MEDIATION AND COHESION IN SOUTH ASIAN FICTION: AN ANALYSIS OF TAGORE'S *HOME AND THE WORLD* AND MUNAWEERA'S *ISLAND OF A THOUSAND MIRRORS*

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Mediation and Cohesion in South Asian Fiction: An Analysis of Tagore's *Home and the World* and Munaweera's *Island of a Thousand Mirrors*

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ABSTRACT

Mediation and Cohesion in South Asian Fiction: An Analysis of Tagore's *Home and the World* and Munaweera's *Island of a Thousand Mirrors*

This dissertation is a reading of two South Asian Anglophone novels: Rabindranath Tagore's Home and the World (1919) and Nayomi Munaweera's Island of a Thousand Mirrors (2012). This project rests on the premise that contemporary South Asian Anglophone fiction depicts a rupture in received categorizations of colonial/postcolonial, east/west, local/translocal. Both the selected texts provide ample amount of space to examine a rejection of binaristic hierarchies and an investigation into the importance of transnational concerns and intermingled South Asian histories. The main argument is based on the assumption that postcolonial theory is reductive and creates hierarchies, distinctions and divisions, thereby exhibiting imperialist nostalgia. Sara Suleri's argument in her counter-discourse *Rhetoric of English India* (1992)—where she accuses postcolonial theorists and writers of perpetuating Eurocentric binarism—seems useful. Moreover, both the selected works of fiction also focus on the geographical locale from where they have emerged: they highlight their respective country's culture, traditions and political unrest, thus foregrounding South Asia. Harish Trivedi's argument in his essay "South Asian Literature: Reflections in a Confluence" seems to supplant Suleri's thesis. He debunks the efficacy of postcolonial theory in reading South Asian texts and demands locally produced theoretical framework(s) that would shed the burden of empire and tie their narrative to their geography. The selection of one Bengali and one Sri Lankan novel is also significant; it challenges the recessive position given to these regions in academia and complicates the superiority of India and Indian-English fiction, which due to a problematic generalization, largely represent South Asia.

Table of Contents

Chapter **Page**

THESIS AND DEFENSE APPROVAL FORM ii

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION iii

ABSTRACT iv

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS viii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ix

DEDICATION x

1. INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE OF THE STUDY 1

1.1 Introduction 1

1.1.1 Locating Tagore and Munaweera in the Larger South Asian Literary Scenario. 3

1.1.2 The Indian-English Novel 4

1.1.3 Post-independence Fiction: Anglophone Novel of Pakistan, India, Bengal and Sri Lanka 11

1.1.4 Postcolonialism, Diaspora Studies and South Asian Literature 17

1.2 Situatedness of the Researcher 21

1.3 Delimitation 21

1.4 Thesis Statement 22

1.5 Research Questions 22

1.6 Chapter Breakdown 22

1.7 Significance of the Study 23

2. LITERATURE REVIEW 24

2.1 Introduction 24

2.2 Oppositionality Discourse: Strategic Exoticism and Imperialist Nostalgia 24
2.3 Energizing the Liminal: Diaspora and the Rhetoric of South Asia 33
2.4 Critical Anthologies of South Asian Literature 44
2.5 Conclusion 48

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY 50
3.1 Introduction 50
3.2 Conceptual Framework for this Study 50
3.2.1 Sara Suleri and *The Anxiety of Empire* 51
3.2.2 Harish Trivedi and the South Asian Literary Category 53
3.3 Research Methodology 54
3.4 Conclusion 56

4. TRANSCENDING PECULIARITIES, RETAINING AUTHENTICITY: TAGORE'S *HOME AND THE WORLD* 57
4.1 Introduction 57
4.2 Tagore, Nationalism and *Home and the World* 60
4.3 Bimala and Bengal: Domesticity, Duty and Desire 63
4.4 Nikhil and Differential Epistemes 67
4.5 Sandip and Nationalism: *A Malady of ideas* 70
4.6 Tradition and Conservatism: Grandmother and Chandranath Babu 74
4.7 Conclusion 75

5. COMPLICATING NATIONALISM, BELONGING AND RHETORIC: MUNAWEERA'S *ISLAND OF A THOUSAND MIRRORS* 76
5.1 Introduction 76

5.2 Multiplicity and Multilocality: The Narrative Voice in *Island of a Thousand Mirrors* 78

5.3 Indigenous Colonization: “A war raged between related beasts” 82

5.4 Sea as Motherland: Indigeneity and Cultural Markers 89

5.5 Conclusion 93

6. CONCLUSION 95

6.1 Recommendations for Future Research 98

7. WORKS CITED 100

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

1. *Home and the World* as *HTW*
2. *Island of a Thousand Mirrors* as *ITM*

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my father who didn’t only raise and nurture literary curiosity in me but also taxed himself significantly over the years of my education. His unflinching support helped me stay tenacious in the face of adversity.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Some of us who had lost our way in the high noon of the colonial are now coming home to roost in the twilight of the postcolonial.

-Harish Trivedi

1.1 Introduction

This study aims to depict the shift in the treatment of East/West encounter and the colonial/postcolonial binary, as perceived in South Asian Literature. In this critical inquiry, I have attempted to see how South Asian writers position themselves at the cusp of a precolonial originary and the present postcolonial identity.

I have selected two works of fiction for analysis: Rabindranath Tagore's *Home and the World* and Nayomi Munaweera's *Island of a Thousand Mirrors*.[1] The research aims to explore the selected texts in the light of the theoretical concepts proposed by Sara Suleri and Harish Trivedi. This critical inquiry is aimed at analyzing how Colonial vis-à-vis Postcolonial forces are addressed in the selected texts. It further examines how South Asian writers attempt to evade their marginal roles—as writers of formerly colonized nation/s or as members of the diasporic community—and carve out for them and their stories an identity that is not trapped into the cycle of margin versus center. Furthermore, how these writers and critics alike attempt to negotiate difference by not subscribing to one essentialist binary of either colonial or postcolonial narrative, and subsequently tend to present an untainted view of the region's indigeneity and distinctive culture/identity. This research has further attempted to interrogate how the selected texts—by dismantling essentialist binaries—engage with the transcultural and the transnational.

Anglophone writings of South Asia present a distinct cultural identity of the region while having a deep sense of affiliation with a shared South Asian identity, the region's common colonial history, and largely similar culture and values. As Arjun

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[1] For convenience, I have abbreviated *Home and the World* as *HTW* and *Island of a Thousand Mirrors* as *ITM* respectively. I have used these abbreviations across the thesis.

Guneratne and Anita M. Weiss argue in their book, *Pathways to Power: The Domestic Politics of South Asia*, South Asian countries share "…cultural affinities deriving from a common past as well as the legacy of the British Indian empire" with "similar frameworks of constitutional governance, public administration, military organization, systems of law not least, a common elite language of English" (4-5).

With their culture and ideology, colonizers also brought their language to the region of South Asia. Initially resented and abhorred, later on, the English language provided the hitherto subalterns of the region a voice with which to proclaim their authority and agency in the Western academia and thereby engage with a global readership. It may be asserted that English language is no longer seen as the condemned language of the colonizer, rather in the context of today's global, cosmopolitan world, it is largely regarded as a medium to gain social mobility. As Paul Brian asserts:

> English has the great advantage of being politically neutral. The English occupiers are long gone, but their language remains a handy tool for writers who want to address a wide and varied audience within South Asia, even if that audience may not be very large. English functions in modern India like Latin in the European Renaissance, as a second language shared by enough people to make it a good vehicle of communication among various groups who share a certain level of linguistic skill. (Brains 4)

My attempt to move beyond dualism is unique and different from earlier models of postcolonial theory and diaspora theorization. As Trivedi asserts, the high noon of the colonial has been replaced by the twilight of the postcolonial, which creates a need for new theoretical frameworks to read works of literature from South Asia (Trivedi 187, my paraphrase). I argue that Postcolonial criticism has somewhat relegated South Asia(ans) to the margins: solely as people who were Othered, looted, and dehumanized. As Trivedi asserts: the terms such as 'Commonwealth', 'Third World' and 'Postcolonial' are reductive and unable to truly depict the literature(s) of South Asia. These labels portray South Asia as a former colony whose sole distinctiveness rests on its individuals being colonial subjects subjugated and Orientalized by the colonizers (188-89). Since these terms are "western labels" and reduce the whole body of Literatures of South Asia to one moment in history, Trivedi asserts that it is important to think of "our[2] literatures…as South Asian Literature". The purpose of this research is to examine how South Asian writers attempt to (re)construct their identity, and (re)define themselves as located in a more global scenario. Similarly, diaspora theorization—such as Bhabha's theory of hybridity—solely focuses on migratory experiences of South Asians living in the metropolis.[3] My argument attests to Bhabha's theorization and earlier postcolonial methods that incorporate transculturalism, liminality and hybridity. However, I focus on indigenous South Asian identity and dismantle previous postcolonial methods of referring to the West as the center.

I have attempted to interrogate how the selected South Asian writers mediate between polarities and attempt to embroider a transcultural, transnational[4] narrative by addressing universal themes, in order to reach a wider readership. This study attempts to show that, in theory, and practice, South Asian literature attempts to come out of a reductive univocal discourse that works on the principle of margin versus center. In the literary category of South Asia, essentialist projections of the Orient and the Occident are dismantled, and in their place, a more nuanced representation of the East-West encounter is offered, a stance that does not seek to hierarchize.

Since the works selected for analysis are by South Asian writers and their stories are also (mostly) set in South Asia, it would be useful to situate these works within the category of South Asian Literature and assess where do these works—both temporally and spatially—stand in the long literary history of the region. Locating these texts in the larger South Asian literary scenario would help contextualize my investigation and situate my critical concerns.

1.1.1 Locating Tagore and Munaweera in the Larger South Asian Literary Scenario.

In this section, I have briefly attempted to trace the literary genealogy of the South Asian region by temporally, spatially, and somewhat thematically locating the selected works within the larger South Asian Anglophone fiction. By keeping in view the polyglot nature of pre-modern South Asia, it is to be made clear that—keeping in mind the scope of this study—it is almost impossible to trace the literature of the region historically and extensively in a critical depth. Therefore, I have attempted to trace the literary traditions of the region, with a focus on Anglophone fiction solely. It is to be made clear that South Asian Literature as a literary category embraces the region's literary production in indigenous languages along with the works written in English, (I have taken one translated work of Tagore and one Anglophone novel). Furthermore, though the term South Asia refers to a group of seven countries that share their borders and that are bound by similar culture, Indian English literature is the most prominent in terms of visibility and critical reception in the Western literary market. Pre and post-partition Indians' prolific literary output has largely silhouetted other countries' relatively little Anglophone literary production. Therefore, it is no surprise that most of the works that I am about to discuss belong to Indian authors, both resident and diasporic. Other countries, which have been able to gain visibility in the global market after the 90's are Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

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[2] By "our" Trivedi means the literary production of South Asia that comprise literature in all languages of South Asia (including English) and not only colonial and postcolonial but all precolonial literary works too.

