West relations, and finely tuned to the ironies of mutual – but especially American – prejudice and misrepresentation’ (*Guardian*, March 3, 2007).

Although these popular reviews assess crucial aspects of the novel and are able to reveal the growing mistrust and suspicion between Changez and America, post 9/11, they are unable to critically analyse the term ‘fundamentalism’ and the way in which Hamid interrogates hegemonic conceptions of it. In contrast to these popular journalistic reviews, most critical writing on *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* focuses on Hamid’s conscious critique of the religious undertones of the term ‘fundamentalism’, and on understanding the use of this term in the context of American capitalism and militarism. This line of enquiry is crucial, as the focus on ‘fundamentalism’ redefines our understanding of contemporary global politics and its effects on post-9/11 migrant narratives. For instance, Donald E. Peace argues that Hamid’s text undercuts the monolithic approach towards understanding post-9/11 global politics. He

states that ‘Changez realizes that “finance is a primary mean by which the American empire exercises its power”... and the war on terror has enormously accelerated Western economic hegemony’ (203). Through this comment, Peace highlights how Hamid’s novel re-focuses our attention on the escalating rise of American capitalism and the need to address the inherent fundamentalism in this approach. It also shifts the focus from the predominant stereotype of Islamic fundamentalism to address more economic and militaristic frameworks of fundamentalism.

Eva Kowal draws attention to Changez’s conception of fundamentalism by stating that:

much has already been written about this – about...how the Underwood Samson company with its motto: “we believe in the best”... stands for the U.S., how the company’s guiding principle “Focus on the fundamentals”... upsets the reader’s expectation on first reading the title of the novel. It turns out that perhaps Changez was really a fundamentalist when he was part of the ruthless valuation firm, part of the U.S.(59-60)

Critics like Scanlan and Nash concur that Changez’s use of the term ‘the fundamentals’ is purely restricted to the ‘systematic pragmatism’, ‘efficiency’ and ‘maximum return’ which he learns while working with Underwood Samson (22) and the term ‘fundamentalism’ and ‘fundamentalist’ are applied in the novel to neither Pakistan, Islam nor any Muslim individual or group; instead they signify the merciless capitalism of the US (Nash110). However, in trying to understand the American capitalistic ethos and militaristic fundamentalism through the Pakistani migrant, Changez’s position and identity vis-à-vis America and/or his firm are sidelined, if not ignored completely. These critics are able to show that Hamid is able to disengage with the religious connotations of fundamentalism and to understand it within the larger framework of American policies of capitalism and militarism, which are otherwise overshadowed by the overwhelming attention to Islamic fundamentalism in the context of 9/11. But, in so doing, they do not dwell on the novel’s representation of Changez’s migrant identity and journey in America, both of which problematize his place in and relationship with the host land.

What I aim to suggest is that although these analyses provide a useful direction from which to deconstruct rampant monolithic definitions of Islamic culture in the West, this approach does little to engage with or understand the conflicts of migrant identity vis-à-vis ethnic identification and the migrant voice, as explored through Hamid's novel, and therefore does not enable a wider understanding of the contemporary dynamics of migrant subjectivities in the post-9/11 geo-political landscape. The next part of my chapter will show that two tropes used by Hamid, the adoption of migrant identity markers and dramatic monologic narration, denote a fierce assertion of migrant identity. They also help redefine contemporary migrant narratives, in order to broaden the socio-political meanings attributed to 9/11 and to reconfigure new shapes and structures of migrant narratives of return from the host land.

In the previous chapters (on Rushdie and Kureishi's novels) I have analysed the conflict between the host land and the migrant, in order to foreground the asymmetrical power relations between the host land and the diasporic subject. As a result, the representation of the migrant is sustained by stereotyping and objectifying individuals by ignoring complex histories and varied subjectivities: through the process of 'othering' the migrant.<sup>58</sup> In the host land, the migrant's othering is affected through various modes: religious and ethnic 'othering', lack of political value in the host nation, and social discrimination. In the case of Hamid's text, visual and facial markers, such as the beard that distinguishes a conventional Muslim man, become defining traits that reconstruct the binarism of Self and Other in America, differentiating and objectifying the migrant through 'that knowledge, not only as a matter of imposed will and domination, also by the power of inner compulsion and subjective con-formation to the norm' (Hall 226).<sup>59</sup> This form of 'otherness' symbolises not only, 'in the Orientalist sense, [that] we [migrants] were constructed different and other within the categories of knowledge of the West by those regimes...they had the power to make us see

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<sup>58</sup>Edward Said in his memoir *Out Of Place* sheds lights on the complexity of the position of the diasporic 'other and his hyphenated Arab-American status that emphasizes his position of that of an outsider in the host nation: "What are you? But Said is an Arab Name; You are an American? You're an American without an American name...You don't look American" (5-6). Although Said's story in itself cannot be understood as reflective of the lives and status of immigrants across the globe, it is able to convey the sense of identity construction that is articulated and sustained by the host land's gaze, perpetrating the sense of othering for the immigrant.

<sup>59</sup>Although the symbol of the beard has garnered some negative connotations post 9/11 and other terrorist activities, the tradition of the beard has great significance in many religions. In Islam, growing a beard is a well-established tradition, a common practice that can be traced back to Mohammed. In trying to revere the Prophet and emulate his persona, many Muslims wear a beard.

and experience ourselves as *the “other”*” (Said, *Orientalism* 394-95). This form of ‘othering’ through inner compulsion results in objectification and the reinforcement of stereotypes.

This is acutely reflected and analysed in Hamid’s text. For instance, the text begins with Changez reinforcing the stereotype of a bearded Muslim man as a potential threat to his American listener:

Excuse me Sir but may I be of assistance? Ah, I see I have alarmed you. Do not be frightened by my beard: I am a lover of America. (Hamid 1)

The first few lines of the novel inform the readers that Changez is aware of a palpable tension between his appearance and the construction of his identity in the eyes of the American stranger. Changez goes on to hurriedly inform the listener that he is a Princeton graduate who lives in New York, and has a job at a prestigious valuation firm called Underwood Samson, so as to convince him of his association with America. Through the course of his uninterrupted narration he begins to divulge that, after the 9/11 attacks, his view of American life and his identification with the national myths of the US begin to rapidly unravel, as he becomes aware of being ‘increasingly marginalized within the post-9/11 milieu’ (Hartnell 336).

It is worth mentioning that before 9/11 Changez exemplified an awareness of the ‘advantage conferred upon me by my *foreignness*’ (Hamid 47), deliberately marginalizing his ethnic characteristics in order to adopt and adapt to New York. As a result, the elements of his personal native identity are discursively appropriated within the hegemonic ‘overused cosmopolitan nature of New York’ (ibid.).<sup>60</sup> By accepting and reiterating his ‘othered’ position, Changez displays a sense of being in a compradorial position, of celebrating ‘otherness’ to re-affirm the American ethos of cultural tolerance and acceptance. Changez feels that despite his exotic clothing, respectful mannerisms, and his accent and other aspects of his native appearance, he is able to ‘seamlessly’ merge with the diverse, urban crowd in the New York subway. He says: ‘I was, in four and a half years, never an American; I was immediately a New Yorker...It was a testament to the open-mindedness and – that overused

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<sup>60</sup>The text shows that Changez is compelled to play out social identities attached to the different personae and to ‘perform’. For instance, Changez admits that at Princeton University he wilfully played the role of a Pakistani prince: ‘At Princeton, I conducted myself in public like a young prince, generous and care-free...and most people I met were taken in by my public persona’ (Hamid 12). He goes on to modify his lifestyle to act like a New Yorker when he is a trainee at his new job: ‘On that day, I did not think of myself as a Pakistani, but as an Underwood Samson trainee, and my firm’s impressive office made me proud’ (38).



word –cosmopolitan nature of New York in those days that I felt completely comfortable on the subway in this attire[Kurta]’ (55).

This early identification with New York and the city’s acceptance of a diversity of cultural markers ironically highlights the centrality of 9/11 in shaping American intolerance and boundaries in the novel. Changez’s reactions to the 9/11 terrorist attacks drastically alter his relationship with America in a manner that questions his allegiance and inadvertently exposes the extent of his othered position in America. Changez admits that he smiled when he witnessed the twin towers collapse, revealing a rather complicated and fraught relationship with America. He is pleased that ‘someone had so visibly brought America to her knees’(73).Changez’s reaction unsettles both the listener in the novel and the reader of the novel as it brings into question his allegiance to and his self-confessed admiration for America.

It can also be argued that the 9/11 attacks act as the moment of rupture and of uncomfortable realization that enables Changez to analyse his compradorial position within the host community. Changez’s antipathy for America is exacerbated as the discourse of war on terror develops, with the ‘with-us-or-against-us’ rhetoric propagated by the political media. As Rajini Srikanth suggests, the ‘war on terror that September 11 inaugurated marshalled the lexicon of loyalty, betrayal, responsibility’ built into the ‘discourse of retribution and war’ (160-1) and dramatically altered American attitudes toward Pakistan. This compels Changez to resent the atrocities committed in his homeland, and he decides to protest against this invasive American militaristic regime. To do so, Changez begins to grow his beard as a mark of his native ethnic identification, symbolising his protest against ‘hostile Americans wanting to display their ostensible patriotism’ (Hartnell 338). He is already aware of the implications and symbolism of the beard with regards to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and explains the performative resistance of growing the beard thus: ‘It was perhaps a form of protest on my part, a symbol of my identity, or perhaps I sought to remind myself of the reality I had just left behind’ (Hamid 147-48).

In an interesting analysis of ‘othering’ through visual symbolism, Ashcroft has also argued that the ‘othering’ of a subject is ‘felt most directly and immediately in the way in which the superficial differences of the body and skin (skin colour, eye shape, hair texture, body shape,

language, dialect or accent) are read as indelible signs of the natural inferiority of their possessors' (321). Aspects such as clothing, body language, colour or accent symbolize marked othering, a process by which visual differentiation becomes the means to distance and isolate the 'other'<sup>61</sup>. In reference to this analysis, it is evident that the body becomes the site of locating and perpetrating 'difference'.<sup>62</sup> In Hamid's novel, 'otherness' is perpetrated by the difference in ethnic clothing and facial elements (such as a beard). Since exterior facial features provide for a convincing visual differentiation between the 'self' and the 'other', these markers become determined signifiers of constructed 'otherness' for the migrant subject.

Changez is well aware that his outward appearance and beard signify his 'othering', yet this adoption of a native facial characteristic deconstructs the power play, as the migrant chooses to acquire 'otherness' in the face of ostentatious patriotism within the host land. Changez himself admits that his outward appearance is interpreted 'as the invasion of the American Flag' and points out that 'more than once travelling on the Subway – where I had always had the feeling of seamlessly blending in – I was subjected to verbal abuse by complete strangers, and at Underwood Samson I seemed to become overnight a subject of whispers and stares' (148), undercutting his initial admiration for the facade of the 'overly used cosmopolitan nature of America' (Hamid 90, 148), Changez's beard 'becomes an authoritative symbol of a diasporic identity in the Western world' (Nash 5) as he chooses to keep the beard: a choice that defines his identity.

Like Haroon, whose stereotypical commodification through ethnic symbolism is advantageously accepted by him, Changez too reverses this power play by consciously adopting religious and ethnic native moorings, and protesting against the host nation through this form of symbolism. I suggest that this conscious move from imposed foreignness to acquired 'otherness' can be interpreted as what Hooks has elsewhere addressed as 'more than a site of deprivation, as a site of radical possibility' (Hooks 24), as despite these awkward

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<sup>61</sup> The term implies specific, visible markers of one's external appearance or attire that differentiate one from others. In this case, aspects such as a beard, ethnic costume and accent.

<sup>62</sup> In this context, the term 'difference' is used in the manner in which Bhabha defines the limits of cultural difference in postcolonial thought. In the introduction to *The Location of Culture* Bhabha points out that cultural difference arises 'from the interstices', thus suggesting that 'the social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, ongoing negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridity' (2). In this chapter, I bring forth this argument by highlighting how visual markers become tropes for asserting and perpetrating cultural difference.

moments at work and outside, Changez is relentless in his effort to show solidarity with his people back home.<sup>63</sup> This 'necessity of opposition' (ibid.) is borne out of the necessity to resist from and within the margins, therefore enabling Changez to simultaneously occupy a position of repression and resistance. Changez's insistence on ethnic clothing and re-growing his beard overtly signifies his ability to acquire 'otherness' and assert his native identity as a form of protest. It foregrounds the migrant's desire to return to his native self through facial (religious) symbolism, deploying a visually convincing and tangible expression of migrant identity.

Hartnell explains that the symbol of the beard in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* highlights 'a national culture determined to assimilate difference only as past, as history. If heritage is not converted to history and basically discarded, as is the case with Changez, who... insists on wearing a beard... then integration on any terms is no longer possible' (342). Hartnell recognises that Changez is unable to use his heritage or build upon his native identity in such a way that it can be assimilated in his host land; instead he uses his beard to overtly pronounce his severed relationship with America. Changez recognises the defiance and stubbornness of his act and redefines the space of the migrant in post-9/11 America, only to foreground the absence of a mutually enabling relationship between the migrant and America. It represents the migrant's act of self-identification, an assertion of his religious identity and collective national identity and also a sustained, marked expression of resistance and self-differentiation. Hence, unlike Karim and Haroon, who struggle with their diasporic subjectivities but eventually end up redefining them, Changez's assertion of his migrant identity becomes much more strident and steadfast, suggesting a lack of integration in America.

This vehement assertion of migrant identity and its concomitant exclusionary politics is more acutely reflected in the narrative form of the dramatic monologue.<sup>64</sup> Hamid's reassertion of a

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<sup>63</sup>In her analysis of feminist theories, Hooks draws from her personal experience to describe the position at the margins as not involving a 'myth of marginality' (24). Although Hook's analysis largely operates within the discourse of colonialism and feminism, her analysis is fitting to the diasporic 'otherness' in the context of this novel, as Hamid's representation of Changez's insistence on ethnic clothing and re-growing his beard overtly signifies his ability to acquire 'otherness' and to assert his native identity as a form of protest.

<sup>64</sup>M. H. Abrams states that dramatic monologue as a form of narration primarily applies to poetry. It is a form in which 'a single person, who is patently not the poet, utters the speech that makes up the whole poem, in a specific situation in a critical moment. This person addresses and interacts with one or more other people; but we know of the auditors' presence and what they say and do, only from clues in the discourse of the single speaker' (70-71).

migrant voice is reflected in the monologue in which Changez speaks directly to ‘you’, an unnamed and unidentified American who is silent for nearly the entire novel. Regarding his inspiration for this technique, Hamid says, ‘In my final year, as I was starting my first novel, I read *The Fall* by Camus. It is written as a dramatic monologue, with the protagonist constantly addressing the reader as “you”, and it changed how I thought books could work. I was amazed by the potential of the “you”, of how much space it could open up in fiction’ (Hamid 3). He goes on to elaborate the use of this technique and the centrality of it to the plot:

In my second novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, I wanted to explore this further, push the boundaries of what I knew how to do with “you”. Camus’s novel was a guide, but my project was my own: to try to show, after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, how feelings already present inside a reader –fear, anger, suspicion, loyalty –could colour a narrative so that the reader, as much as or even more than the writer, is deciding what is really going on. I wanted the novel to be a kind of mirror, to let readers see how they are reading, and, therefore, how they are living and how they are deciding their politics. (Ibid.4)

In deploying this technique, Hamid emphasizes the importance of this format to the text, as it addresses the unnamed American listener directly and uninterrupted. In this way, the marginalized story of the Pakistani is re-centred, and the American is voiceless, for, as the author noted in an interview with Deborah Solomon, ‘in the world of... the American media, it’s almost always the other way around’; representatives of the Islamic world ‘mostly seem to be speaking in grainy videos from caves’ (Scanlan 22).

His monologue goes on to reveal a discomfort with being scrutinized in the post-9/11 world on the basis of his appearance, and the way he is constructed as a potential terrorist figure in America. The use of a dramatic monologue forces America to hear the story of the War on Terror from the citizen of the victimized, war-stricken country, and allows him to present his experiences as the defining voice of the narrative. The Pakistani critic A. Ahmed also recognizes this strain as a purposeful assertion of the migrant voice in Hamid’s narrative:

The deceptively easygoing narrative of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is about geo-political alliances and civilizational solidarity...For the first time in Pakistan's intricate and messy relationship with the United States of America, we have a scenario, though fictional, where the American listens to the Pakistani for such a long time[.] (3)

Through this fictional scenario, Hamid carefully establishes a sensitive relationship between Changez and the mute American listener, only to foreground the fragility of their connection. Hamid, in his *Hard Court* interview, also states that 'the form of the novel, with the narrator and his audience both acting as characters, allowed me to mirror the mutual suspicion with which America and Pakistan (or the Muslim world) look at one another' (4). Although the one-sided perspective of the novel allows the ending to be completely ambivalent and elusive, as the reader is left to draw their own conclusion as to whether Changez does come become a radical Islamist, the American is a CIA assassin, both of them are armed or both are innocent and agenda-less. One is tempted to believe what Hamid says about the novel: 'the novel is just a conversation between two men. If you believe one is a terrorist, or one is a CIA agent, or one harms the other, that is something determined by you, the reader. I created shadows in which a reader could explore their own biases' but it needs to be highlighted that because Changez's voice in the novel is always speaking to 'you', it makes the novel very conversational and didactic (Hamid 4). As a consequence, the reader forced to listen to and identify with Changez's story and listen to the criticism in his dialogue. Thus this narrative technique establishes the migrant's narrative as the version of the 9/11 tragedy that needs to be heard despite the atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust.

Furthermore, the use of dramatic monologue also enables Hamid to not only 'challenge the complacencies of public rhetoric' according to which 'virtually every Muslim in sight was a terrorist' in the US since 9/11 (Scanlan 55), but also to foreground 'a non western migrant's view' (Nash 108) of the aftermath of 9/11 and the global ramifications of America's drastic militaristic and capitalist measures. In so doing, the text fundamentally reconfigures contemporary structures of power and enables the South Asian migrant to assert a differentiated self, subtly suggesting the lack of dialogue between America and diasporic Muslim populations, and also the waning possibility of integration in post-9/11 America. In

this respect, Hamid's text emerges as a migrant's narrative of disenchantment and subsequent return to the homeland, a perspective that needs to be addressed, and a contemporary migrant's view of geopolitical relationships and emergent globalized structures of power. Hamid himself confesses:

I suppose one of the things I was very concerned about in this novel was the immigrant novel about America – usually that's a story about coming to America, this magnet that pulls people, often poor, from all over the world to itself. There they have the American dream or the American nightmare. That is what I understand to be the typical American immigrant novel. Writing in the twenty-first century I was conscious of what happens to that dream after America's relationship to the world has radically changed. So this novel became an emigrant novel, a story of leaving America, which I think is as much the immigrant novel of today as a story of going to the United States. (Qtd in Yaqin 47)

Hence, one can conclude that Changez's narrative of leaving America displays an awareness of the intercultural (mis)perceptions that contribute to and shape social and political realities after 9/11. As a result, the text structurally foregrounds a story of emigration from the USA, depicting a character that learns to look beyond both his private preoccupations and his existence in the USA. The novel depicts a migrant who appears to have been naturalized into the American capitalistic system, but is gradually disenchanted and disillusioned by the outward movement of American political and economic power post 9/11.

## **Conclusion**

Changez narrates his story of immediate love and gradual disillusionment with America post 9/11, a story that is firmly rooted in the migrant's perspective and his version of the 9/11 tragedy and the consequent War on Terror. In this chapter, I have shown that in challenging and reassessing hegemonic representations of the 9/11 tragedy and the War on Terror, Hamid's text carefully narrativizes the journey of a migrant whose deep admiration for American life is dismantled by his aversion to America's devotion to national myths of economic and political domination. I have also shown that the use of dramatic monologue for

the narrative voice foregrounds the purposeful assertion of Changez's voice and his story of disillusionment and return that needs to be heard.

This chapter has shown that this form of dynamic representation of the migrant's tale repositions the migrant as centrally crucial to the global narratives of 9/11 and the messy global politics that succeeded this tragedy. In so doing, the novel strongly demands that its readers acknowledge and assess the larger importance of this American tragedy and the reformulation of America's relationship with its South Asian Muslim diaspora. Hamid's text builds upon the contemporaneity of migrant narratives by powerfully evoking the need and the place for a narrative of return to homeland, and for broadening the rubric of contemporary representations of the migrant's assimilation and integration within the host land.

## Chapter 8

### Understanding Gendered Spaces in Mira Nair's *The Namesake* (2007) and Gurinder Chadha's *Bend It like Beckham* (2001)

In the previous chapters, I have highlighted the gradual change in diasporic identity through first-and second-generation migrants, and foregrounded the fragile politics of assimilation. In this chapter, I will highlight how the delocalized nature and the multicultural experiences of living and struggling in the host land lead to the possibility of redefining diasporic identities through diasporic films. As I mentioned in the introduction, the inclusion of films in the thesis enables me to explore a new medium of cultural representation and to analyse the representation of homeland and host land by the diasporic filmmaker, in a popular medium.<sup>65</sup> In fact, the combination of literary texts and diasporic cinema posits my intervention and analysis as crucial in understanding the cultural landscape of South Asian diasporic identity. This allows for a broader engagement with diaspora literature in general, as it enables to gauge and analyse diasporic identities through two distinct, yet significant and powerful artistic mediums: literature and cinema. In a way, the aspect of intergenerational differences that was analysed in the previous chapters through literary texts is carried forward in this chapter by widening its framework. The filial narratives within diasporic homes extend the issues of intergenerational conflicts and explore diverse diasporic identities.

In this chapter, I focus on two diasporic films, *Bend It Like Beckham* by Gurinder Chadha and *The Namesake* by Mira Nair. In her insightful, seminal discussion of South Asian diasporic cinema in *Beyond Bollywood*(2004), Desai claims that diasporic filmmakers like Gurinder

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<sup>65</sup>The Indian critic Rajinder Kumar Dudrah states that one cannot ignore the widespread popularity and reach of diasporic films within and outside the Indian sub-continent, as it is thriving medium for entertainment that significantly contributes in making and sustain South Asian diasporic culture:

Cinema represents the fostering alliance of the cultural cross-disciplinary dialogue... the interconnection between cultural flows makes that collectively important in the film-making process... [as well as] the audiences around the globe [that] receive and experience a large, constant, complex and interconnected supply of images from around the globe. (25)



Chadha and Mira Nair in their own unique way embody the plurality of South Asia diaspora and represent the hybridity of postcolonial dislocations that both of them have experienced. Desai highlights how the particular gender conflicts represented in Chadha and Nair's diasporic cinemas are expressive of the reality of the South Asian diaspora in the UK and the US, as well as the peculiarities of contemporary hybrid existences in diaspora. As a result, both the filmmakers are regarded as pioneer women filmmakers, and both of their films have women protagonists whose lives and journeys are sensitively portrayed within the hybridized spaces of diasporic displacements in the host land. Keeping this in mind, I aim to analyse both films in order to unravel the role and place of women in two different generations, to further understand the portrayal of South Asian diasporic women in a contemporary brand of diasporic cinema.