[3] I have used the terms metropolis or metropolitan to refer to the academic centers in colonial periphery.

[4] This could also be called a cosmopolitan aesthetic. It can be defined as the tendency to present eclectic sensibilities from both sides of the binary.

1.1.2 The Indian-English Novel

South Asia had a copious body of literature and literary works when most of the world lacked a written code for language (Pollock 5, my paraphrase). The earliest works of literature were poems and Epics written in Sanskrit, which was not used in common day-to-day conversation and was given the same status that Latin enjoyed in the Western world. With the arrival of Muslims in the subcontinent, a rich body of Persian literature was also brought into the region. Persian was given the status of official language in India and it became a handy medium to write works of literature. With the imperial invasion, English was introduced, rather, imposed on the masses, as Pollock remarks:

> When the English brought their language to India and Sri Lanka, it was used as a tool to make the population easier to govern. English language literature was taught in Indian schools before it was taught in British ones, to inculcate respect for the imperial power (Pollock 4).

Colonizers left the legacy of the English language for writers who saw it as a viable tool to address a wider audience. The recent decades have seen a proliferation of literature in English from South Asia. Many of these works are critically acclaimed and even hailed as classics. Consequently, there is a growing demand for South Asian fiction in the international literary market. The works of fiction from South Asia illustrate the region in various ways, often employing realist apparatuses like in Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) or fantastic/al elements like in Rushdie's *Midnight Children* (2006, originally published in 1981). The fictional world/s that these writers portray are wide and varied. "South Asian literature is a colorful kaleidoscope of fragmented views, colored by the perception of its authors, reflecting myriad realities—and fantasies" (6 Pollock). Furthermore, almost all of the indigenous literary production of South Asia were poems in some form; novel and prose in the South Asian literary scenario, as we know today, was established by colonizers as the appropriate form of literary expression.

The imposition/introduction of English in the socio-political spaces of South Asia, during colonial rule, created spaces of contact between the ruler and the ruled. Tickell, in his *South Asian Fiction in English: Contemporary Transformations* (2016) identifies three major zones of contact: employment, marriage and religious conversion (245, 248, and 250). It could be argued that the first generation of South Asian writers writing in English emerged on the literary scenario because of the aforementioned "contact zones". [5] Din Muhammad, C.V. Boriah, Rammohun Roy, Henry Derozio (hailed as the first Indian to write English poetry) and Michael Madhusudan Dutt are significant examples.[6]

The Travels of Dean Mahomet (1794) was the first English novel by a writer of South Asian descent, particularly of Indian origin. Din Muhammad is celebrated as one of the earliest authors who wrote in English. Born in Patna, India he migrated to Ireland after forming a close friendship with his employer Rose baker. After a considerable period of acculturation and due to his marriage with an Irish woman, Din became well versed in English and wrote his first English work. C.V Boriah is credited for writing the first literary Biography by an Indian, which contained details and translated works of more than a hundred poets from Sanskrit, Telugu, Tamil and

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[5] Mary Louise Pratt, in her *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* argues that colonization creates "contact zones", a site of multidimensional interaction between colonizer and colonized. For detailed reference, see works cited.

[6] The details about these authors are drawn from Fisher and Fisher's *The Politics of the British Annexation of India* (1993). For detailed reference, see works cited.

Marathi. *Biographical Sketches of the Deccan Poets* (1829) was the first-ever attempt at translating local poetry into English. Rammohum Roy published his first work in Persian *Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin* (1820). Throughout his literary career, Roy published many books in Bangla. From the year 1816, Roy started publishing a series of texts in English among which English translations of the Upanishads are notable. While comparing the trio, Pollock provides a noteworthy commentary on the characteristic difference between these three authors, and where do they stand in the literary tradition of South Asia:

> Din Muhammad's writing was primarily in the narrative and expository modes, whereas much of Roy's work in English combined exposition with a polemical argument on controversial social, economic, political, historical, and religious issues. Both Din Muhammad's *Travels* and Boriah's "Account of Jains" belonged to the discourse that represents Indian understandings of India in English and stood in a contestatory relation to the British discourse on India, but neither text was aggressively argumentative. In contrast, Roy's work not only contested certain British (and Christian) representations of India but also complicated the Indian counter-discourse internally by using it to contest conservative Indian understanding of India… Roy's conscious… intention was to initiate a change… that was at once epistemological, social, political and religious. (Pollock 221-222)

Due to being outside the circumference of British colonial discourse, these three writers were able to construct a critique and self-critique that became an intrinsic part of Indian English writing, later. They attempted to (re)present a unique but authentic depiction of Indian society and culture that were not mere constructions by the imperial masters. The use of English became advantageous, as a wider audience heard the authentic Indian stories at home and abroad. Furthermore, the multilingual origin/s from where these writers sprang brought a discursiveness into the field of Indian/South Asian English literature through which the colonial, precolonial, and the non-colonial intermingled and became a part of each other, challenging the normative unidirectional approach to colonial discourse/experience. Considering this aperture in the earliest English writings from South Asia, it can be maintained that reading literature from South Asia solely in terms of colonizer/colonized hierarchy is essentially reductive and that the literature/s of South Asia demand/s a more polyvocal, multidimensional analysis.

The years 1820s to 1920s were remarkable in the history of English writings in South Asia. The writers of this period were informed by the emergence of Modernism and the Progressive writers' movement in Britain. Authors produced aesthetic pieces (mainly poems) that were dedicated to the mastery of form and meter. Most of these writers composed highly imaginative pieces that emphasized aesthetic expression and sentiment. As Pollock remarks, Indian-English writing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century underwent a shift from being about reformative agendas to "aestheticized expression" (223). Henry Derozio and Michael Madhusudan Dutt are among the most notable of these writers. Here, I have briefly discussed their writings and where do these compositions stand in the long literary history of South Asia.

Henry Derozio is the earliest writer who drew his attention towards literary aestheticism. He was a poet who, at a young age, became a lecturer in English Literature and History at Hindu college.[7] In the coming years, as David Kopf has noted, Derozio "inspired a whole generation of Westernizing radical intellectuals" (43). He organized discussions with his students on various themes related to religion, social structure, and patriotism, which attracted many Indians and some Europeans. His ideas were progressive and often seen as controversial which led to his dismissal from his college. Derozio shifted his attention to journalism and launched a newspaper, *The East Indian*. He published two books: *Poems* (1827) and *The Fakir of Jungheera, a Metrical Tale, and Other Poems* (1828) before he turned nineteen. He experimented with poetic techniques and introduced aesthetic sentiment in the Indian literary scenario. In most of his poems, we see a reverence for India but also an attack on the superstitious and archaic nature of Indian society. In Alfonso-Karkala's words, Derozio "identified himself with his native land and wrote purely on Indian themes with a reformer's zeal" (43).

Michael Madhusudan Dutt started writing poetry when he was seventeen, some of which were printed in leading English-language literary journals in India, *The Bengal Spectator* and the *Calcutta Literary Gazette* (Dharwadker 227, my paraphrase). He became westernized in not only taste and learning but also converted to Christianity. *The Captive Ladie* (1849) is his only published book, which is a collection of poems, including "The Captive Lady", which retold the legend of Prithviraj Chauhan III, king of Delhi. The collection also had one verse-play "Rizia, the Empress of Ind", based on the life events of Rizziya Sultana, the first woman ruler of Delhi.

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[7] For more on the biographical details of these authors, see Alphonso-Karkala, and John B's *Indo-English Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (1970). For detailed reference, see works cited.

The shift from "instrumental writing to aesthetic production", and from prose to poetry was aimed at reaching the similar mastery that these poets' British counterparts had (Pollock 230). This transition is also a consequence of the need of representing India by Indians. The Indian-English poets writing in the nineteenth century were driven by a desire to be recognized and celebrated the way native English poets were. This desire is not a product of acquiescence to the supremacy of the British Masters, but as Pollock stresses "… they dreamed (impossibly) of being acknowledged as artistic equals" (231, parenthesis original). Shifting the focus from pragmatic regional/political contestation between East and West, colonizer and colonized, Us and Them, these poets instead made literariness a battleground. One may suggest that aesthetic literary production in the nineteenth century was a part of cultural/literary warfare initiated by Din Mohammad and Rammohun Roy a century ago.

The East India company strengthened its roots in 1835, "… when Governor-General William Bentinck and his council in Calcutta unilaterally declared English as the sole official language of British-Indian administration…" (Pollock 223). Thus, English was seen as not merely a medium to gain social mobility but also as a language of power. It began to infiltrate not only political, social and cultural arenas of the region. Consequently, Indians learned the language to gain social mobility and status, because linguistic proficiency would enable them to occupy better social positions. Literature of the region was also touched by this power politics, so much so that even after seventy years of independence, English is still associated with class and privilege, and despite being an integral part of South Asian polity—past and present—English is still skilfully read and understood by only a handful of the general population. That is why, the authors who chose to write in English are accused of commoditizing their works by envisioning the West as their expected audience, who consume (at least partly) the literature(s) of South Asia due to its being energized by exoticism and Indian spiritualism.

The Indian-English writers of the twentieth century revolutionized the South Asian literary scenario by moving away from the traditional aestheticism of the previous decades. Instead of longing for a lost, glorious past like their predecessors did, twentieth-century writers sought to represent contemporary reality. They preferred the novel as the main literary form and employed realist apparatuses to dramatize a social comment. R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao are some of the most prominent writers of the early twentieth century who realistically sought to depict the Indian cultural milieu in most of their novels. Narayan is primarily known for embedding the Indian tradition of storytelling into the modern literary form of expression. He published fifteen novels—from *Swami and Friends* (1935) to *World of Nagaraj* (1990)—over the course of six decades. Narayan's storyline and characters mediate between tradition and modernity; rooted in Indian myth but set in modern technological, social, political fluctuations. The focus is not on how characters find meaning among a fragmentation of past and present, but how they retain an authentic sense of "Indianness" while mediating between past nostalgia and present political changes.

At the start of the twentieth century, the Socialist reformist agenda also took stage on the Indian literary scenario, with the works of Mulk Raj Anand: specifically, his novels *Untouchable* (1935) and *Coolie* (1936). These "…became proletarian classics in English and Eastern European translations in the Soviet-bloc countries in the high period of socialist agenda" (Dharwadker 250). The spirit of anti-colonial resistance became manifest, for the first time in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938). Rao is credited with hybridizing the English-Indian novel; not only in terms of form—he grafts Indian storytelling with the modern-day stream of consciousness technique—but also in terms of diction—he domesticated the English language by silhouetting it with Indian colloquial words/phrases. This mediation between Indian and Western elements has enabled the Indian-English novel to achieve a sense of discursivity, whereby it had/has become possible to translate Indian life/culture to a global audience.

Not only capitalism, but critiques on imperialism also became normative and often, especially from the first quarter to mid of the twentieth century—at the pinnacle of the freedom movement in India. Though the decolonizing agenda took roots in this era (in terms of praxis), it reached its height in the post-independence period (in terms of theory). From mid to the end of the twentieth century, South Asian Anglophone fiction mostly teemed with critiques on imperialism and an investigation of East-West encounter. G.V Desani was among the first Indian novelists who carried out a critique on imperialism; his novel, *All About H. Hatterr* (1948) is described by Rushdie as "the first great stroke of the decolonizing pen" (8). Ahmad Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* (1940) is another tale of nostalgia and loss of cultural heritage in the aftermath of colonial invasion and the downfall of a past glorious Mughal Empire.

As discussed above, with the freedom movement at its peak, English novels by South Asian writers became overtly anticolonial, projecting national solidarity and resistance to imperialism. One of my primary texts for analysis was written at the start of the twentieth century when the struggle for freedom from the British Raj was underway. *Home and the World* (originally published in 1916) is set in Bengal during the Swadeshi movement. It would be useful here to comment upon Bangla literature as it is "… the first distinctively modern literature in India" (Kaviraj 506). In the nineteenth century, with the arrival of Western modernity, Bangla Literary sensibility incorporated modern themes and forms such as novels and sonnet without losing touch with indigenous literary originary. Tagore, "who—although…wrote primarily in Bengali—was the first South Asian author to become well known abroad for writing in English" (Pollock 4). The reason why I chose this novel is that it is set in precolonial Bengal with colonization and the ongoing struggle for freedom at the backdrop of the story, however, Tagore does not seem to either valorize colonization or depict a staunch resistance against Western, colonial influence. His characters take a middle ground, his storyline and themes mediate between the polarities of what is strictly the colonial narrative of the imperial master versus the anticolonial resistance rhetoric. His concerns are indigenous, with a distinct motive of giving importance to humans and human relations above political agendas, focusing on the region's distinct indigenous identity.

India and Sri Lanka gained independence from the British in 1947 and 1948 respectively. With the emergence of an autonomous political recognition, the South Asian socio-political and cultural identity demanded fictional representation. The mid 90's saw a proliferation of what is termed as partition fiction: itemizing the partition between India and Pakistan and the horror that ensued in the form of communal riots. Sri Lankan writers set down to chronicle the twenty-six years long armed conflict between the Sinhala-majority lead government and the Tamil separatists. The partition of East and West Pakistan in 1971 also provided materials for fiction on both sides of the border. The next section briefly traces the post-independence fiction of South Asia.

1.1.3 Post-independence Fiction: Anglophone Novel of Pakistan, India, Bengal and Sri Lanka

Partition of India and Pakistan and later East and West Pakistan undoubtedly forms most of the bulk of South Asian anglophone writing. In the aftermath of the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, several writers turned towards depicting the madness and bloodshed that both nations saw during and after partition. Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) is the most noteworthy work which discusses the aftermath of the partition of the Subcontinent in 1947. Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* (1988) (originally *Ice-Candy-Man*) was the first of its kind "partition fiction" from Pakistan. Though both the aforementioned works explicate the horrors of communal violence between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, the perspectives that these novels offer are different even somewhat opposing:

> Whereas Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* portrays partition from an Indian's perspective, with unimaginable slaughter taking off across the border in Pakistan, Sidhwa gives us a Pakistani perspective. Not that she holds her countrymen blameless, but she provides vivid details of the horrors inflicted by Indians on Muslims in a way that has made her book more readily acceptable in Pakistan. (Paul Brians 105)

Any discussion of South Asian Anglophone fiction is incomplete without the mention of a large number of diasporic authors/theorists who have had their fair share of contribution in shaping the literary consciousness of South Asia to what it is today. It is through the works of these writers that the inherent "cosmopolitan aesthetics" of South Asian writing flourished (Tickell 41). However, most often, these writers are accused of re-Orientalization and signifying western audiences as their sole, implied reader, and in turn, creating fiction that would be more apt for the consumption of

Western readers.[8] This commodified, exotic portrayal of India can be most readily seen in the fiction of Bharti Mukherjee (her novels *Jasmine* (1989) and *The Holder of the World* (1993) are characteristic), Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (*Arranged Marriage: Stories* (1995) and *The Mistress of Spices* (1997) are most notable) and Salman Rushdie, specifically his *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999). This kind of (re)presentation of India by Indians resonated with the west's expectations of India as an exotic 'other'. However, later on, representing India became an ideologically combative endeavour, to challenge and deconstruct the centrality of the centre or "The Metropolis". Primarily, due to the works of such diasporic critics/theorists as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha and Salman Rushdie.[9] These postcolonial theorists—writing from the interstices of two different worlds they inhabited— enact a form of anticolonial revenge by celebrating hybridity, and in turn challenge the Western construct of a (Caucasian) unified/homogenous self and/or identity. Postcolonial jargon and structures, which were popularized by postcolonial theorists, became the hallmark of Commonwealth fiction, later. Consequently, post-partition era fiction of South Asia was irrefutably informed by post/anticolonial ethos.

From the year 1990 and onwards, the global literary market saw a proliferation of English works by writers of South Asian descent. Rapid economic growth, increasingly complex political scenarios, and global outreach—due to advancements in technology and the internet— demanded fictional representation. The subject matter was influenced by the now altered methods of consumption and dissemination of literature, a consequence of the internet and globalization. Furthermore, the former prerequisite of writing a work of fiction in English solely to cater to western assumptions was replaced by a need to simply embody a South Asian reality. South Asian countries saw a drastic transformation regionally and politically as well, which was reflected in the words of fiction.

Pakistan went through a long tenure of military rule, the incident of 9/11, and the subsequent "war on terror", which was represented in Anglophone fiction of the time. In India, economic reforms, rapid industrial growth and the complexity of regional politics reshaped the Indian-English novel. Sri Lankan writers chronicled the trauma of the civil war and the 2004 Tsunami, and Bangladeshi writers saw the need to present Bangladeshi perspective on the 1971 liberation war. Furthermore, Pakistani, Bengali and Sri Lankan writers achieved greater visibility in the international market which increasingly challenged the prominence of what we may call Indian-English canon (Tickell 3, my paraphrase). I will now very briefly discuss each of these countries' literary output while situating the works in that country's larger political, social and literary scenario.

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[8] In order to have a more in-depth critical study of Re-Orientalism see Lisa Lau and Ana Cristina Mendes, *Re-Orientalism and South Asian Identity Politics: The Oriental Other Within* (London: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[9] Rushdie's *Imaginary Homelands*, Spivak's *Outside in the Teaching Machine* and essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" and Bhabha's *Location of Culture* are noteworthy. "Can the Subaltern Speak"? appears in the closing chapter, titled "History" in Spivak's *A Critique of Postcolonial Reasons: Towards A History of the Vanishing Present* (1999). For detailed reference, see works cited.

Anglophone fiction by Pakistani writers attained visibility on the global literary scenario at the end of the twentieth century, initially due to such diasporic writers as Hanif Kureshi and Sara Suleri. Kureshi's *Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) got international applaud and won the Whitbread Award[10]. The novel is autobiographical and details the story of an immigrant, Karim and deals with the themes of displacement and nostalgia. Suleri's memoir *Meatless Days* (1989), chronicles her life in Pakistan and then Connecticut. The early 21st century saw a boom in the production of Pakistani writing in English. Several novelists won or were shortlisted for international awards. Mohsin Hamid is among the most prominent writers who got international recognition due to such critically acclaimed novels as *Moth Smoke* (2000) and *Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007). *Moth Smoke* is hailed for initiating a new era in South Asian fiction. It signalled "… a word of comment on our day, our history, the passage of years and human experience" (Desai). The most favoured themes of Pakistani authors are racism in the wake of 9/11 (most conspicuous is Hamid's *Reluctant Fundamentalist*), regional politics and how an ordinary citizen experiences them—notable example is Hanif Kureshi's *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* (2008). An interrogation of urban consciousness through an exploration of city life is also a significant thematic concern; notable examples are Mohammad Hanif's *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011), Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2013), and Kamila Shamsie's *Kartoraphy* (2002). Some of the diasporic authors who made their mark on the global literary milieu are, Uzma Aslam Khan, whose novel

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[10] For more on the history and development of Pakistani Literature in English see Muneeza Shamsie, *A Dragonfly in the Sun: An Anthology of Pakistani Writing in English* (London: Oxford University Press, 1997).

Trespassing (2003) was shortlisted for Commonwealth Writers Prize and Nadeem Aslam, who garnered much critical acclaim due to his novels *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004) and *The Wasted Vigil* (2008).

The Indian-English novel in the post-liberalization era in India explored the horrors of partition, in most part. Vikram Seth's much-celebrated *A Suitable Boy* (1993) also revisits partition. It is a comment on the Indian middle class, using realist techniques. Another internationally recognized and much-celebrated work is Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), which won the Booker Prize. This novel is hailed as the first and most influential work of fiction from South Asia, which popularized South Asian fictional imaginaries both at home and abroad. The work deals with such themes as caste-based prejudice and the Naxalite movement in India. It also dramatizes the affluence of the middle-class in a newfound economic order. This critical interrogation of the economic system in India takes an even stronger, more overt form in Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008). Adiga depicts a ruthless world, which is primarily operated by money and where human life has no value to those with power and influence. Both the aforementioned novels are Man Booker Prize winners, which contributed significantly to the recognition of Anglophone South Asian fiction in Western academia.

Another significant critique of India's economic reform is Manju Kapur's *Custody* (2011), which depicts marriage and family dynamics. Set in the 1990s, where foreign multinationals are clamouring for India, the novel also has a curious postcolonial angle. It can be asserted that the literary scenario in India in the 21st century is more Indianized and indigenous in its ethos. The privilege of western academia to give agency to India and its stories and/or enact anticolonial revenge on the center has been largely replaced by a need to comment upon the authentic Indian socio-political and cultural scenario. 21st-century authors try to speak to the world about the reality of India while adhering to a sense of cosmopolitanism, without catering to western expectations of India as (solely) an exotic land.

Although Bangla was the first South Asian language that was modernized by Western influence, it is surprising to know that among all the other South Asian countries, Bangladesh is the least developed in terms of English writing. This belatedness might owe to the country's political climate, which shaped language policies and in turn affected the production and dissemination of English-language literature. Linguistic identity—that led to an uprising and eventual partition of Pakistan in December 1971—became a national identity, consequently, Bangladesh valorized the Bangla language as part of a distinct Bengali identity. This caused the almost disappearance of English from Bengali polity and curricula both[11]. However, propelled by a need to globally present the Bengali perspective on the war of liberation, some writers did produce notable works of fiction, which got recognition at home and abroad. The Bangladesh liberation war of 1971 indisputably occupies a central position in English-language Bangladeshi fiction, even today. Adib Khan's *Seasonal Adjustments* (1995), *Spiral Road* (2007) and Tahmima Anam's *A Golden Age* (2007) and its sequel *The Good Muslim* (2011) are most notable.