Gurinder Chadha's *Bend It Like Beckham* and Mira Nair's *The Namesake* problematize unified conceptions of diasporic identities in the host land, by exploring the continuance of homeland values and cultures in the host land. In the process, both filmmakers primarily focus on their female characters, especially the first-generation diasporic mothers, to reflect and analyse their position as bearers of culture who are constantly engaged in preserving and continuing homeland values. The filmmakers go on to show how the experience and challenges of living in a diaspora interrogate South Asian diasporic identities in diasporic homes. Moreover, in so doing, they not only carve a more liberal space for women in diaspora, they also present to the audience changing conceptions of diasporic identities and homes.

Chadha was born in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1960, as an East African Indian descendant, and later moved to Southall, England. Nair was born in the Indian Punjab (North West of the subcontinent) but soon migrated to the Orissa Province and then to Delhi. After completing her college studies, her family moved to Uganda and then finally settled in America. Chadha and Nair are bound by their South Asian background (both have their family background in the Punjab) and by their Indian experiences in East Africa. Their pairing is particularly useful and relevant as both filmmakers reflect their personal cartographies of diaspora juxtaposed against their different knowledge of South Asian identities in diaspora in their films. Moreover, both these filmmakers have been appreciated for their portrayal of the issues of

gender and sexuality in South Asian diasporic cinema. Jigna Desai reinforces this fact: ‘For over a decade a handful of South Asian diasporic female filmmakers such as...Mira Nair and Gurinder Chadha have portrayed...femininity in contemporary English language films’(1).<sup>66</sup> Moreover, since their films confront the situation of women in the diaspora, interrogating both postcolonial and gender complexity within one framework, their films have gained immense popular and critical success.

In the first part of this chapter, I will study the representation of Ashima, the female protagonist in Nair’s film. Ashima is a first-generation diasporic mother; whose diasporic journey from India to America and her diasporic existence in America problematize her identity. I will argue that Nair deconstructs the burdens of cultural preservation that are earmarked for a diasporic mother by engaging with and highlighting the fragility of her diasporic position. In so doing, Nair is able to reflect upon and document the contemporaneous changing identity of a diasporic woman and its concomitant effects on the private, filial experiences of a diasporic home. To this end, I will show that Nair highlights how Ashima’s conflicted diasporic identity problematizes her relationship with her newly adopted host nation and questions the relevance of homeland values in her diasporic life.

*The Namesake* (2007) is adapted from Jhumpa Lahiri’s popular novel, *The Namesake* (2003). *The Namesake* has proved to be a very popular text in mediums, film and literature. Lahiri’s novel sold more than 800,000 copies of its first printing, and according to *Box Office Magazine*, Nair’s film earned more than 20 million dollars in its first year.<sup>67</sup> The reason for choosing and analysing Nair’s movie, rather than Lahiri’s novel, has much to do with the fact that Nair and the author of the screenplay, Soni Taraporevala, identify Ashima as the main character, even though she was a secondary character in the novel. Ashima’s moving journey towards self-realization and her ability to deconstruct her role as preserver of culture in a diasporic household in America is the central focus of the movie. The film explores this form

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<sup>66</sup>Not only Desai but other critics like Sheshagiri and Dhawan reinforce the celebrated position of both Nair and Chadha within the larger global cinematic space. Sheshagiri (2003) furthers this analysis by stating that contemporary Indian cinema has been revived by these ‘diasporic feminist filmmakers as they eloquently question the patriarchal value system embedded in the South Asian culture. As a result, their movies have been able to connect with South Asian diasporic and national audiences as well as the Western audiences’ (178).

<sup>67</sup>The IMDB states that *The Namesake*, produced by **Fox Searchlight Pictures**, **Cine Mosaic** and **Entertainment Farm (EF)**, had great opening figures, making \$248,552 (USA) (9 March 2007), whereas the gross profit amounted to \$13,569,248 (USA)(3 August 2007). By its second week of release, *The Namesake* had grossed \$1.1 million and made its way into the North American Top 20. Thanks to its success, the film opened in another 69 theatres around the country on March 23.

of subtle ideological conflict within South Asian diasporic homes through the character of Ashima, unravelling how the translocation of families in diasporic journeys uncritically replicates homeland values and cultures within the diaspora. This contestation of values within diasporic homes, I suggest, is crucial in understanding the relationship between diasporic individuals/families and the host land.

## **Part I: The ‘Reel’ Diaspora: Receiving and Representing Gendered Identities in *The Namesake***

Nair’s film *The Namesake* was released in 2007.<sup>68</sup> Although a few film critics such as Seshagiri and Desai have repeatedly affirmed Nair’s position as a powerful feminist diasporic filmmaker whose films have dealt with diasporic and gender issues in a powerful light, most critical and academic attention has focussed on the literary work rather than the cinematic adaptation.<sup>69</sup> As a result, there is a dearth of critical scholarship on the film. Therefore, in this section, I engage critically with popular reviews of the film and assess the popular understanding of Nair’s representation of diasporic experiences. This allows me to understand and assess the global cultural scope and appeal of Nair’s film and the range of its influence in terms of diaspora and gender issues.

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<sup>68</sup>Like her previous two films, *Mississippi Masala*(1991) and *Monsoon Wedding* (2001), which also broadly dealt with diasporic identities and the immigrant psyche within the organised spaces of immigrant homes in the host land, *The Namesake* continues Nair’s engagement with the theme of migration and assimilation, whilst translating the literal and semiotic into a visual space. Nair confesses:

For the record I loved the book and was rather nervous about how such a tender mood piece thin on plot and crowded with sensitively drawn characters could possibly translate into a film...I did not keep down, I kept reading it. I read it in a state of complete grief...it was only then that I understood that it was thirty years of two cities I have lived in most of my life in Calcutta and New York. It was personal at many levels here[.] (Video interview with Su Chin Pak, August 14, 2007)

<sup>69</sup>Nair gained immense international popularity and fame after she co-wrote the screenplay of *Salaam Bombay* with her friend Soni Taraporevala, a film that was nominated in the best foreign film category at the 1989 Oscars and Bafta Awards. Immediately after that Nair’s *Mississippi Masala* and *Monsoon Wedding* also gained immense international box office fame and success:

With the premier of *Monsoon Wedding* at the 2001 Venice Film Festival Mira Nair became the first woman director to win the Gold Lion award...When *Mississippi Masala* was released in American theatres in 1992 its controversial treatment of history, race and miscegenation propelled Nair into the American spotlight; reviews and interviews alike portrayed the director as an Indian feminist whose films cracked open cultural master narratives and re-imagined them from previously unconsidered viewpoints[.] (Seshagiri 177)

*The Namesake* invokes the spatial topography of Calcutta and Boston alternatively to reiterate the diasporic displacement of a Bengali family.<sup>70</sup> The outstanding cinematography of Frederick Elmes vividly conveys the chaos of the streets of Calcutta and the backdrop of Boston, where Ashok and Ashima spin out the story of their lives. Nagajothi points out that ‘by substituting New York for Boston, Nair establishes a visual continuity that bound together Calcutta with New York. By this technique Nair perplexed the audience viscerally where they are and thereby highlights the in between world of immigrants’ (549). Nair uses several cinematic techniques to link Boston with Calcutta throughout the film. Camera techniques like medium shots, lingering imagery and still images depict transitions between countries as well as across time. Nair also uses ‘bleached bypass on select scenes throughout the film to link together Ashoke and Ashima’s memories of home in India with their present experience in the United States’ (ibid. 550).

The film is able to document and present movement and crossing borders, and is more than just a presentation of a tale of an arranged marriage couple who come to America. The film narrowly scrutinizes and portrays the nuances of being stifled between two disparate cultural and social environments with their exceedingly divergent religious, social and ideological differences. As a consequence, *The Namesake* has been often analysed from the vantage point of American multiculturalism and the dynamics of integration, with very little attention paid to the place and position of women within diasporic households. For instance, the review published in the *Guardian* states that ‘Nair’s movie was praised to the rafters in the US where few movies seem to have dealt with South Asian American integration’ (np).

The core politics of ‘South Asian American integration’ and the dynamics of adaptation and adjustment within the host nation dominate most popular discussions of Nair’s film. Some reviews extend the analysis to focus on the varying extent of integration between the first-generation expatriates from Bengal, Ashima and Ashok, whose daily struggles with trauma, alienation, isolation and nostalgia gradually becomes less meaningful and poignant after the second-generation South Asian diasporic children arrive. As a consequence, these reviews

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<sup>70</sup> In an interview with Indian Filmmaker Karan Johar, the actress Tabu and Mira Nair both commented on the diasporic status of the film. They said that although the film is produced by Warner Bros studios, the film is about a Bengali couple and their diasporic journey and thus it cannot be considered a Hollywood film in any aspect.

highlight the fact that the process of integration is much easier and less nostalgic with the emergence of a second generation of diasporic life in America.

Stephen holder in his review in the *New York Times* summarises the movie as ‘the story of upwardly mobile immigrants torn between tradition and modernity as they are absorbed into the American melting pot...the longing for roots of these displaced middle class Indians lends a sorrowful undertow to a film conspicuously lacking in melodrama...despite all the tensions in the Ganguli household *The Namesake* expresses a reassuring faith in family solidarity’ (3). The reviewer claims that the ‘film is about the relationship between the parents and [their] children as they negotiate their way of living between America and Calcutta... But as Gogol enters their world the film becomes less nostalgic and much more about the present’ (ibid.).

Predominantly, most reviewers celebrate the film for its delicate portrayal of a diversity of cultures in the host nation, and in so doing primarily focus on the representation of diasporic displacement and the debates over acculturation that the narrative depicts.<sup>71</sup> As Pawar notes, ‘Nair turn to the past to recreate a history of South American citizenship, mapping the production of immigrant citizen-subjects through the socio-political landscapes of Boston, New York, and Calcutta in the 1970s and 1980s’ and goes on to depict ‘a coming-of-age film about Gogol and his diasporic difficulties’(1). This is precisely why the film is primarily and hastily adjudged as a coming-of-age movie, reflecting on the problems and possibilities of assimilation for second-generation diasporic individuals. This form of superficial engagement with or cursory depiction of diasporic lives and lack of engagement with the interpersonal tensions between first-generation diasporic parents and second-generation diasporic children homogenises the process of assimilation and integration for diasporic subjects. It foregrounds a gradual turn towards a less nostalgic existence for first generation migrant parents, thereby homogenising the diasporic experience for both Ashima and Ashok and ignoring the struggles within a diasporic home.