Like Bangladeshi Anglophone fiction, Sri Lankan writing has also been unable to gain visibility in the Western academia, "… in part because of its smaller literary output and comparatively nascent Anglophone publishing culture" (Tickell 79). This also might owe to publishing houses' favouring diasporic writers and in turn marginalizing resident ones. However, this dynamic has considerably changed over the last two decades, partly due to the establishment of the Gratiaen Prize, by Michael Ondaatje—awarded to best works by resident authors. This endeavour challenged the ever-looming authority of the centre and problematized the recognition of a literary work abroad as a prerequisite for its success at home. Interrogation of the socio-political conditions of Sri Lanka, the Tamil-Sinhala conflict and 26 years long civil war, and class/ethnic division are some of the common thematic concerns of Sri Lankan writers. The selection of indigenous themes has somewhat challenged the perception of South Asian writers as "native informants"[12], and as producers of literary materials that are readily available for the consumption of Euro-American readers.

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[11] For more on this subject, see Farah Ghuznavi, *Lifelines: New Writing from Bangladesh* (Dhakka: Zubaan, 2014). Also see "Introducing an English language writer from Bangladesh: An interview with Kaiser Haq". For detailed reference, see works cited.

[12] Spivak, in her book *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present* (1991) introduces the term 'native informants' in postcolonial theory. Native informants are understood as people from the colony or postcolony, who serve as informants to the Euro-American center, which helps the west further exoticize and objectify the East.

Before discussing works of fiction that narrate the civil war between the government of Sri Lanka, majorly led by Sinhalese, and the LTTE[13]—a theme that undoubtedly holds a central position in Sri Lankan Anglophone fiction—it might be useful to mention some of the earlier works. The events that culminated in the outbreak of civil war are fictionalized in the historical novels of A. Sivananden and Shyam Selvadurai. Selvadurai's *Cinnamon Gardens* (1998) explores sexual and ethnic identity in pre-independence Sri Lanka. The text deals with such issues as unyielding social norms and sexual identity politics in the backdrop of Sri Lanka's effort for self-government. The novel also dramatizes the power politics that informed differential ideologies between the Sinhala and Tamil politicians. Sivananden's *When Memory Dies* (1997) tells the narrative of civil conflict from the viewpoint of a Tamil. In an attempt to deconstruct the populist narrative of the majority Sinhalese, Sivananden charts out the activities and contributions of the leftist Lanka Sama Samaja Party in resisting right-wing politics. He scrutinizes the perception of Tamils as 'Other' and encourages inter-ethnic friendship. The rejection of constructed Sinhala-Tamil binarism takes an even stronger form in the works of Carl Muller. His works *The Jam Fruit Tree* (1993), *Yakada Yaka* (1994), and its sequel *Once Upon a Tender Time* (1995) are all written during a time of extremist Sinhala nationalism. These novels deconstruct ethnic divisions and present "hybrid possibilities" of coexistence between the Sinhala and Tamil communities (Tickell 85).

The optimism and hope for harmony between the two ethnicities, which was envisioned by the earlier fiction writers, were smothered by the burning of the Jaffna public library on June 1, 1983. This incident fuelled the separatist sentiments in Tamils and might have led to twenty-six years long and bloody civil war (1983-2009). The Civil war undoubtedly informs most of the recent fiction of Sri Lanka. A noteworthy novel is Selvadurai's debut *Funny Boy* (1994). It tells the story of a young, homosexual Tamil boy Argie who is facing double marginalization due to his sexuality and ethnicity. Argie narrates the horrors of civil war, due to which he loses his family, home, and eventually his country. Even though the armed conflict between the two ethnicities ended in the year 2009, ethnic polarization and extremism are still a part of the Sri Lankan polity.

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[13] Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam was a militant organization based in northeast Sri Lanka, whose aim was to secure an independent state of Tamil Elam.

It can be said that almost all of the fictive pieces written after the year 1990 dramatized the horrors of war in some way and the im/possibility of coexistence and harmony in the aftermath of long civil unrest. The most notable novels are Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* (2000), Manuka Wijesinghe's *Monsoon and Potholes* (2006), *Love Marriage* (2008) by V. V. Ganeshananthan, and Shehan Karuntalika's debut *Chinaman: The Legend of Pradeep Mathew* (2011). These novels explore the ethnoreligious extremism that is an extricable part of pre/postwar Sri Lanka. The trope of memory is employed in most of these novels to deliver disparate views on war and trauma. One of the primary texts that I have chosen for analysis also revisits the trauma faced by war torn Sri Lankans at home and abroad. *Island of a Thousand Mirrors* (2011) is a critical comment on the ethnic tapestry of Sri Lanka, the country's rich cultural heritage, social hierarchies, and how they define the human experience. The novel also probes deep into the psychology of immigrants, dealing with such themes as nostalgia, unhomeliness, and ambivalence. The text critiques regional politics while commenting upon larger transnational/universal considerations: the trauma of war, nostalgia faced by the diasporic community, and the psychosocial aftermath of war.

Any discussion of South Asian Literature seems incomplete without the mention of an abundant ballast of theory and discourse which emerged in Western academia in the aftermath of decolonization. The role of postcolonial studies and diaspora theorization in determining the course of South Asian fiction cannot be overemphasized. In the next heading, I have discussed a brief history of postcolonial discourse and diaspora theorization and how they have shaped the South Asian anglophone novel.

1.1.4 Postcolonialism, Diaspora Studies and South Asian Literature

Before discussing the applicability and relevance of postcolonialism and diaspora theorization in the context of South Asian fiction, it is imperative to discuss their inception in the academic field of research. Beginning with the formation of such labels as The Commonwealth Literature or The New Literature in English, postcolonialism as an academic field has a long and extensive history. As Huggan informs us, the institutionalization of postcolonial studies owes to the publication of some influential anthologies and introductory readers (Huggan 228, my paraphrase). The first major critical anthology of postcolonial texts was Bill Ashcroft, Gareth

Griffiths and Helen Tiffin's *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Studies* (1989). The book analyses the selected texts in their respective postcolonial, cultural contexts and their critiques on Eurocentrism. In 1994, two substantial collections were published which initiated an era of postcolonial literary/theoretical activity: Francis Baker, Peter Hulme and Margaret Iversen's *Colonial Discourse/Postcolonial Theory* and Patrick Williams and Laura Christman's *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. Another influential reader published in 1995 was Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin's *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*. It can be said that this profusion of literary activity made way for the recognition of postcolonialism as a field of research in first-world academia.

That the emergence of postcolonial literary/critical activity coincides with the formation of postmodernism is not a coincidence. Both fields share certain conceptual frameworks. Postmodernism as a theory—much like postcolonialism—also gained popularity in the 1980s and 90's with the works of Fredric Jameson, Jean François Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard. Summed up by Lyotard as "incredulity towards metanarratives" [14], postmodernism critiques the Enlightenment project's notions of Eurocentric/universalist assumptions related to truth, subjectivity, identity, progress, and language (Lyotard XXIV). Thus, parallelism can also be seen between postmodernism and postcolonialism, as both approaches question master-narratives. However, one point of difference is that where postmodernism interrogates and/or explains a cultural phenomenon, postcolonialism had an emancipatory agenda as well. For instance, the use of the centre's language to resist its perceived standardization by the imperial power:

> Language becomes a medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of 'truth', 'order', and reality become established. Such power is rejected in the emergence of an effective post-colonial voice. For this reason, the discussion of post-colonial writing…is largely a discussion of the process by which the language, with its

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[14] For more on Postmodernism, see Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (New York: Duke University Press,1991), Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) and Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1981). For an overview on Postmodernism see Jim Powell, *Postmodernism for Beginners* (New York: For Beginners, 2007).

> power, and the writing with its signification of authority, has been wrested from the dominant European culture. (Ashcroft, et al. 7)

The journey of the postcolonial academic field began with Commonwealth Literature. John Press's *Commonwealth Literature: Unity and Diversity in a Common Culture* (1964) is referred to as "Commonwealth Literature's founding volume" (Huggan 230). However, the label 'Commonwealth' was discredited by some theorists on accounts of being using English Literature as a frame of reference, thus pushing literature in English by former colonies to the margins. As Rushdie has pointed out in his essay, ""Commonwealth Literature" Does Not Exist" (1893):

> …the term [Commonwealth Literature] is not used simply to describe, or even misdescribe, but also to *divide*. It permits academic institutions, publishers, critics, and even readers to dump a large segment of English literature into a box and then more or less ignore it. At best, what is called Commonwealth Literature is positioned *below* English Literature 'proper'. (Rushdie 66, parenthesis added)

As seen in the above discussion, the traditional postcolonial theory works on an essentialist binaristic paradigm. Postcolonialism—due to its totalizing, overarching agency over representing the colonial subject about its relation with the empire—has the precarious potential of omitting the specificity of sub-groups and their individual, unique experiences. Therefore, those sub-groups (such as South Asia, postcolonial women, and African writers) are at risk of invisibility as they are perceived under the larger rubric of the term postcolonial, thus avoiding representation. One way of circumventing this predicament is the inception of a locally-sourced theoretical framework like the South Asian literary category. However, it needs to be explicated that the journey of the South Asian literature as a literary category has been initiated through dismantling Eurocentric/universalist norms. Therefore, the credibility of postcolonial theory cannot be invalidated.

The effectiveness of postcolonial discourse and the history of anti-colonial struggle in former colonies is useful in reading my primary text. Tagore's *Home and the World* (1916) was written in colonial times when Hindu nationalist movements were on the rise and decolonization was underway in Bengal. Munaweera's *Island of* *a Thousand Mirrors* (2012) opens up just after colonizers have left Sri Lanka. Therefore, (post)colonial discourse forms the backdrop of both of the selected texts.

The introduction of the concepts of hybridization of culture and identity brought a fresh theoretical insight into postcolonial literary theory. Bhabha's concept of 'third/liminal/interstitial space', 'ambivalence' and 'mimicry' empower the 'in-between spaces' of culture. In his *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha asserts the importance of writing at the margins and critiques the Enlightenment project's notions of purity of culture and identity. Addressing the contingency of identity, writers at the margins construct subjects/identities that move between different cultures, borders and nations, thus defying the normative conception of a fixed, homogenous subject position. This amounts to an intervention in the normative/essentialist colonial construction of Us vis-à-vis them.

Thus, diasporic authors write to assert agency and authority over their representation by the imperialist discourse as others. It is the multiplicity and multilocality of subjectivity that has been used to dismantle colonial conceptions of a homogenous self, and to (re)present identity in terms that defy its containment. This is in line with the postmodern view of the nonlinearity of selfhood and subjectivity. However, diaspora theorization and Bhabha's concepts apply to those writing at the margins only. As I have attempted to show, South Asian literature as a literary category is inclusive of diasporic writing but does not focus on one sub-group. Thus, it needs new theoretical frameworks that are inclusive and representative of the region without the essentialist hierarchization. One of my primary texts, Munaweera's *Island of a Thousand Mirrors* (2012) is written by a diasporic writer. The novel also details the experiences of first- and second-generation immigrants living in the US. Therefore, diasporic theorization is useful in analyzing this text. Consequently, throughout my analysis, I have harked back to this section.

As can be seen from the brief analysis of South Asian fiction in this section, contemporary South Asian writers are conscious of their position as writers who are encumbered with the task of detailing/translating an authentic south Asian experience, while they are situated in an increasingly glocal scenario.[15] Writing is (largely) no longer circumscribed by West's expectations. Terms such as commonwealth and postcolonial seem reductive and are less useful in representing or even describing the South Asian milieu. It can be asserted that South Asian writers have their own, indigenous, local theoretical concerns, which demand a separate literary category that does not require approval by the metropolis. The writers writing in the twenty-first century are aware of the colonial influence and are cognizant of the role it has played in shaping South Asia, yet, they do not engage themselves in the cycle of margin versus center. They attempt to weave a transnational, transcultural narrative, that does not disregard their local obligations as writers of South Asia, translating an authentic South Asian experience.

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[15] Oxford English dictionary defines glocal as, "having features or related to factors that are both local and global." For detailed reference, see works cited.

1.2 Situatedness of the Researcher

In recent years, Pakistani writers have been able to gain visibility and much critical acclaim in the international literary market. There has been a significant proliferation of Pakistani literature in English. Being a Pakistani researcher, I hope that this project would be able to provide the students of literature with a local critical trend to read Anglophone Pakistani fiction. Introducing locally produced critical theory is likely to facilitate the interpretation of Anglophone texts to Pakistani students. As using imported western methods to read the stories that spring from Pakistan might breed a sense of cultural alienation.

1.3 Delimitation

In normative, academic establishment, South Asian literature as a literary category consists of the pre-partition Subcontinent, although the geographical region itself consists of seven countries. It is to be pointed out that—erroneously so—literature from India and Pakistan generally represents South Asia. Therefore, to bring critical attention to the relatively untapped area in South Asia fiction, I have chosen two novels, one from pre-partition Bengal and the other from Sri Lanka: Rabindranath Tagore's *Home and the World* and Nayomi Munaweera's *An Island of Thousand Mirrors*. Furthermore, due to the scale of the study, the research will be delimited to the exploration of a nexus between colonial/Western versus anticolonial/Eastern forces and how they are addressed in the aforementioned texts. Only two theorists are taken: Sara Suleri would be my principal theorist and Harish Trivedi would be the supporting theorist.

1.4 Thesis Statement

The selected South Asian novels attempt to construct a literary category without subscribing to essentialist representations of what is colonial or post-colonial. The invocation of Suleri and Trivedi's concepts are likely to be useful in reading the primary texts that engage with the global and the cross-cultural while retaining the region's uniqueness and indigeneity without being reductive or strictly dualistic in nature. Since the ethos of South Asian Literature as a Literary category rests on the conjecture that it attempts to subvert essential binarism and goes for a more diverse and inclusive view, this research is likely to provide fresh insights into the local cultural representation without subscribing to the intrusive, dominant, and dualistic postcolonial stance.

1.5 Research Questions

This research intends to answer the following questions:

- How do Rabindranath Tagore's *Home and the World* and Nayomi Munaweera's *Island of Thousand a Mirrors* tend to blend the colonial and the postcolonial elements?
- How do (differential) epistemes in the selected novels address the exclusionary binaristic hierarchies?
- In what ways do the selected texts mediate between the South Asian local and multicultural (western) representations?

1.6 Chapter Breakdown

The chapter breakdown plan for the thesis is as follows:

Chapter One: Introduction

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework

Chapter Four: Transcending Peculiarities, Retaining Authenticity: Tagore's *Home and the World*

Chapter Five: Complicating Nationalism, Belonging and Rhetoric: Munaweera's *Island of a Thousand Mirrors*

Chapter Six: Conclusion

1.7 Significance of the Study

The present research is significant on two grounds. Firstly, as there has been little critical insight into the theory of South Asia, it is hoped that the present investigation would give expression to the region's distinct identity, history and culture. Secondly, as the theory of the literary category of South Asia rests on the presupposition of overriding binarism, it is assumed that the research would add fresh insight into contemporary colonial discourse by presenting nondualist, diverse perspectives. It is also anticipated that South Asian literature as a literary category could be recognized as a separate literary category. Furthermore, by not falling into strict binarism, we, South Asians, might begin to move towards a form of transnational cultural/literary studies, able to stage conversations between here (East) and there (West), between home and abroad. The South Asian literary scenario, as Spivak has asserted, should be a "staged battleground between epistemes" (154). This approach might bring discursiveness to cultural/literary studies from South Asia, and might be very useful to students and researchers of South Asian universities.

After stating my research premise, it is likely to be useful to contextualize my research in contemporary critical scholarship. For this purpose, I have reviewed an assortment of the available scholarships related to my research in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of literature review is twofold: to contextualize my research in the currently available scholarship, and to find gaps in the currently available critical sources. In line with this twin purpose, I have done the following review of the available scholarship on topics that are similar to my research. It is to be made clear that I have selected those works for review which are immediately relevant to my research, and are likely to help contextualize my primary texts in the contemporary critical apparatus. Moreover, keeping in mind my thesis statement, (see Ch. 1, pp 22) I have divided this chapter into the following parts: part I selectively reviews the available literature related to the South Asian fictional imaginaries in general, and part II is an assortment of the critical scholarship related to the works of fiction selected for analysis.

(I)

2.2 Oppositionality Discourse: Strategic Exoticism and Imperialist Nostalgia

Part of my larger argument in this dissertation rests on the conjecture that Postcolonial theory is somewhat reductive and understates the literary sensibility of South Asian Literature as a literary category in the present multicultural, pluralistic, global scenario. It tends to hierarchize and therefore perpetuates the very difference it aims to erase or at least challenge. Therefore, it is viable to discuss the available critical scholarship that problematizes postcolonial theory which would help present rationale for this research. Below, I have discussed some critical qualifications that showcase how some postcolonial theorists become complicit with essentialism, which is regressive.

The first secondary resource that has been very helpful to me in forming my main argument is a collection of essays, titled *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia* (1993), edited by Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer. The essays in this collection focus on the Postcolonial predicament of how the positioning of the West in contrast with the East entails essentialist projections that are reductive. That "Western studies of South Asia in general use, explicitly or implicitly, a comparative framework in which "The West" is contrasted to "The Rest"" (Breckenridge and Veer 2). Capitalizing on Said's *Orientalism* (1979), this critical work goes a step further to point out that colonial/imperialist discourse infects Indian—we may suggest here, South Asian—polity and culture till date. That the binaristic construct of 'Us' versus 'Them', perpetuated by orientalist scholarship, still lives on in the postcolony. The opening chapter, which is written by the editors, emphasizes how traditional ""colonial discourse" mode of entry into the politics of "otherness" locates the other wholly and (even solely) in the colonial moment" (10). This approach tends to disregard the precolonial or present postcolonial polity of a formerly colonized people. Going against the conventionally perceived linearity between colonial and postcolonial projects, the editors and contributors suggest a more differential approach:

> …there is neither a monolithic imperial project nor a monolithic subaltern reaction, but rather there are different historical trajectories of contest and change with lags and disjunctures along the way. While denying the absoluteness and uni-directionality of colonial hegemony and while ascribing agency to both colonizer and colonized, there is no doubting the larger evolving picture of colonial domination that goes far beyond the individual intentions or aspirations of any of its principal actors. (Breckenridge and Veer, 10)

The critical stance that the editors and contributors have taken to problematize postcolonial theory and discourse resonates well with my argument. Studying South Asian literary materials by employing a normative post/anti/colonial critical lens disregards the region's precolonial history and its present postcolonial, sociocultural polity by solely defining it in terms of its contact with the colonizer. That the colonial/orientalist, unidirectional approach to analyse literary production from former colonies is no longer relevant in the present cosmopolitan scenario. However, the essays in this book use India only as a frame of reference to critique post/colonial critical strategies. The absence of any insightful reference to the South Asian literary category justifies the rationale for this project.

The essays in the aforementioned collection not only indicate the gaps in postcolonial theory and criticism but also suggest possible solutions. Spivak's essay, "The Burden of English" in the above collection has been particularly useful to me. She begins her argument by exploring how the cultural gap between East and West breeds a sense of psychic alienation in native students reading literature in English. Her solution is the interweaving of both: that the literary productions of India, written in local languages must be conjoined with the Western Literature written in English. She further suggests resisting the containment of colonial subject in its native tongue as it enforces difference, already perpetuated by Orientalist scholarship. Spivak proposes that: "…the teaching of English literature can become critical only if it is intimately yoked to the teaching of the literary or cultural production in the mother tongue(s)" (60). Neutralization of the English language by reading its literature in conjunction with Indian literary materials suggests a unique approach that might lead us towards transnational cultural solidarity. She suggests "…to undo the imported distinction between center and periphery as well as some indigenous divisions by looking at literature as the staged battleground of epistemes" (61). This mediative stance is likely to contribute towards a need for a new local critical trend that would challenge the received Euro-American sovereignty over academia. This essay has been particularly useful to me. It has helped me construct my argument over the need for a contemporary, native critical theory that springs from South Asia, and the importance of the deployment of strategies that render the demarcation between East/West or Colonial/postcolonial less acute. However, like most of the essays, Spivak's discussion is limited to India only which vindicates my research project.

The addition of scholarly insights by various theoreticians coupled with the editors'/contributors' critical comments make *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia* (1993) a very useful secondary source for me. This book has helped me immensely in analysing my primary texts. However, the essays gloss over any critical insight on South Asian literary production, which is likely to justify this project. Almost all the essays critically engage with Indian literature and politics. Most of the essays even confound India with South Asia, as they discuss post/pre-independence Indian cultural, literary, historical milieu. I have attempted to problematize the positionality of India as the representative of South

Asia, which vindicates my project. It provides room for this research so that I have the critical space to discuss South Asia as an exclusive.

Another viable secondary source that complicates the efficacy of postcolonial theory in reading the literature from former colonies is Graham Huggan's *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (2001). The condition of postcoloniality/postcolonialism in the global late-capitalist scenario is addressed in this book[16]. As Huggan explicates in the preface, "The book is a study…of the varying degrees of complicity between local oppositional discourses and the global late-capitalist system in which these discourses circulate and are contained" (vii). He addresses the systemic institutionalization of the field that has influenced the production, dissemination, and reception of literature produced by the writers of the former colonies which is sold in the metropolis. The principal concern of the book is to identify and interrogate "exoticist discourse(s) in postcolonial writing" (Huggan 28). Huggan also interrogates as to what extent does postcolonial theory capitalize on "…the booming 'alterity industry' that it at once serves and resists" (vii Preface).