Deepika Bahri’s analysis of the movie is one of the rare reviews to have touched upon issues of migration and the role of women. She states: ‘Considered together with *Monsoon*

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<sup>71</sup> In a review in the *Hindustan Times*, the reviewer states: ‘Mira Nair’s *The Namesake* is a jewel of a movie – emotional, superbly acted and underscored with the kind of compassion which can be conveyed only by someone who has felt the pain of loss. And that is Nair’s triumph truly. She relates a story about a dysfunctional Bengali family settled in a University town of the US. The parents are resilient, nostalgic about the land they have left behind’(March 24, 2007).

*Wedding*(2001) and *Mississippi Masala* (1991) Nair's latest film is part of a soberly meditative trilogy of the tussle between the noise and music of globalization and the losses and gains of migration'(12-13).Bahri elaborates upon this premise of migration and focuses on the character of Ashima to reveal the understated tone of the movie, showing that her 'return to her interrupted training in classical Indian music as she "follows her bliss" is part of the symbolic structure of the film that tries to represent the experience of a multicultural world through contrapuntal notes'(ibid.). Bahri reinforces the idea that it is through the character of Ashima and her turmoil in the newly adopted environment of New York that the film furthers the tensions between migration and the continuation of homeland values. The 'contrapuntal notes' of her diasporic life spell the complex relationship of first-generation diasporic women: her continuous struggle with homeland values and the changing landscape of diasporic realities.

Bahri's analysis only tangentially probes into the politics of filial ties and the role of women, but nonetheless it initiates a critical discussion about diasporic life for Ashima and the larger issue of gender roles in diasporic homes. In the next part of this chapter, I will analyse the cultural and emotional journey of Ashima as a first-generation diasporic woman, for whom the domestic and filial space becomes a site of uninterrupted continuance of Bengali<sup>72</sup> values, which is gradually fractured by the conflict within the household due to the social and cultural pressures of a new diasporic life. This exploration of the cultural and gendered narratives of Ashima's diasporic life, in a way, continues my analysis of discursively exploring socially, culturally and generationally changing diasporic identities.

*The Namesake* begins in the year 1968 and travels up to the year 2000, covering a large span of time and two generations. The film follows the Ganguly family and their cultural and geographical displacement from Calcutta to New York. The first-generation diasporic parents, Ashok and Ashima, fly to New York to start a new life. In the character of Ashok Ganguly, the film depicts the journey that many Indians undertook during the late fifties and early

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<sup>72</sup> West Bengal is state in the Eastern part of India, the capital of which is Calcutta. *The Namesake* focuses on the lives and journeys of a Bengali couple who travel from Calcutta to America. In the rest of the chapter, I use the word Bengali often in conjunction or interchangeably with the word 'Indian'. This is primarily for two reasons. First, since the discussion of diasporic journeys involve host and home nation, I use the word 'Indian' rather than 'Bengali' to contextualize the debate within national frameworks, rather than provincial or parochial. Secondly, the term 'Indian' when used in the context of values and culture is evasively broad and encapsulates many distinct and diverse cultures within it. Thus, in this sense, Bengali values or culture can be subsumed under the broader framework of Indian values.

sixties. Ashok is represented as the active agent of migration; it is due to him that Ashima also embarks upon this diasporic journey. Thereafter the film portrays her as withdrawing into a longing for home and constantly feeling spatially and emotionally dislocated from the comfortable 'home' in Calcutta.<sup>73</sup>

The initial scenes in America, like the one in which Ashima drags a suitcase of dirty clothes to a laundrette in the biting New York winter, with her husband's oversized coat wrapped around her own Dhaka saree, are very telling. This scene, for example, foregrounds her inability to understand winter clothing in America. The scene begins with a wide shot of Ashima in her white Dhaka saree against the icy, snowy background, alternating between a sharp focus on her frazzled face and the chaos at the laundry shop, displaying her sense of hopelessness and her inability to acquaint herself with the American way of living. The visible juxtaposition built by dim white lighting on Ashima's face and blurry, dusty lighting in the background, foregrounds her overwhelming loneliness.

This loneliness is further aggravated as she conceives her child on this alien soil. This scene in the movie shows a very confident Ashok trying to convince Ashima to stay in America as 'America is the land of opportunity' (Nair: 00:25:52), against her desire to move back to India. Although the conflict is resolved, the scene portrays a rather sad and dejected Ashima, unable to come to terms with her diasporic life. This scene reiterates what Brah describes as the pressures of filial ties through which patriarchal power is sustained in the form of subtle victimisation of women and their marginalisation to sundry roles. In fact, Brah further argues that 'the institution of the family constitutes one of the key sites where the subordination of women is secured. Patriarchal ideology constructs "home" as the rightful place for women' (76). Moreover, Ashima's inability to oppose her husband and sacrifice her personal needs in order to fulfil filial duties, rightfully reflects the appropriation of women's caring work as 'labour of love' (ibid.) within filial frameworks.

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<sup>73</sup> Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake* engages in a more nuanced portrayal of Ashima's loneliness upon her arrival in America. The narrative initially portrays her as emotionally fragile, always thinking of 'home' and re-reading Bengali short stories, poems and articles from the Bengali magazines she has brought with her. She 'keeps her ears trained, between the hours of twelve and two, for the sound of the postman's footsteps on the porch, followed by the soft click of the mail slot in the door' (Lahiri 36), waiting for her parents' letters which she collects in her white bag and re-reads often. But the most terrifying experience for her is 'motherhood in a foreign land', 'so far from home', unmonitored and unobserved by those she loved, 'without a single grandparent or parent or uncle or aunt at her side' and the need to 'raise a child in a country where she is related to no one, where she knows so little, where life seems so tentative and spare' (45).

The melancholia and the dim light of this scene are immediately contrasted with the vast space of the ocean and the brighter setting of the next scene, in which the Ganguly family pose for a picture with the newest member of their family, Ashok and Ashima's daughter. Nair layers this scene with slow-paced, ethnic music, and the camera focuses on Ashok and Gogol walking away from Ashima towards the ocean. This scene highlights Ashima's continual sense of worry and care for her son, whereas one watches Ashok and Gogol not reacting to Ashima's instructions. The scene ends by highlighting the contrast between the loud noise of the sea and the minimal exchange of dialogue, presenting the lonely figure of Ashima, who is attempting to find peace in her diasporic life.

Thereafter, Ashima decides to let go of her desire to go back 'home', and attempts to nurture her children with filial and kinship values that she has imbibed from her homeland. Anthias and Davis have argued that the centrality of women's role, inside the diaspora (and outside), relies on their role as 'transmitters and reproducers of ethnic and national ideologies', thereby reinforcing their position within the home space in which they are 'central to transmitting cultural rules' (Anthias & Davis 550). As a result, Anthias and Davis further point out, the task of cultural preservation and sustenance within filial life is exclusively marked for women in diasporic frameworks and they are, therefore, objectified through patriarchal control in terms of forbidding inter-community marriage and ascertaining limits of professional choices and social-private life expectations.

This is acutely reflected in Ashima's effort to sustain her position as the bearer of culture of the family by exclusively interacting within the Bengali diasporic community in America. The film shows that Ashima celebrates different customs and ceremonies, such as marriages, death, childbirth, festivals etc. as per Bengali customs, trying to preserve her homeland culture in a new land. The montage of these few scenes presents Bengali culture clearly through audio-visual modes and relies on 'chronotopic' (Bakhtin 84) motifs, that is, sequences of time and space in narrative patterns that unify multiple temporalities and histories. For instance, the sharp focus on incense sticks and colourful powders, beautifully laid out in an overpowering fashion throughout the Ganguly household, foreground a sense of familiarity and happiness for Ashima. Even the costumes and the lighting of these scenes are



brighter and more enhanced as compared to the rest of the scenes, foregrounding a sense of celebration and colour that these homeland rituals add to the narrative.

Diaspora theorists like McLeod have elaborated on how ‘their[diasporic communities]’ belief, tradition, customs, behaviours and values along with their “possessions and belongings” are carried by migrants with them to new places’ (211). This is deeply resonant of their desire to sustain the continuities of their homeland within diasporic homes. This is the reason why Nair’s film focuses on these pressures of transmission in diasporic households, in terms of narrativising these traditions and visually concentrating on ethnic symbolism and imagery. Nair dedicates four long scenes to showing the fast-paced interactions and chaos of social gatherings comprised of people from Bengali diasporic communities. Shot through wide camera angles, one of these scenes focuses on the name ceremony of Ashima’s daughter, sharply focussing on the rituals and the symbolic visuals of Bengali costumes, the ethnic decor of the house and the attention to ethnic nuances such as ornaments and decorative pieces. The camera swiftly turns towards Ashima towards the end of each of these scenes to highlight her contentment and happiness after these homeland rituals are repeated and celebrated. In this manner, the narrative keeps refocusing on Ashima’s role within filial space and her ability to constantly engage her family and the children in preserving and continuing Bengali rituals and culture.

This representation of the diasporic home and the continuance of homeland culture are slightly different from Lahiri’s representation of the continuance of homeland culture in America in her novel, as she focuses on how both the parents train their children in Bengali language literature and history at home and through special Bengali classes. Lahiri shows that Ashima teaches Gogol ‘to memorize a four line children poem by Tagore’, the ‘names of deities’ and ‘Indian rhymes’ (54). The novel displays Ashima’s detachment from America in her disregard for English and its recognitions as a language of the public space in order to deliberately ghettoize the world of her children, whereas in the movie, the obvious, more

visual symbolic markers of rituals, costumes and ethnic imagery is used to reflect Ashima's severe detachment from her adopted host land.<sup>74</sup>

In a way, Nair shows that Ashima attempts to compensate for the anxiety of loss and displacement that her emergent diasporic existence brings about by indulging in an uncritical cultural reclamation of homeland values, and by evoking certain physical and symbolic elements that can promise a certain level of existential security or affirmation of her homeland in America. In so doing, Nair highlights Ashima's conflicted association with the host country. As a consequence, Ashok and the children become weary of her incessant need to uphold homeland values and begin to challenge their relevance to their American life. In fact, once the children grow into adulthood, the film portrays a more definite contestation of values between Ashima and her children. In a conversation that Gogol has with his father about how he intends to change his name from 'Gogol' to 'Nikhil', the narrative shows that Ashima promptly intervenes in the debate and rebukes both the children. First, she instructs Gogol, 'don't talk to your father like that' and tells him that 'Gogol is your name' (Nair 00:37:45) and then decides to reprimand both the children for their disrespectful manners: 'if I close my eyes, I feel I am talking to strangers' (ibid.).<sup>75</sup> Ashima's role can be understood as how Anthias defines the role of a woman in a family as that of 'the mediator between the patriarch and the children' (Anthias 556), foregrounding her efforts in trying to sustain homeland values.<sup>76</sup> This scene begins by sharply focussing on the facial expressions of Gogol and Sonia and their indifference towards Ashok's sentiments, but it drifts towards Ashima's reactions. Ashok's reaction is shown, with his back turned against the children, whereas Ashima takes charge immediately. The camera captures the sternness in her voice and a side-angle shot fades out Ashok and the children, marking her presence in the scene exclusively. The scene reflects upon the conflicted and tenuous relationship between Ashima and her children, subtly reflecting a bitter rift between Ashima's ideologies about filial ties and the emergent diasporic values that challenge her beliefs.

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<sup>74</sup>On some level, this difference can be attributed to the novel being a literary medium in which the attention is inevitably directed towards literary and linguistic aspects, in contrast to the film, in which Nair deliberately foregrounds the visual imagery and symbolism to highlight Ashima's detachment from America.