Throughout the various chapters, Huggan argues that commodification of marginality—its exotic portrayal—provides readymade materials for the consumption of metropolis. The authors from the postcolony cater to this 'demand' for texts with an exotic flair, writing stories that may not represent the region in its entirety but are only accommodating the imagination of the western reader. Critiquing the issues of salability, marketability, and consumption, Huggan is of the view that "… the term [postcolonialism]… circulates as a token of cultural value; it functions as a sales-tag in the context of today's globalized commodity culture" (10, parenthesis added). In the present global cultural marketplace, postcolonial literary productions—both at home and abroad—are mediated by global commodity culture, the metropolitan gaze, and the category's institutionalization in the Western academia. (Huggan ix Preface, my paraphrase). He also criticizes the field's systemic valorization of a handful of celebrity writers (Rushdie, Roy, and Achebe) and its three celebrity theorists (Spivak, Bhabha, and Said). Huggan also argues that instead of dispelling exoticist myths concerning the postcolony, postcolonial writers enforce them, thus defying the apparent anticolonial agenda of the oppositionality discourse. Almost all the chapters in *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (2001) are devoted to interrogating the exoticist portrayal of the postcolony in postcolonial literary/cultural productions and how much of that portrayal relies on the metropolitan consumption. Huggan discusses works of fiction ranging from African to Indian authors including those who write at the margins.

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[16] Huggan has explicated the difference between postcolonialism and postcoloniality in the introduction: "The first of these concerns largely localized agencies of resistance, the second refers to a global condition of cross-cultural exchange" (ix).

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Yambo Ouologuem's *Le devoir de violence* (1968) and Bessie's Head's *The Collector of Treasures* (1977) are discussed in chapter 1. Chapter 2 analyses the portrayal of India as an exotic spectacle by such influential Indian writers as Rushdie, Vikram Seth, and Arundhati Roy. In chapter 3, Huggan discusses works by several South Asian diasporic writers such as Hanif Kureshi and V.S Naipaul, critiquing how the writers 'stage marginality' to benefit from their (dramatized) subordinate status as the member of the former colonies which makes them marketable in the western academia.[17] This chapter interrogates instances of staged marginality as portrayed in Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* (1988), Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987) and Kureshi's *Buddha of Suburbia* (1990). Chapter 4 presents insightful comments on the role of the Booker Prize in promoting postcolonial writers and its part in neutralizing the English language. In this chapter, Huggan argues that the Booker Prize has been able to initiate a transnational era, licensing a dialogue across cultures, nations and borders. However, Huggan goes on to demonstrate how Booker's endeavors are rooted in corporate warfare and the desire to revive the imperialist legacy. He argues that:

> …the Booker Prize, in rewarding the works of these admittedly disparate writers, suggests a continuing desire for metropolitan control born in part of 'imperialist nostalgia' (Rosaldo 1993). The rehearsal of colonial history…offers up nostalgic versions of India (and other former colonies) as exotic sites; the *resistance* to such nostalgia that is obviously exercised by many of the writers if effectively recuperated by an 'otherness industry' that banks its profits on exotic myths. (Huggan xiii, parenthesis original)

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[17] Huggan has adopted the term 'staged marginality' from Dean MacCannel, denoting "…the process by which marginalized individuals or minority groups dramatize their 'subordinate' status for the imagined benefit of a majority audience" (Huggan xii).

The concluding chapter of *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* has been useful to me in several respects. This chapter comprehensively presents the history of the field of postcolonial theory beginning with Commonwealth literature in the 1960s. The chapter also considers the role of academia in valorising marginality by promoting centre/periphery discourse, "…at odds with its emancipatory social goals" (xv). Huggan further adds: "Postcolonial studies, it could be argued, has capitalized on its perceived marginality while helping turn marginality itself into a valuable intellectual commodity" (viii). He concludes the book by acknowledging the field's searching critiques that are relevant to the present social order, however, he also stresses the importance of critiquing the field as it seems tied up with the late-capitalist commodity culture. This book has served as a viable secondary source for my research. Not only has the author critiqued the totalizing agency of postcolonial theory in academia, addressing the gaps in post/colonial criticism, he also hints towards better alternatives:

> … locally produced theories and methods might prove in the end to be more productive than the reliance on Euro-American philosophical trends and habits of thought… One of the ironies, it could be said, of a particular kind of postcolonial criticism has been… [It's] tendency to privilege Europe as a frame of cultural reference, as the primary producer of the discourses against which postcolonial writers/thinkers are aligned. This…approach… subscrib[es] to the very binaries (e.g., 'Europe and its Others') it seeks to resist (Huggan 3, original parenthesis).

Although the importance of creating a transnational cultural narrative is elided, Huggan's criticism is useful in addressing the gaps in postcolonial theory. His emphasis on the interrogation of postcolonial theory as a representative for the literatures of South Asia is significant in critiquing the postcolonial narrative. The field's inability to divorce itself from the imperialist legacy and its corporate interests render it less effective to study the literary works from South Asia, which creates a need for a new theoretical framework, a separate literary category. Huggan has also cited several theorists who problematize traditional postcolonial criticism (for instance, Ella Shohat, Arif Dirlick, Aijaz Ahmed and Arjun Appiah). *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* has proven to be a valuable secondary source due to its comprehensive critique of exoticism and exoticist discourse.

However, Huggan leaves out any discussion on the belated visibility of South Asian literature as a differential yet contiguous category and its usefulness in the present global scenario, which is likely to provide the rationale for this project.

Ejaz Ahmad's seminal work, *In Theory: Classes, Literatures Nations* (1992), has also served as a very useful secondary source for this research. This book has become a significant critical work in the domain of cultural theory, specifically when it comes to anti-alteritist discourse. Ahmed also discusses the issues of production, dissemination and reception of third world texts in the western academia, including the matters of saleability and marketability. The main thesis of this work is how cultural production (and critical theory) have Marxist underpinnings. This work can be understood as a Marxist rereading of "a…configuration of authors and positions…clustered around questions of empire, colony, migrancy, post-coloniality, and so on" (Ahmad 3). This book has served as a viable critical source to me in addressing the nexus of postcolonial theory and capitalism. However, Marxism or Marxist reading is not my concern in this thesis. Furthermore, in critiquing postcolonial methods of writing back to the former colonial center, Ahmad leaves out discussion on the belated visibility of South Asian Literature as a literary category, which vindicates the rationale for this project.

Ahmed's critique of Jameson's essay "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capital" (1986) is quite relevant to my main argument. Ahmed warns against the misappropriation of the terms third-world or third world literature, as he says "in context…there is no such thing as 'Third-World literature'" (96, single comma in the original text). Jameson's definition of third world is that it is constituted by colonialism and its literatures narrate the experience of colonialism or imperialism. Ahmad is critical of Jameson's attempt to communicate the experience of the third world as a single, collective other, an experience that could be "contained and communicated with a single narrative form (Ahmad 98)." Jameson's attempt of creating a literary category of "Third-World literature" by describing it as literature of resistance is problematic for Ahmad. As, in doing so, Jameson erases the nuances found in literatures in former colonies and reduces them to the colonial moment. Ahmed's criticism of Jameson's generality around the third-world or third world literature is relevant to my argument. However, Ahmed elides any discussion on contemporary Anglophone South Asian fiction that might complicate Jameson's assumptions. Both of the works that I have selected for analysis are not predominantly Marxist texts and their thematic concerns do not center around resistance to the colonial enterprize. They narrate the everyday idiom of living of the time and age when they were produced. My invocation of South Asian Literature as a literary category that goes beyond and simultaneously mediates the binaries of east/west, colonial postcolonial justifies the rationale for this project.

Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh's *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (2018) is one of the recent works in the area of decolonization. The editors define decoloniality in the first chapter as a domain that consciously tries to depart and delink theory from the "conceptual instruments of Western thought" (7). This book attempts to create and illuminate "pluriversal and interversal paths that disturb the totality from which the universal and the global are most often perceived" (Mignolo and Walsh 2). Their call for decolonizing theory is immediately relevant to my research, as it has helped me problematize postcolonial theory and situate my intervention. Since the book's main thesis is to explain decoloniality as a way of thinking that precedes colonial enterprize, it endorses my main argument—the need to move beyond post/colonial thought. However, South Asian Literature as a literary category doesn't seek to decolonize the literary production of South Asia, since the history of colonial encounter is indispensable in reading works of literature. Trivedi aptly notes that South Asian Literature is a thread "that runs through and round the colonial to connect the precolonial to the postcolonial" and simultaneously surpasses them (188). Rather, it presents colonial encounter as a given and doesn't seek to limit the literatures of South Asia to one moment in the long literary trajectory of the region. But Mignolo's argument is relevant to my research in the sense that it perspectivizes it because of its preferred focus on indigeneity.

One of the earliest critical works that point out the importance of a constructive rupture in the received perception of domination and subordination as fixed entities is Benita Parry and Allen Lane's book *Delusions and Discoveries: Studies on India in British Imagination, 1889-1930* (1972). Here I present a review of the latest version of this book titled *Delusions and Discoveries: India in the British Imagination* (1998) by Benita Perry and Michael Sprinker. In this book, the writers present a critical analysis of fiction written by British writers in the wake of "the Raj Revival" (VII). The British literature written during the 1960s and 70's exhibits a nostalgia for the British rule in India. “The Raj Revival” is defined in the foreword as the attempts “…to sustain the imperial legacy…like the…Commonwealth Literature…” (VII). The authors also critique the field of postcolonialism as complicit with the Orientalist agenda of a (re)imagination of imperial rule in India. They trace “The British imperial attitudes”, and critique the racist, jingoistic and xenophobic elements in the works of such influential writers of the age as E.M Forster, Flora Annie Steel, Maud Diver, and Edward Thompson (viii). The writers not only analyze fiction, but they also include travelogues, “…administrative records, missionaries’ reports, newspapers, periodicals, diaries, letters [and] memoirs” (32). The non-fictive writings “…imply the mental and emotional climate which was either reproduced or scrutinized in fiction” (32). They critique the selected texts, by situating them in their respective spatiotemporal setting, focusing on how these texts by Anglo-Indians subscribe to the imperial project and present a distorted image of India as filtered through the British imagination of the land and its people.

What makes *Delusions and Discoveries: India in the British Imagination* immediately relevant to my research is the book’s pluralistic, non-binary critical stance. As it is “Directed at interrupting accounts of colonialism’s totalizing momentum and breaking down ‘the fixity of the dividing lines between domination and subordination’, …[it] presents the colonial encounter as one of mutuality and negotiation between the participants” (1, Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India* p 4 quoted by Perry and Sprinker). The authors also discuss how anticolonial discourse disregards the proximity of the colonizer and colonized, and “…can overlook [the fact] that colonial discourses were transmitted to and received by two audiences” (4). Although the writers dismantle the exclusionary difference between colonizer and colonized as promulgated by the postcolonial discourse, they also acknowledge the field as a critical body of theory and literature that has sparked constructive, curious critiques about the British view of India as presented in the British Literature and “an understanding of the imperial project” (Perry and Sprinker 2).

While discussing the importance of reading against the grain, the writers discuss Suleri’s *Rhetoric of English India* (1992). They assert that Suleri’s recommendation of “productive absence of alterity” marks a radical departure in the contemporary colonial narrative (Suleri, quoted by Parry and Sprinker in the preface, 4). The effacement of strict demarcation between ruler and ruled may signal towards a productive yet farfetched "dialogue across cultural boundaries" (Parry and Sprinker 3). The word 'dialogue' implies recognition of agency and authority on both sides and presents both parties as constituting knowledge. It implies that there is a need to understand colonizer and colonized as "equally situated parties conducting colloquies" (8). This assertion is similar to what the present research would most likely attempt to show: the dilution of binaries and hierarchies to construct a more discursive narrative. The aforementioned book has helped me analyze my primary texts in a non-exclusionary way, by subscribing agency to both colonizer and colonized. However, this book does not incorporate a critical investigation of literature(s) of South Asia and does not relate a strategic rejection of binarism with the literary category of South Asia. Furthermore, India and Indian-English literature is the frame of reference and the main focus of most of the critique done in the book. As I have explored in my analysis, South Asian writers' strategic erasure of traditional binaries brings forth a distinct identity of South Asia, and presents a view of the region with its unique cultural manifestations, without being tainted by hierarchical distinctions.

After presenting a brief review of the works which problematize postcolonial discourse, and question its validity in reading literary productions from South Asia, it is now useful to review those resources which discuss the importance of cross-cultural negotiation. It is to be made clear that some of the works which I am about to discuss do not directly situate their critical concerns regarding South Asian fiction, yet they have been very useful to me in forming my thesis statement.

2.3 Energizing the Liminal: Diaspora and the Rhetoric of South Asia

Two of the most important works in the colonial discourse which valorize assimilationist rhetoric are Homi K. Bhabha's *Nation and Narration* (1990) and *The Location of Culture* (1994). His concepts of third/liminal space of enunciation, assimilation, ambivalence, and hybridity open up new cultural/critical avenues. I have reviewed each of the above-mentioned books in a temporal order. *Nation and Narration* (1990) is a collection of essays, devoted to critiquing one particular literary or cultural text. Bhabha explores the narrative strategies used by the selected writers to come to terms with narrating their nation(s). The book explores the concept of nationhood as a lived experience and as it is narrated in the ambivalence of language:

> …liminal image of the nation…which…is a particular ambivalence that haunts the idea of the nation, the language of those who write of it, and the lives of those who live it. It is an ambivalence that emerges from the growing awareness that…the cultural temporality of the nation inscribes a much more transitional social reality. (Bhabha 1)

The importance of fluidity of national culture/state that Bhabha explores in *Nation and Narration* (1990), is an improvement upon the previous postcolonial dualistic, center/periphery discourse. Bhabha critiques the Enlightenment project's systemic validation of the ideas of nation/borders and national progress which have served as powerful political statements (or imperialist tools) in the west. He argues that the western nationalist discourses profit from the idea of nation as a contiguous construct. Bhabha highlights the importance of "…large and liminal image of the nation…a particular ambivalence that haunts the idea of the nation, the language of those who write of it, and the lives of those who live it" (Bhabha 1). Debunking the myths of national/racial purity, he stresses that national identity is hybrid, ambivalent, contingent, and a negotiation of the public and the private.

For Bhabha, the rhetoric of nation which relies on linguistic and racial determinism, among others, is exclusionary. The essays in *Nation and Narration* interrogate how to envision a democratic nation that does not work on the principle of exclusion and yet does not smother group particularities. Bhabha's concluding essay "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation" is the most relevant in this respect. The essay discusses the diasporic community as they try to find 'home' at the margins, at the "lonely gatherings of the scattered people" (291). In this essay, Bhabha clarifies his main argument: that the idea of nation is too hybrid, collective, and plural to be defined in terms of "hierarchical or binary structuring of social antagonism", such as gender, race, and class (291). The minority at the margins tends to negotiate "powerful master discourses" (306). This negotiating, hierarchy-defying tendency of the people at the margins is more fully explored in Bhabha's next book *The Location of Culture* (1994).

Where *Nation and Narration* is a celebration of the neutralization of English in the present cosmopolitan era, Bhabha's next publication is a step further into the importance of cosmopolitanism. *The Location of Culture* (1994) is a collection of several of Bhabha's most significant essays, most of which were published previously. Bhabha further explains his theory of cultural hybridity which he explores in *Nation and Narration* but fully develops in his seminal essay "Signs Taken for Wonders". In this book, he discusses the significance of liminal spaces between nations/cultures. Liminal space or third space for Bhabha is a site of cultural negotiation where "subjectivity finds itself poised between sameness and 'alterity' and new discursive forms are constituted" (144). Discussing the importance of liminal spaces, Bhabha informs: "This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (5). The hybridity of culture is a consequence of colonization which enables cultural collusion and interchange.

The introduction begins with the concept of the "beyond" (Bhabha 1). Bhabha describes this space as "the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion." (1) This concept introduces Bhabha's theory of liminality and the third space which he describes later in the text. The hybrid/liminal space is to be seen as a productive site of cultural negotiation. The hybrid challenges the preconceived—as promoted by the Enlightenment project—conceptions of fixity of consciousness, identity, and culture. Thus, the purity of culture, consciousness, identity is contradicted by The Hybrid. This intervention into the constructed duality of margin vis-a-vis center problematizes the positional authority of the center and gives more agency to the periphery, hitherto denied by the traditional postcolonial discourse. Diasporic identity is formed at the interstices of borders. Moreover, the writers traversing the in-between spaces—here Bhabha refers to diasporic writers solely—invoke a transcultural/transnational dimension. These two books have also been useful to me in understanding the importance of weaving cosmopolitan rhetoric in the present global world order.

Bhabha intends his theories to be read in the context of diaspora and migrant writers who exhibit 'alterity' by engaging with the limen. As explained in Chapter 1 Introduction, the main argument of this project is that the historic encounter of the colonizer with the colonized and globalization has rendered the consciousness of the colonized as a hybrid. I have tried to explain that South Asian literature attempts to emerge out of the binaries of West versus South Asia or colonial discourse versus postcolonial discourse. This refusal of binaries and an attempt to surpass them might render South Asian literature an occupant of what Bhabha calls the third space. Bhabha's elimination of the South Asian literary milieu, as the third/liminal cultural space, is likely to justify this project. Additionally, Bhabha's theorisation about hybridity and liminal space might be viewed as a propagation of cultural imperialism of the west because he celebrates hybridity of culture. My argument is located out of Bhabha's idea of the third space and it, simultaneously, connects back to pre-Saidian times where binaries are not entertained and where indigenous rhetoric is celebrated. Munaweera, despite being diasporic, ties her narrative to her geography and, thus, seems to celebrate indigenous culture. Quite unlike Bhabha, despite having an experience of living in the diasporic and (culturally) liminal spaces, Yashodhara shows no tendency to brandish her hybrid identity. There is an unavoidable going back to her indigenous culture and the place riven with war and its excesses. Therefore, my study visibly parts ways with Bhabha's notion of cultural hybridity because of its veering back to non-binaristic representation of local culture. And that is what South Asian Literature as a literary category stands for.

What Bhabha glosses over—the South Asian literary consciousness as a mix of differences thus defying fixity—is somewhat accomplished in Deepika Bahri and Mary Vasuadeva's *Between the Lines: South Asians and Postcoloniality* (1996). This book is, as described by the editors in the Introduction "…a sampling of perspectives from South Asian writers and critics" engaging with "questions of identity, representation, and postcoloniality" (2). Recognizing the academic marginality and lack of representation of South Asians in academia, Bahri and Vasuadeva have put together a collection of interviews by various South Asian theorists and writers to circumvent the marginality of South Asians. As they have pointed out in their introduction:

> …ours is an attempt to record the growing South Asian presence in the United States and Canada... The historical and cultural specificity of South Asian experience is often obscured within the discourse of "Asian" studies in Anglo-America...This volume is thus also an effort to disaggregate the group "Asian" by focusing on a subgroup that is not often recognized or represented. (Bahri and Vasuadeva, l)

The editors and contributors examine South Asian presence in Anglo-America.[18] The book consists of five parts. Part I is a collection of interviews of South Asian critics from American academia, Part II, titled "Commentaries" presents critical commentaries on such vogue terms as 'the postcolonial' and 'South Asia(ns)' and Part III explores "Studies in the Media and Popular Culture". Part IV is titled "Literary Criticism", and critiques works of fiction by such seminal postcolonial writers as Salman Rushdie, Sara Suleri, Anita Desai and Bharti Mukherjee. Part V is titled "Experimental Critiques" and "…challenges traditional notions of literary and theoretical criticisms" (26). The book's most engaging aspect is its rejection of fixed categorization, as the editors elaborate the purpose of putting together this collection in the following words:

> The quest for a stable South Asian identity is a daunting venture; hence, the varied articulations presented here offer an understanding of identity as the product of complex interactions and negotiations. Enunciated variously, identity emerges as a dynamic process without primordial fixity… (Bahri and Vasuadeva 1)

Between the Lines: South Asians and Postcoloniality is a critically insightful book relating to the migratory experiences of South Asians living in the US. The editors/contributors also comment upon various issues relating to identity, gender, representation, and alterity. The writers/editors also point out the role South Asians have played in academia and the socio-political life of America. They explain how much of the postcolonial discourse owes itself to South Asian writers or critics. Bahri and Vasuadeva also add that however prolific these writers' works may be, South Asia as a contiguous category is yet to be debated, as it is often glossed over, under the rubric of Asia. (Bahri and Vasuadeva 2, my paraphrase). The editors' one of the most significant arguments is indicating a problematic generalization of some of the vogue theoretical terms such as postcolonial or South Asia(ns). Rejecting the perceived uni-directionality of these labels, the editors argue that they "…are discursive and contingent as well as descriptive" (3). The interviewees (specifically Viswanathan and Spivak) address the responsibility of the academic in dismantling these generalizations. For instance, Bahri and Vasuadeva criticize the problematic synonymy of South Asia with India. This emphasis on the fact that South Asia consists of seven countries that share borders, a common colonial past, and similar culture, and Indian English literature is not the sole representative of South Asia has been very helpful to me in forming my thesis statement. As they explain:

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[18] Bahri and Vasuadeva use the term 'Anglo-America' to designate the United States and Canada and for use in the postcolonial context Anglo-America refers to the center or the metropole.

> Customarily, "South Asia" would include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, [and] Sri Lanka. These are the countries that share contiguous or close borders and claim more modicum of cultural overlap—in language, religion, cuisine, or certain attitudes and practices—and a shared history of colonization before their evolution into modern nationhood. (Bahri and Vasuadeva, 3)

Bahri and Vasuadeva also discuss the South Asian diaspora as a space of cultural negotiation. The importance of negating monolithic representation is also discussed by the interviewers and interviewees. This collection has been useful to me in understanding the importance of bringing into light the formerly neglected South Asian literary category and the importance of dismantling unitary/monolithic representations, since "a breakdown of crude dichotomies" is the constant strain in most of the essays/interviews (Bahri and Vasuadevaa 28). However, the editors and contributors discuss South Asian literary category solely in terms of its visibility in the Western academia and limit their discussion to the South Asian diaspora in the US. Diaspora and the importance of diasporic consciousness is an important aspect of South Asian literary sensibilities; however, it is not confined to just that. The suggestion of a move towards the inception of a framework that conjoins local/indigenous issues with the present global cosmopolitan concerns is likely to justify the rationale for this project.