<sup>75</sup>The Bengali tradition of having two names for their children, 'calling name' (pet name) and *bhalonaam* (good name), is kept alive by Ashima. Both Ashima and Ashok decide to use 'Gogol' as their son's calling name.

<sup>76</sup>Moreover, this scene, like many other pivotal scenes, is positioned in the kitchen of the house, a domestic power space for Ashima, in which she dictates values and instructs the family.

Furthermore, Ashima's use of the word 'stranger' is particularly significant in this scene, because it signifies the limits of cultural values that she embodies and the transgressive capacity of her diasporic life. Gogol's desire to change his name, and in the process redefine the markers of his identity in the host nation, threatens the position and values that Ashima upholds, as it demands of her to allow him to forgo and move away from the values she espouses. Moreover, this word expresses Ashima's disapproval of her children's turn towards more 'American' ways of life, away from the traditional Bengali virtues that she has tried to instil in them. As a result, the children become disenchanted with their life and experiences at home, and drift apart, emotionally and geographically. These household conflicts reach a climatic end after the sudden death of Ashok. This tragedy compels Ashima to start afresh and take up a job in a library. This form of financial independence and the absence of the patriarch of the family enable Ashima to evolve and understand her diasporic life, empowering Ashima to analyse her own position and place within filial and public life.

The penultimate scene of the film shows Ashima giving a speech at her house in New York to thank her family and friends for their support. She says she is happy to know that both her children are settled and happy and she has decided to move back to India to pursue her dream of learning Indian classical music: 'I want to be free...[that's why] I have decided to sell the house. I am going to do what your father and I always planned. Six months in India and six months in the US. Then I can go and sing in Calcutta. That is if any guru wants a forty-five-year-old student. I want to be free' (Nair 01:53:00). The lighting and camera angles focus sharply on Ashima's beaming smile and her confident demeanour, and Ashima and Gogol's newfound intimacy. Nair chooses to use close-up shots and over-the-shoulder shots in this scene to emphasize Ashima's emotions and to draw the audience's attention to her reactions.

The repeated use of the term 'free' denotes that Ashima has come to associate the dynamics of confinement and cultural stagnancy with the domestic space she inhabits. At this moment, Nair articulately depicts Ashima's sombre acceptance of her place within her home and her diasporic existence. Nair shows that Ashima begins to understand her diasporic existence as a transformative space that has enabled her to venture out of her household. The camera then changes to a point-of-view shot, letting the audience see Gogol and Ashima in a new light.

Both the lighting and the camera angles emphasize Ashima's emotional journey with the use of slow shots that allow the image and scene to linger.

This gradual acceptance of her dual life, with equal focus on her diasporic life in America and her life in Calcutta, marks a new beginning for Ashima, who relinquishes the position of keeper of culture in order to embrace a more liberal space marked by travel, music and fewer responsibilities. Ashima's speech reflects her desire to question the continuance of homeland values in her diasporic life, and also the way they should be espoused or followed in the host land. In this manner, the film not only deconstructs conceptions of gender roles that position women as 'frequently (but problematically) associated with positions within the domestic cultural economy and charged with maintaining the edifice of home life' (Anthias 552), but it also dismantles the unified and naturalized sustenance of homeland values in diasporic homes.

The film ends with a powerful image of Ashima singing and playing sitar in Calcutta, depicting the climatic moments of happiness and contentment in her life. The lighting, against the backdrop of the Howrah bridge of Calcutta, reflects Ashima's re-connection with her homeland, foregrounding Ashima's sense of liberation within an open environment and bright lighting. The camera slowly focuses out of this scene, leaving the audience with Ashima's enchanting rendition of vibrant Baul songs (folk music by roving minstrels of rural Bengali), and Rabindra Sangeet (songs by Tagore).<sup>77</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Nair's direction and Soni's screenplay portray the experience of living in an alien environment and the relentless contestation of residual cultural values of the homeland. The film further reveals the fragility of the position of bearer of culture in a diasporic environment, which is being constantly re-articulated through spatial, temporal and cultural changes. The narrative concludes by showing that Ashima's role as bearer of culture reinforces the volatility of filial conflicts that are integral to the liberalization of women's space in the diaspora. This chapter has elaborated upon how Nair's film is able to show the way in which diasporic filial relationships problematize the negotiation of diasporic identities

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<sup>77</sup>The Bauls are a sect of religious mendicants in Bengal, whose songs are loved and sung by the people. The literal meaning of the word 'Baul' is 'the mad'. Tagore songs are those composed and sung by Rabindra Nath Tagore. These songs are often influenced by romantic folklore and poetry, and often use Baul music.

and allow diasporic subjectivities to articulate a distinct position for themselves by questioning and resisting traditional narratives of homeland hegemony in diasporic homes.

## **Part II: ‘Bending’ Gender Identities in Gurinder Chadha’s *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002)<sup>78</sup>**

In the previous part of this chapter, I began by reflecting on the politics of gendering diasporic homes as ‘gender rules...construct women as mainly responsible for the domestic domain...within dominant discourses and practices...within the diaspora’ (Anthias qtd in Kalra, Kaur & Hutnyk 557). I showed that Nair is able to reflect on Ashima’s journey and to show that the internal conflicts of a diasporic home deconstruct the cultural burdens of homeland values within it. This part of this chapter further explores the contestation of homeland values in diasporic homes by carefully scrutinizing a second-generation diasporic daughter (Jess) in Chadha’s *Bend It Like Beckham*. I argue that Chadha presents Jess as capable of affecting a liberalization and transformation of gendered spaces in diasporic homes, and that this is brought about by the delocalized nature and multi-racial and ethnic experiences of living in the host land. Unlike Ashima, who accepts the geographical and emotional duality of her existence, by ‘living six months in India and six months in the US’ (*The Namesake*, 2007), Jess intervenes in homogenized perception of ‘Indianness’ within diasporic homes. In building her character within a South Asian diasporic home in London, the film is able to discursively promote the plurality of identities in diasporic homes and to capture the changing face of diasporic homes in the host nation.

I will conclude this section by showing that, while Nair’s film shows that a gradual move towards acceptance of diasporic life is enacted in the absence of the patriarch, Chadha’s film ventures to show that this contestation of homeland values in diasporic homes is affected after the intervention of the patriarch, thereby showing that stereotypes about the role of women in diasporic families can be challenged and redefined by articulating a space for men and women

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<sup>78</sup>*Bend it Like Beckham* was first released on 12 April 2002 in the United Kingdom by Redbus Film Distribution. The film was produced by Gurinder Chadha in association with her co-writers and Deepak Nayyar.

to reassess their diasporic journeys and to pave the way for a more inclusive and progressive diasporic existence.

*Bend It Like Beckham* was one of the successes of 2002, making over \$75,000,000 worldwide, striking a chord with a range of audiences globally. *Bend It Like Beckham* was presented as a 'feel good' film which appealed to audiences in its examination of culture clashes and family traditions (Hussain 5-9, Desai 53-56). It has been described as a vibrant and colourful British comedy about a young girl from a Sikh family who desperately wants to play football, against the wishes of her traditional parents. *Bend It Like Beckham* was presented with the tagline 'Who wants to cook *aloo gobi* when you can bend a ball like Beckham?' The comical timing of Asian elderly women played a prominent part in the movie and the humour generated from the way she understands Jess and Jules' relationship has added immensely to the popularity of the film. Another reason for the film's widespread global appeal is the combination of the genre of coming of age and sport-oriented film that is able to impress Western viewers, and the traditional setting, values and wedding narratives that appeal to South Asian diasporic audiences globally (Korte & Sternberg 174).<sup>79</sup> In fact, Chadha and her co-writers, Guljit Bindra and Paul Mayeda Berges, were widely applauded for having brought diasporic cultural conflicts to the forefront.<sup>80</sup> Chadha won the Special Recognition for Excellence in Filmmaking award in 2003, and Best Film in the British Comedy Awards in 2002. Internationally, the film was greatly appreciated and won awards at the Locarno Film Festival, the International Film Festival of Marrakesh and the Sydney Film Festival.

The film has popularly and predominantly been analysed in terms of exploring 'Asian British migrant identities' in the UK and of critiquing the internal dynamics of a diasporic household. The film is youth-centric and focuses on Jess and Jules, teenagers aspiring to be footballers. The film not only sports an extensive range of music clips, but also uses them in a series of

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<sup>79</sup> The question of target audience and differences in Western and native audiences has been addressed in critical studies by Korte and Sternburg and, to some extent, even in Desai's work on Chadha's film. I do not wish to dwell further on the ramifications of exoticism and mainstream appeal vis-à-vis these films. This is purely because my focus is on gender narratives in these films, and delving into debates of audiences and market pulls and incentives will stretch the analysis in another direction. This is not to suggest that these discussions do not contribute towards understanding the global dynamics of consumption and production of diasporic texts, but they are not within the scope of my project.

<sup>80</sup> Gurinder Chadha and her co-writers, Paul Mayeda Berges and Guljit Bindra, won the Best Original Screenplay award in 2003 from Writers Guild of America.

montage sequences, often associated with football training and action from featured games. The reliance on these montage sequences is perhaps the defining stylistic feature of the film. The film is filmed on location with studio inserts for the Bhamra home. Apart from a couple of crane shots and extensive steadicam work on the football field, the camera work is more expansive in nature, juxtaposing the openness of the play field and the claustrophobic spaces inside the Bhamra household.

Peter Bradshaw states in his review of the film: 'Gurinder Chadha's third film is an undemanding unambitious comedy about Jess (Parminder Nagra), a soccer mad teenage girl who outrages her traditional Indian family by idolizing Beckham and playing football in a local all-female team' (*Guardian*, April 12, 2002). Similarly, Jamie Russell states in the *BBC Review*: 'Gurinder Chadha turns this British Asian film about a clash between traditional values and the modern day world into a fantastic feel good movie... As her [Jess's] mum says, 'who would want a girl who plays football all day but can't make round chapattis' (April 11, 2002). These popular reviews have a tendency to discuss the movie in the light of the liberal ending, primarily understanding it as an 'unambitious comedy' or a 'fantastic feel good movie'.

The focus is on describing the film as an engaging and entertaining representation of a South Asian migrant family and its regressive social and cultural patriarchal norms, without engaging with the conflicts of gender roles and, for that matter, barely problematizing the gender and generational tensions within diasporic homes. In so doing, reviews have circumscribed the gender concerns that the film sensitively portrays and have ignored the overlapping and conflicting paradigms of the diasporic household.

Within the domain of scholarship on Chadha's film, *Bend It Like Beckham* has predominantly been analysed by problematizing the conflicted relationship of women and sports. Ann Chacko in her brilliant analysis of the gendered spaces in the Bhamra household begins by elaborating upon the conflicted relationship between Jess and her mother: 'Mrs. Bhamra is anxious that Jess might remain a perpetual spinster as no family will want a daughter in law who can run around all day but can't make round chapattis'. As a result, Chacko argues, Jess often finds the 'baggage associated with her Indian identity cumbersome... [and therefore] she challenges and subverts essentialized notions about an Indian girl' (85).

Chacko furthers this argument by comparing the conflicted relationship between Mrs Bhamra and Jess to Jules and her mother, Mrs Paxton. She points out that Jules' English mother is also shown to be 'colluding with the patriarchal discourse and its stereotypical role assigned to women' (ibid.), thereby highlighting how this form of oppressive, antagonistic approach to women's sports and non-domestic activities is not exclusive to Asian migrant mothers.<sup>81</sup> Although Chacko's main argument accurately points out that both Jess and Jules are subject to outmoded patriarchal norms by their overbearing mothers, and rebel against the norms with the support of their fathers, the analysis homogenizes patriarchal value systems as universal, and undervalues the individual journeys and subject positions of Jess and Jules. It fails to recognize that the subject location of Jess as a second-generation diasporic woman in a Sikh household in London is hugely different from Jules' position as a young British woman who is trying to play football against her mother's wishes.

Desai furthers this comparative analysis by invoking a new dimension of Jess and Jules' relationship. Desai posits that 'both families [Jess and Jules] are concerned with the ways in which sports may disrupt gender and sexual normativities' as it dismantles their non-feminine behaviour and compels their parents to doubt their relationship with each other (214). Desai further argues that the primary relationship in the film is not the one between Joe and Jess but between Jess and Jules. The queer angle between Jess and Jules is usefully deployed to represent how both the women deconstruct gender norms in contemporary Britain, articulating the lack of understanding of their love for sports and the concomitant aspects of camaraderie it encourages. Desai further states that the relationship the girls share is constantly sexualized and treated as something that can be voiced but then dismissed. This is done as a consequence of the fact that neither Jules nor Jess are acting in a feminine way that is recognized as legitimate by their mothers, nor in Jess's case by her community.

Although Desai and Chacko are right in pointing out the alternative models of relationship within the film, what these comparisons do is initiate constant uncritical comparisons between Jess and Jules and their battles against the overarching oppressions of patriarchy, largely

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<sup>81</sup>Caudwell, a researcher of gender and equality in sporting contexts, has deployed the queer-feminist approach to analyse Chadha's *Bend It Like Beckham*. Appreciating the narrative and subject of the film, Caudwell argues that there are very few films that portray athletic bodies of women and women's entry into a male dominated territory. Caudwell's analysis also states that traditional restrictive roles for women and the lack of family support are the two critical reasons for the dearth of women's representation in sports.



ignoring the position and diasporized status of Jess, which is distinct from Jules' position. Jess's passion for football, and her willingness to neglect domestic happiness for it, positions her in a much more complex space of defying all the norms of her traditional Asian home at one level, and of the larger South Asian diasporic community at another.<sup>82</sup>

Hence there is a need to address the cultural and social differences of Jess's position, in order to examine the role and place of women in South Asian diasporic households. In the following section, I aim to divert the focus from these lines of argument to focus on the consolidation of homeland culture within diasporic homes, through the figure of Mrs Bhamra, and then go on to show how Jess challenges these rigidified homeland values. I will delve deeper into the representation of this equation between the women in the Bhamra household to better understand Chadha's negotiation of the gender conflicts within the domestic space of a British Asian home.

*Bend It Like Beckham* depicts the story of Jessminder 'Jess' Bhamra, the youngest daughter of a Sikh family living in suburban London. She is shown to be an admirer of David Beckham, and plays football wherever and whenever she can. There is an establishing shot at the opening of the film, focusing on the houses in Southall, the area where the Bhamra's reside. It then cuts to focus on Mrs Bhamra praying in front of a large framed photo of Guru Nanak. Through this establishing shot, the director shows that Mrs Bhamra has managed to retain certain key symbolic elements of 'Indianness' in the household, which 'is replete with significant and essential markers of Indian cultural identity such as Indian food, Indian TV programmes, the Punjabi language, religious icons and heated discussions regarding the code of conduct for Indian girls' (Chacko 82). This scene presents the loud and dogmatic figure of Jess's mother through her dialogue, in which she insists that she is 'too busy trying to keep the Indian values over my girls' and therefore strongly condemns Jess's decision to take up football professionally:

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<sup>82</sup>Jess's relationship with her mother and Jules' conflicts with her mother are presented in different ways in the film. Jess's arguments and problems are presented in a serious way, whereas Jules' filial situation and her mother's concern are presented as a humorous foil to Jess. Also, the movie depicts that Jules' mother does come around to see her daughter play and begins to take an interest in football, whereas Jess's mother does not support her interest in football till the very end of the movie. Mrs Bhamra's support for her daughter's career choice only comes forth in the wake of her husband's intervention in the matter and is presented as secondary to his decision of encouraging Jess to follow her dream career.

Jessminder, I don't want shame on my family... you have to start behaving as a proper woman, ok? I don't want you running around people half-naked in front of men, look how dark you have become playing under the sun. No family will want a daughter-in-law who plays football non-stop. You can go and play round football but you can't make round chapattis. Once your exams are over you are starting to learn how to cook a proper Punjabi dinner. (Chadha 00:20:34)

This interaction between Mrs Bhamra and Jess highlights some defining characteristics of the position of bearer of culture of the family. First, like Ashima, the first-generation diasporic mother is relentless in sustaining symbolism of 'Indianness' through a barrage of ethnic objects and ritualistic imagery within the household. Secondly, like Nair's representation of Ashima's interaction with her children that are mostly carried out in the kitchen Chadha positions Mrs Bhamra within the domestic confines of the kitchen, angling the camera to capture her back and forth movement from the kitchen. She, too, is engaged in teaching and coercing her children into learning Indian values without challenging the relevance of these homeland values in their diasporic existence. This form of patriarchal and cultural pressure to sustain 'Indianness' and other 'ethnic and unassimilated traits' – of being able to 'make round chapattis' – illustrates the residual effects of homeland values within diasporic homes, further problematizing an already conflicted relationship between Mrs Bhamra and Jess (Radhakrishnan 121).

Mrs Bhamra's displeasure also stems from that fact that she expects the responsibility of cultural preservation to be automatically transferred to the next generation of women; she expects the daughters of the family to further a 'faithful reproduction of Indianness' (Wilson 17). Therefore she is even more displeased by Jess's disinterest in household chores, as she watches with annoyance Jess kicking a ball through the washing. A long shot focuses on Jess's kicking the ball, against the colourful sarees hanging from the washing line, symbolizing her detachment from daily household chores, family and domesticity<sup>83</sup>. The camera constantly juxtaposes Mrs Bhamra's traditional clothing against Jess's soccer clothes in order to

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<sup>83</sup>The motif of the hanging saree is a recurring one; as most scenes shot in the backyard of the Bhamra household repeatedly capture hanging sarees. In a rather comic scene, Jess's football peers help her drape a saree and Jess is seen struggling to keep it on, displaying a reluctance to learning Indian traditions (such as wearing sarees) and is then reprimanded by her mother for not having imbibed this 'Indian trait'.

highlight the difference in their personal lifestyle choices. This scene ends with a low shot of Jess demonstrating her subservience and her intimidation after she is confronted by her mother in the park.

Anjali Gera Roy, who discusses the politics of space and chronotope in the Bhamra household, highlights how the neighbourhood field and the park emerge as ‘spaces of liminality’ (62), and how the visual depiction of the household reinforces it as a space of conflict, by juxtaposing it with the football field and the airport that are privileged as spaces of liberation (62-64). A montage contrasts the claustrophobic home space, filled with overbearing religious symbolism, ritualistic imagery and Mrs Bhamra’s dominating presence, with Jess’s football field, foregrounding Jess’s sense of liberation and freedom from the confines of domesticity. The background music during these scenes, songs such as ‘Move on Up’ and ‘Do Your Thing’, when Jess is practicing and playing in the field, is juxtaposed against Indian Punjabi folklore songs such as ‘KinnaSona’ and ‘Kurta Punjab Diya’, played during the wedding celebrations. This contrast is built in order to highlight the difference in setting and to widen the chasm between the chaotic Bhamra household and the more open space of the football field or the park.

The contradiction and tension between these two spaces reflects upon the struggle between Mrs Bhamra, who is trying to reinforce ‘allegiance to a homeland’ (Ezra & Rowden 5) through the replication of Indian values, and Jess, for whom these cultural values are less relevant and meaningful. Jess understands this power play and the constant tension between the pulls of Indianness that Mrs Bhamra is attempting to uphold, and the desire to keep away from the confines of the home to play football. Jess is seen confessing to her coach Joe that her parents’ refusal to allow her to play football stems from their desire to protect: ‘they want to protect me...this is taking me away from everything they know’ (Chadha 00:35:46). Jess understands that her passion for a male-dominated sport stands in opposition to the domestic space that her parents, especially her mother, are attempting to preserve, because it represents an invasion of the ‘foreign’. She painfully laments: ‘Anything I want is just not Indian enough for [my parents]’ (ibid.). Mrs Bhamra’s use of the word ‘foreign’ reiterates Ashima’s use of the term ‘strange’ for the distant behaviour of her children. Once again, we see that for the bearer of culture, the host land signifies a distant, alien territory, and therefore it dramatically

alters their sense of belonging and values. This inherent desire to sustain and preserve the patriarchal values of the homeland in the diaspora space reflects a homing desire for the bearer of culture, as these values come to represent the mythic distant space of the homeland; a space that is unachievable in diaspora but yet fervently desired. It also redefines their own position vis-à-vis their children, whose sense of belonging to their parents' homeland is fragile and fraught. Mrs Bhamra's position as the bearer of culture amplifies her role within the domestic sphere, thereby placing her in a position of command within the household; and yet, at the same time, it distances her from the outside world, a world in which Jess privileges the neighbourhood park and football field more than the home.

Moreover, this form of lamentation by Jess reflects the tenuous cultural space she occupies and the emotional struggles that this entails. Her positionality reflects the emotional and cultural distance from her parent's homeland space and its fading relevance in her social space. Jess's conflicted relationship with her parents compels Jess to question her parent's desperation 'to protect their 'Indianness'...the 'fossilized' values of the 1960's[sic]including commitment, duty, honour, sacrifice perpetuated over the years'(Hussain 26). Yasmin Hussain, in her discussion of the contestation of homeland values in diaspora, highlights generational conflicts as a characteristic of diasporic families, and argues that the 'differences between the generations arise from the exposure to the integrating services of the majority society from the birth...in the diaspora, the second and subsequent generation finds itself navigating within a social context which differs entirely from that which they share with their own parents'(ibid.). Hussain further argues that 'their [second generation diasporic children] hyphenated identity becomes expressive of a commonality and national loyalty that serves as a symbol of belonging' (25).

Unlike first-generation diasporic individuals, who are very much involved in discovering, assimilating with and reinventing their space within the host country, second-generation diasporic children are emotionally and culturally distanced from their parent's native culture. These constant tensions and the tenuousness of the connection also has severe ramifications within the diasporic family, as the tensions between first-generation diasporic parents and their children reflects an uneasy negotiation of homeland values and diasporic identities for all the people involved.

Jess, too, acknowledges the fact that, despite their diasporic position and upbringing, her parents' continued and intimate association with the overbearing framework of 'Indian' cultural values problematizes Jess's diasporic positioning and her life choices. As a result, Jess begins to reflect upon the normative and restrictive frameworks of the cultural values that her parents and the larger Asian diasporic community upholds. For instance, Jess points out that she is markedly different from her sister, as she dislikes make-up and tight clothing, she has never truanted from school, and has never chased boys or slept with them.<sup>84</sup> Despite this, she points out that she is constantly labelled the oddity in the family. In emphasizing these traits as negative and an aberration from the normalcy of Indian cultural norms, Jess is able to highlight how even her sister is complicit in challenging the conventionality of these values. Furthermore, she points out that these traits of her sister's are tolerated, if not completely accepted, by the family and the larger diasporic community. This is symptomatic of the hypocrisy of values that allows the Indian diasporic community to tolerate and accept feminine behaviour as long as it is complemented by domestic skills and is leading to marriage. In so doing, Jess highlights the transformative capacity of diasporic life that, on one level, has allowed her to question the inconsistent sustenance of traditional Indian values in the host nation, and at another level, reflects the changing landscape of a South Asian British community in which some traditional values are being re-defined.

This form of awareness of self and deeper understanding of the fraught filial space is particularly helpful as it enables Jess to confidently rebel against overbearing traditional values and assert her professional choices. Jess's honest speech about her love for football and her success in the game changes Mrs Bhamra's attitude towards Jess and her own position within the family. She comes to realize that however unconventional Jess's aspirations might be, they are crucial for her professional growth and personal happiness. During this scene, the camera sharply focuses on Jess's confident face as she stands in front of her relatives and her family, courageously voicing her love for football, and the scene ends with a close up of Jess and her father, who is amicably understanding of Jess's choice of career and passion. The end of the movie, in which Jess is given permission to pursue a career in football, represents a

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<sup>84</sup>The film shows how Mrs Bhamra constantly compares Jess to her elder sister Pinky, whose interest in marriage and domestic life are seen as hallmarks of Indian values. Pinky is the older daughter of the Bhamra household, who is presented as the more conventional Indian daughter, and who is constantly fussing over her wedding plans and appears to conform to her parent's wishes

positive acknowledgement and reinforcement from Mrs Bhamra and the larger diasporic community. It symbolizes Jess's attempt to 'bend' the patriarchal rules and dictates, in order to carve a more liberal space for South Asian women in diaspora. In an interview, Chadha mentions that the title of the movie, *Bend It Like Beckham*, which is a reference to David Beckham's skill of bending the ball when scoring a goal, plays with the boundaries of hegemonic patriarchal norms and of the necessity for women to 'bend' societal rules in order to follow their dreams (Morales (np)).

Although most critics have celebrated the climax of the film as empowering and liberating for Jess, as it 'endeavours to contest the construction of South Asian and diasporic women as passive victims of heteropatriarchy' (Desai 215), I would like to highlight how Chadha's film is able to affect this redefinition of gender identities and to resolve filial conflicts through the intervention of Mr Bhamra. In other words, unlike Nair's film, in which the absence of Ashok heralds the transformative process for Ashima, Chadha shows that one cannot ignore the position of the patriarch in the traditional Asian diasporic household, whose intervention is crucial for the conflicts to be resolved and for there to be a powerful change in family dynamics as well.

Chadha juxtaposes the figure of the uninformed and dogmatic Mrs. Bhamra against the figure of Mr. Bhamra, whose rejection of Jess's interest in football is borne out of experience, thereby reinforcing the position of the former as culturally burdened and confined to domesticity. In the scene in which Jess's coach Joe comes to her house to formally ask for her parents' permission to let her play, it is Mr. Bhamra who decides to confront him and inform him that their disapproval of Jess's participation in the women's football team is a consequence of his own bitter experiences of racial and parochial discrimination when he was trying to join the English national cricket team. This scene depicts the home dynamics of the Bhamra household, in which the first-generation diasporic mother, Mrs Bhamra, is allowed to refine and polish her daughters to become more marketable commodities in the marriage market, yet within the public negotiations it is the patriarch of the family whose experiences of the world dictate major household decisions. This scene particularly foregrounds Mr. Bhamra's facial expressions and angst through close-up shots, establishing the importance of his journey in the host land, and the angst of discrimination and racism that it reflects.

The end of the film presents a breakthrough moment, as Mr. Bhamra decides to re-think his reservations, and realizes that his personal tragedies cannot and should not define his daughter's ambitions. He decides to forgo his initial resentment and also to ignore the disapproval of the diasporic Indian community, and let his daughter undertake the journey. In so doing, Chadha not only signals a movement towards acceptance and assimilation on behalf of Mr. Bhamra, but also that a comprehensive change in traditional patterns of filial ties and gender roles can be brought about by complete participation of the woman in diasporic homes and the patriarch of the family. In fact, this conventional climax, along with Jess's speech, re-affirm the fact that Chadha is interested in preserving some of the Indian cultural ethos of obedience towards parents and filial ties, while at the same time allowing Jess to question and deconstruct certain gender stereotypes intrinsic to Asian homes.

The film ends with a scene at the airport, where Jess and Jules' parents come to bid goodbye to their daughters as they leave for their football training camp in America. Critics like Chacko, Aarti Nair and Desai argue that this climactic scene symbolizes the conflict between the ideals that Mrs Bhamra espouses throughout the film, with marriage being the ultimate goal for an Indian girl, and Jess's golden opportunity of participating in the football championship and denouncing traditions of Indian marriages. Hence, they argue that the ending of the film celebrates and supports Jess's dream career but with the agreement and support of her parents. Desai concludes: 'As a film advocating women playing sports *Bend It Like Beckham* proposes an engaging narrative that has been immensely popular. Finally the film concludes with the celebrated migration of Jules and Jess to the U.S.' (216). Even Chacko concludes her analysis by foregrounding that by 'dribbling through cross-cultural spaces'(1) Jess is able to articulate a more liberal space for women in the diaspora.

Although the critics are right in highlighting the central conflict and the concomitant resolution, in my opinion, the ending of the film resonates at many levels. This scene reiterates the pivotal role of open spaces such as airports, where interactions and relationships are captured through bright lighting and full-length shots, in order to foreground the impending freedom for Jess and Jules. The scene begins with close-up shots of Jess and her parents, and ends with a wide shot of the Bhamra and Paxton families waving their goodbyes, and consoling each other. In so doing, Chadha manages to show a positive image of a

growing inter-ethnic relationship and, more importantly, an acceptance of new identities for diasporic women, built and sustained through the support of their families. Therefore, in agreement with Desai's hypothesis, I would also emphasize that *Bend It Like Beckham* is 'liberal but not too radical' in its treatment of gender issues (214), as parental consent vis-à-vis career choices and inter-ethnic love equations is depicted as crucial within South Asian diasporic homes, so that gender roles and filial frameworks can be amicably (with some resistance) renegotiated.

## Conclusion

In part two of this chapter, I have examined the gendered diasporic space as projected in *Bend It Like Beckham*. I hope to have shown that the film shows how women in the South Asian diaspora embody the site of struggle between homeland values and the emergent culture in the host nation. I have highlighted how the film depicts Mrs. Bhamra's journey from total rejection and disdain towards Jess's lack of interest in domestic life and passion for football, to a more generous acceptance of her career choice and her move away from the traditional roles of 'upholders and preservers of our culture' (Wilson 39). In this conflict of ideologies, Jess is able to contest and challenge the continuities of 'homeland' and the concomitant conceptions of gendered identity, only to reveal a more complex and transformative cultural space for diasporic women. I have also shown that this acceptance of liberal space for women is brought about by changing gender dynamics within the house.

Furthermore, both the films in this chapter identify and foreground the complexity of the position of women as diasporic subjects, which is constructed through multiple factors in terms of migrant hood, generational conflict and gender. Both films reflect upon diasporic frameworks that 'maintain and consolidate connections and imaginings of the homeland by performing national identities through gender' (Desai 30), and both purposefully question normative gender identities to represent the changing identities of diasporic homes and the place of women within them. In analysing both films, I have shown that they reinforce the position of the first-generation diasporic mother as culturally burdened. *The Namesake*, the first-generation diasporic mother, Ashima, is presented in conflict with other family members,



whereas in *Bend It Like Beckham*, the conflict is between Mrs Bhamra and Jess. I have been able to show that the films present these conflicts as integral, as they redefine the inter-generational conflict within a South Asian diasporic household. Furthermore, though in different ways, both films present these conflicts without ignoring the importance of the patriarchal presence. *The Namesake* shows Ashima's growth and emancipation in the absence of Ashok, whereas Jess' dream to play professional football is achieved only after she obtains her father's approval. In so doing, the films do not completely sideline the figure of the patriarch, but present him as a catalyst whose intervention (even through absence) can significantly contribute towards reshaping filial connections and identities for women in the South Asian diaspora.

I have shown that both films address the complexities of claiming and defining South Asian diasporic and gender identities through intergenerational conflicts and filial frameworks. The films represent the ways in which South Asian women negotiate their subjective experiences and essentialized identities. In so doing, both films engage with diasporic narrativizations of private, filial experiences to deconstruct essentialized ideologies of homeland values, and to inform our understanding of South Asian diasporic identities in the host land.

## Conclusion

My aim in this thesis has been to show how selected diasporic writers and filmmakers from South Asia negotiate ambivalent, multi-dimensional and hybrid diasporic positioning in order to problematize representations of homeland and host spaces, debates of diasporic reception and unified notions of diasporic identity. As I argued in the introduction, the thesis aims at understanding ‘the relationship between identity and fixity’, by deconstructing the conventional wisdom of ‘home’ as ‘a stationery point in the environment from which to engineer one’s moving, perceiving, ordering and constructing’(Rapport & Dawson 21). This area of research is especially relevant as it interrogates the ‘emergence of the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of differences’ where the ‘intersubjunctive and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated’ (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 2).

The introduction began by interrogating key concepts of ‘home’, ‘belonging’ ‘diasporic identity’ and ‘host land’. In the introduction, I used theories propounded by Brah, Hall and Bhabha to understand how diasporic displacement is predicated upon the concept of home, as the issues of belonging and distance radically re-articulate diasporic journeys and settlement. Their definitions of home and belonging suggest that transposing ‘home’ or re-homing within diasporic frameworks is a process of cultural translation and relocation. As a result, it can be seen that diasporic representations of homeland and host nations are defined through ‘an interminable discussion between scattered historical inheritance and a heterogeneous present’ (Chambers 6).

Hence, rather than imbuing diasporic representations of homeland with a yearning for a univocal home, and lingering on nostalgic recreations of the world left behind, I have revealed how writers actively negotiate alternative modalities of belonging that celebrate the plurality of cultural identities within and outside the homeland. As a consequence, the thesis successfully locates diasporic works within contemporary cultural and globalized contexts, acknowledging their relevance in representing, redefining, rewriting and rearticulating

homeland realities and the history of re-settlement. Furthermore, I have shown that representations of homeland and host nations are marked by interrogating history and national events, problematizing the postcolonial identity of nation states and national cultures, redefining their political and social journeys and foregrounding their contemporary/emergent positioning within global frameworks. I have also argued that these texts produce alternative identities of the homeland, discursively articulating the changing face of homeland postcoloniality and understanding the contemporaneity of historical events. This analysis led me to interrogate unified and singular conceptions of migrant identity, migrant presence, and the cultural and social politics of the host land. In so doing, I have been able to foreground the idea that the literary and filmic production of diasporic communities represents both a celebration and an incisive critique of the different cultural spaces they inhabit. In sharing their experiences of multiple-linguistic, geographical, historical dislocations, the diasporic writers included in the thesis invite their readers to see the changing faces of diasporic cultures and identities.

In addressing the reception of diasporic texts, I have argued for a more positive engagement with South Asian diasporic texts in terms of engaging in what may be a more progressive analysis of reception. I have attempted to liberate critical scholarship on diasporic representations of South Asia from the binarism of nationalism and the territorialization of native identities by highlighting the dynamism of diasporic spaces. I have analysed the reception of diasporic texts by drawing together and contrasting academic and popular responses. In so doing, I have worked to redefine the understanding of diasporic reception by focusing on the cultural expanse of these diasporic texts. Reading these texts as agents of cultural production, the thesis was able to draw on the interpretative possibilities of the literary critical mode of reading, enabling nuanced modes of analysis attentive to issues of diasporic identity, the identity of nation-states and the emergent global dynamics of migrant narratives.

In the first two chapters, I analysed Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Mistry's *A Fine Balance*, and Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* and *Anil's Ghost*. I have conclusively shown that Rushdie's and Mistry's texts problematize a unified political understanding of the Indian Emergency, and also that they deconstruct the unitary temporal and spatial relations of socio-

political realities of India, post-independence. In this way, both these texts emerge as crucial interventions in an interrogation of the dominant narrative of the nation/state by problematizing the strategies of closure and containment which are perpetrated through the discourse of the homeland, the nation and the signs of its cultural life that emerge as necessarily constituted of unresolved contradictions and dilemmas. These ideas are carried forward in my chapter on Michael Ondaatje, which ventures to understand the notions of 'belonging' and 'homecoming', so as to critically probe the contemporaneity of return narratives and understand them through this paradigm. Through this space of dialogue and interaction between these distinct diasporic identities, Ondaatje manages to redefine concepts of 'return' and alienation' within the homeland and build up new ways of understanding homeland and its tenuous relationship with the diasporic returnee.

In the next three chapters, I analysed Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* and Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. This section deals with diasporic representations of the host land. All three chapters deconstruct the notions of a unified, homogenized view of the difficulties of diasporic settlements: problems of assimilation, ethnic othering, racial discrimination and generational integration. In this section, I explored how all three writers, Rushdie, Kureishi and Hamid, unravel the political, cultural and psychological relationship between migrants and their host nation. In so doing, I reveal the process of cultural and social transformation that has been brought about through migrant interventions in the host land, and I foreground the notions of migrant identity and national affiliations that are becoming more indistinct, ambiguous and complex.

In the last part of the thesis, on South Asian diasporic films, I address gender and inter-generational conflict in Gurinder Chadha's *Bend it Like Beckham* and Mira Nair's *The Namesake*, and turn to many critical areas at once, drawing together my earlier concerns and expanding them to consider a wider cultural exchange. First of all, I initiate a dialogue between films and literature that extends the scope of my thesis to accommodate another media of diasporic representation. Secondly, I consider the subject of accommodation to the host land in relation to gender dynamics. I do this by evaluating the specific position of women in the diasporic household by examining the continuance of homeland values in diasporic homes through the interrelationship between the first-generation mother and second-

generation daughter, and I identify and unravel the conflict of diasporic identities and ideologies. Moreover, the focus on filial dynamics of a South Asian diasporic household helps to unravel ‘heteronormativity and liberal feminist politics’ (Desai 208), especially in terms of balancing the modern and the traditional values of homeland. And thirdly, I consider the subject of the global reception of the films and invite the reader to consider the popular texture of diasporic works through cinema, as it is ‘the focus on the issues of gender and sexuality that has produced commercial successes in the past five years [for South Asian diasporic cinema]’ (Desai 5). I work to show the crucial role of films in the development of a South Asian diasporic identity and culture.

The combination and contrast of all these chapters of the thesis places both the conceptual frames of ‘home’ and ‘diaspora’ in dialectal tension, in order to help us rethink our own ideas of nationhood and belonging, allowing us to deconstruct rigidified ideas of culture, society and identity.

First, through these literary imaginings of home and host land, I have been able to show that home is not that fixed point of origin; it emerges as necessarily constituted of unresolved contradictions and dilemmas. To show this, I have engaged with several key issues concerning the reconfiguration of the nation, and the re-presenting of the national imaginary from perspectives that defy nationalist interpretations of culture and history. These texts have been able to negotiate with homeland postcolonial realities in order to assess and address the increasing significance of homeland politics: in history, culture and politics. Moreover, I have shown that these selected diasporic texts tend to privilege personalized memory of national events and history over historical accuracy and representation, offering alternative metaphors for national identity construction which interrogate and problematize nationalist narratives of identity.

Secondly, I have extended this form of analysis to representations of host land, in order to show the way diasporic subjects interrogate homogenized ethnic conceptions of Asian identity, inter-generational diasporic conflicts, and their ramifications for the relationship between the migrant and their host country. Moreover, I extended the analysis forward by exploring migrant politics against global events such as the terrorist attacks of 9/11. In so doing, I have been able to show the contemporaneity of migrant narratives by powerfully

evoking the need and the place for a narrative of arriving, living and departing from the host land. I am able to show that contemporary migrant tales of assimilation and integration can be studied through the vantage point of different generations and through a returning diasporic subject, broadening the rubric of contemporary representations of the migrant's assimilation and integration within the host land.

Thirdly, the thesis is able to succinctly show the way in which diasporic filial relationships within the homeland and within diasporic homes problematize the negotiation of diasporic identities, and allow diasporic subjectivities to articulate a distinct position for them by questioning and resisting traditional narratives of homeland hegemony and host land stereotypes. The thesis has been able to interconnect issues of inter-generational diasporic conflicts and filial issues within diasporic homes in both literature and films, in order to problematize representations of domestic spaces within diasporic frameworks.

As a consequence, I am able to show that these literary and cinematic works explore the fluidity and relativity of cultural identity, resulting from interaction between diasporic positionalities and the matrix of peoples and cultures, showcasing the complexities of identity negotiation in diasporic space. In this manner, my thesis is able to build up a strong synergy of diasporic debates and discussions, exploring the heterogeneity, difference and diversity of diasporic representations by integrating cultural, sociological, political, gender-centric and postcolonial aspects within one research project.

Despite this broad coverage, my focus on the representation and mediation of diasporic identity in relation to the homeland and host land has inevitably meant that I have been unable to address some important areas that lie outside the scope of my thesis. Related concepts such as transnationalism, the role of digital media and transmission, and globalization, are all critical fields that extend the scope of my concerns and work toward widening the rubric of diasporic studies and enhancing their contemporary relevance.

The concept of 'transnationalism', for example, extends my focus on diasporic perspectives on the representation of homeland and host nations. It directs our attention to the complex multidirectional flows of human beings, ideas and products (cultural and physical), through

negotiation and exchange, and processes of acculturation and cultural creativity.<sup>85</sup> Steven Vertovec's *Transnationalism* (2009) and Hannerz *Transnational Connections: Culture, People and Places* (1996) provide very useful and comprehensive starting points that reveal the way the politics and growth of transnationalism are of relevance to diasporic cultural studies. Furthermore, their engagement with travelling diasporic subjects might be extremely useful in analyzing texts such as Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* or Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, both novels that I had originally intended to use in my thesis, but did not. I chose not to because I did not wish to focus on the figure of the nomadic or the diasporic traveller. Such a focus would have pulled my research in a different direction, requiring more attention on the narrator figure and the transnational subject in ways that would have prevented me remaining clearly focused on understanding diasporic negotiations of and with the homeland and host land.

Secondly, in terms of dissecting the oeuvre of South Asian diasporic culture globally, I have become aware of the extensive reach of my core concerns and that I could have given more attention to diasporic works or writers who have settled in other parts of Asia and Africa.<sup>86</sup> A close focus on South Asian diasporic populations within Asia and Africa would have involved an analysis of the continued migration of whole diasporic groups and factors related to the expansion and contraction of diasporic communities to these places. This broader framework of analysis seems to belong to historical and area studies, and could work to illustrate changing patterns of migration over time, further clarifying the distinctions between diaspora in First World and Third World nations. This space can be explored to analyse the diversity and difference in political relationship between these countries and the way diasporic dislocation alter these relationships.

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<sup>85</sup> Stephen Clingan's book *The Grammar of Identity* is a wonderful study in this direction. It touches upon the core issues of the boundary of self and place in this postmodern world. In so doing, it explores the fiction of major writers such as Salman Rushdie, Joseph Conrad, Caryl Phillips, Jean Rhys, Nadine Gordimer and more, to deconstruct the binaries of the modern and postmodern and expand the concept of the transnational self in order to study the nature of theoretical and conceptual boundaries and the relationship between the travelling subject and the traumas of dislocation.

<sup>86</sup> I did come across few research papers and articles that have discussed African migration patterns to Asia and have elaborated upon the history of indenture and colonization through this migration. In an interesting research paper on African migrants as cultural brokers in South Asia, Jayasurya focuses on migration from Africa to India and South East Asia, largely due to the slave trade. He states: 'The bicentennial of the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade has obscured other slave routes. African slaves reached not only the Caribbean but also China and Japan, spilling over into the Pacific Ocean. The process of migration eastwards began long before the Atlantic slave trade. While the latter lasted mainly from about 1440 to 1870, the movement across the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean spanned over several millennia' (de Silva Jayasuriya 2006a).

Another important area of research would involve analyzing and understanding diasporic representation through virtual spaces. Keeping up with the technologically advanced movements of literature and cinema, one will have to bear in mind that these new forms and narratives are continuously being shaped through the virtual world of e-information and e-writing. Diasporic writing in terms of blogs, websites, Twitter and other social networking sites has recently changed the medium and the syntax in which diasporic experiences are expressed<sup>87</sup>. This virtual world has changed the dynamics of reception, as there is an inherent liberality and openness about virtual space in which the complexity of the target audience is dismantled at a global level. Hence, there is an urgent need to systematically study the virtual space as a new, invigorated medium of diasporic expression.

Lastly, another approach to diasporic representations of homeland is one that focuses more specifically on the place of South Asian art in localized settings. Jasjit Singh's engaging study, which examines the cultural value of South Asian art in Britain via a review of literature on the subject and its impact on individuals and society is an example of this approach.<sup>88</sup> His study explores how South Asian art is explored and used in diasporic literature and how it plays an important role across the generations, highlighting the role of culturally relevant art for South Asians, and allowing young South Asians to engage with their heritage. I find this critical approach extremely novel, and at the same time very useful for exploring and learning about the growing scope of South Asian diasporic culture globally.

I wish to conclude the thesis by stating that I understand that any form of research (inevitably) tends to privilege the researchers' understanding and his/her methodology of analysis and experimentation. Having said that, I do believe that I have been earnest in my approach to developing the thesis as an original, critical intervention in the field, without devaluing the strength and relevance of the literary voices, scholarship and critical investments of all theorists, writers and filmmakers who have contributed to the conceptualization and completion of this project.

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<sup>87</sup> 'Between History and Identity: Reading the Authentic in South Asian Diasporic Literature and Community' by Tamara Ayesha Bhalla is a dissertation about community websites and cultural critique through these collective virtual spaces. The project draws upon 'qualitative sociological methods in order to study a South Asian American book club, the Network of South Asian Professionals Book Club located in Washington D.C., (hereafter NetSAP) while also mobilizing methods of literary textual analysis, literary history, and reception study' (Bhalla 4). After reading this dissertation, I realized that this area of virtual writing is under-explored and needs more systematic study of its expression and idiom

<sup>88</sup> See Jasjit Singh, *The Cultural Value of South Asian Arts* (2014).



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