Another notable critical anthology that critically examines the fiction of South Asian writers at the margin is Ruvani Ranasinha's *Contemporary Diasporic South Asian Women's Fiction: Gender, Narration, and Globalization* (2016). Although this book is a critical anthology of Anglophone fiction by diasporic South Asian women and does not critique the works selected for analysis, it has served as an expedient source for this research. This owes to the book's critical engagement with the selected works and its straddling of different theoretical threads such as feminism, postcolonialism, diaspora theorization, issues related to globalization, and cosmopolitanism. Ranasinha analyses a variety of works of fiction by writers from diverse backgrounds to explore how South Asian female diasporic writers defy hierarchical distinctions starting from India—Roy's *God of Small things* (1997)—and Bangladesh—Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003). She also discusses such influential contemporary works of fiction as Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), Tahmima Anam's *A Golden Age* (2007), Sorayya Khan's *Noor* (2003), Kamila Shamsie's *Broken Verses* (2005), *Kartography* (2002) and *A God in Every Stone* (2014).

Critiquing the viability of center-periphery discourse, Ranasinha in the aforementioned book has explored how the younger generation of female South Asian diasporic writers challenges the postcolonial monolithic projection/s of the third world woman. As a strict dualism tends to "… overlook a comparable cosmopolitanism and shared aesthetic in alternative modernity in the context of globalization" (Ranasinha 27). Asserting that contemporary South Asian diasporic women fiction writers exemplify a shift, Ranasinha emphasizes the need for new theoretical framework/s to read contemporary diasporic fiction. That "… the texts in the book exemplify a new literary category that signals the inadequacy of postcolonial models of 'writing back' to a former colonial center and of cultural imperialism" (14, single comma in the original text). This book places the selected literary texts in their present post-colonial contemporaneity, situating the works in the sociopolitical settings from which they emerge, thus taking into account their historical locale. The book has also been useful to me because it complicates the perception of India as the sole representative of South Asia, as explained in the Introduction:

> …it destabilizes the central place given to fiction focused on India… India, as the overarching political and economic signifier of the region, subsumes smaller cultures and nations under a common rubric of the Indian subcontinent. In post-colonial and contemporary fiction, and in the academic study of South Asia more generally, South Asia typically becomes a shorthand description for India. (Ranasinha 8-9)

Thus, by exploring the selected authors' indigenous backgrounds of Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, Ranasinha dismantles the position given to India as the sole exemplar of South Asian cultural and political milieux. She interrogates how the selected South Asian diasporic female writers distinctly narrate their time and age by situating themselves in a cosmopolitan locale. While discussing the rationality behind undertaking such a project, Ranasinha asserts that her book "…sets South Asia within a more fully mapped global context than has yet been attempted… it explores the significance of the national and cultural spaces that many of these Anglophone authors bestride and *move between* for reasons of colonial history, politics and class" (10-11, emphasis original). In line with Bhabha's theorization regarding the in-between spaces as productive sites of cultural negotiation, Ranasinha highlights the importance of writing at the interstitial space, which gives rise to a discursive, cosmopolitan literary domain. This transnational/transcultural stance has the potential to dismantle hierarchies and monolithic representations.

Another significant critical point is the book's engagement with the theories on "Re-Orientalism." Ranasinha, through her analysis of the selected works, argues how the selected fiction writers "…complicate some of the 're-Orientalizing' tendencies that Lau and others identify in the writings of their South Asian peers" (7). Lisa Lau and Ana Christina Mendes in their book *Re-Orientalism and South Asian Identity Politics: The Oriental Other Within* (2011) argue that South Asian writers (re)inscribe the Orientalist narrative, catering to the demands of the metropolis. That these writers still envision the west as the center and therefore "place themselves as other" (Lau and Mendes, 4). They further argue that South Asian writers exhibit a nostalgia for the colonial legacy through their narratives and therefore display a strong relationship with the former colonizer: "a relationship which may be closer and of more immediate significance to them than their relationship with their compatriots" (Lau and Mendes, quoted in Ranasinha, 7).

Re-Orientalist writers also propagate the Orientalist legacy by being at the top of the hierarchy: the comprador class. Ranasinha has taken upon herself the task of stressing through her analysis how the selected works complicate these assumptions. Firstly, she stresses through her analysis how the selected writers dismantle the central place given to the west, by engaging in different varieties of feminism and critiquing the "first-world models" (7). Moreover, these writers give central place to "South Asian regional ties and dialogue between subcontinental neighbouring regions" (8). The selected diasporic writers' attentiveness to their respective homeland's political climate and its relationship to other countries destabilizes Lau and Mendes's claims. Ranasinha cites examples from the works of Shamsie and Anam to prove her thesis.

She also adds “many of the writers discussed self-consciously scrutinize the elite comprador class to which they inescapably belong”, thus defying hierarchy (8). This comprehensive analysis by Ranasinha has helped me ground my argument. It has provided me with the necessary critical tools to scaffold my research and has helped me immensely in analyzing my primary works.

Contemporary Diasporic South Asian Women’s Fiction: Gender, Narration, and Globalization has proven to be a valuable secondary source to me. The writer explores the cosmopolitan aesthetic of diasporic fiction writers who dismantle previous monolithic representations of South Asia and position themselves more globally. My research project is aimed at signifying South Asian literature as a separate literary category that is inclusive of works by both resident and migrant writers. This critical stance is likely to establish the efficacy of my research. Moreover, Ranasinha analyses contemporary fiction by selected female diasporic South Asians and therefore has not reviewed any resident South Asian writer or works of fiction that I have selected for this research.

To review the importance of cosmopolitanism in the present global world order and how South Asians living at the margins contribute to it*, New Cosmopolitanism: South Asians in the US* (2006) is a remarkable book.[19] It is a collection of essays edited by Gita Rajan and Shailja Sharma. Detailing the issues related to migrancy, diaspora, and identity, the collection highlights the multiplicity and multilocality of the growing South Asian presence in the US. As the editors clarify in the introduction: “In this collection we explore and discuss the meaning of a new kind of subject construction formed by globalization—the new cosmopolitan subject—and all that it entails in life experiences for South Asians within the nation space of the United States” (1). The book highlights the growing presence of South Asian cultural artifacts—ranging from museum displays to Bollywood movies—in the US. It addresses the critical convergence of such subject constructions as diaspora and the postcolonial at the intersection of transnationalism, globalization, and cosmopolitanism.

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[19] For more on cosmopolitanism see Appiah’s essay, “Cosmopolitan Patriots”. For detailed reference, see works cited. Also see Brennan Timothy and Timothy J. Brennan, *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now* (Massachusetts: Harvard university press, 1997)

The writers and editors in *New Cosmopolitanism: South Asians in the US* are not just concerned with detailing a South Asian cultural and literary presence in the US, they claim to be more critically engaged with "New Cosmopolitanism" (Rajan and Sharma 2). Distinguishing their critical concerns from subaltern studies or diaspora theorization, they claim to have attempted "…to locate that new cosmopolitanism in a contemporary formation that results from the confluence of globalization (trade, migration, media, money, and culture) …" (Rajan and Sharma 2, parenthesis original). Drawing on Timothy Brennan's definition of cosmopolitanism as a category that dismantles binaries by invoking hybridity while simultaneously retaining authenticity, the editors attempt to locate the new cosmopolitan subject beyond the constructions of geography, nation-state, or class:

> She (the new cosmopolitan subject) instead occupies a range of fluid subject positions, which can be trans-class, trans-local with competing value systems…Consequently, we want to examine the ground that South Asians inhabit, ranging from older migrants to newer ones, across first, second, and third-generation populations whose lifestyle and life choices reveal an interesting blend of diasporic and cosmopolitan traits. (Rajan and Sharma 2, parenthesis added)

The writers' engagement with cosmopolitanism as a productive intervention in diaspora studies is what makes *New Cosmopolitanism: South Asians in the US* immediately relevant to my research. Moreover, the concluding chapter, "Theorizing Recognition: South Asian Authors in a Global Milieu" of this collection has been extremely helpful in constructing my main argument. In this chapter, the writers present a detailed analysis of some of the most celebrated contemporary diasporic South Asian fiction. Presenting examples from Rushdie's *Midnight Children* (1980), Rajan and Sharma explicate how such writing helped usher a "global readership that includes, but is not limited to, the subcontinent" (150).

By narrating their time and age, diasporic, South Asian writers, (Rajan and Sharma give examples from the works of Chitra Divakaruni, Mohsin Hamid, and Kiren Desai) depict everyday realities. Such an approach is not grounded in any grand, social, emancipatory agendas. Contemporary diasporic fiction writers of South Asia can speak to the masses while using a global platform. Due to this, they have been able to achieve visibility in the international literary market. The stories which these writers narrate are relatable to the masses, which enables them to tell tales that transcend the boundaries of gender, class, and race and occupy a more cosmopolitan space. Highlighting the plurality and polyphonic aesthetic of South Asian writing, the critics argue that "…the success of South Asian writing in English has been its curious intermingling of difference and familiarity, strangeness, and in Bhabha's terms, *heimlich/unheimlich* comforts that it offers" (151). Appealing to a diverse reading public, the South Asian diasporic writers bestride both local and global narrative threads, transcending the prior center vis-à-vis margin narratives:

> The South Asian authors who are producing a new kind of cosmopolitan writing inhabit the globe with an easy mobile sensibility clearly moving beyond oppositional, emancipatory, or center-periphery narrative threads—instead, they have multiple peripheries as is the custom in globalization. (Rajan and Sharma 158)

Rajan and Sharma's *New Cosmopolitanism: South Asians in the US* has been a significant study. The editors analyze contemporary diasporic fiction in terms of its engagement with a cosmopolitan aesthetic and its global literary appeal. Such an analysis supports my critical concerns and helps me situate my analysis of the primary texts. Furthermore, the editors' invocation of Bhabha's concepts of *heimlich/unheimlich* to assess the South Asian literary aesthetic is significant to this project. South Asian writers can invoke variance while retaining specificity that makes it a productive, discursive space. However, as with the works discussed before, the editors limit their analysis to the experiences of South Asians living in the US. Almost all the literary works discussed in the concluding chapters are written by migrant writers. The growth of resident writers and a domestic reading public is elided in the book. My suggestion of reading South Asian literature in more discursive terms—which is likely to dissolve binaristic divisions—vindicates the rationale for this project.

Another notable essay that can be read in the context of South Asian literature is Huma Ibraim's "Transnational Migrations and the Debate of English Writing in/of Pakistan". In this essay, Huma underscores the importance of "the rapid cross-cultural pollination of cultural heritage between the West and Pakistan" and addresses some "issues of intention and performance in (Pakistani writers') decision to write in English" (33, parenthesis original). Ibrahim argues that, even though the choice to write in English gives these writers literary mobility in academia, **"**the influx of "otherness"" can easily run the risk of being commodified and exoticized for the Western gaze (33). However, Ibrahim offers a solution by suggesting a harmony between the literary productions of East and West.

Discussing some popular South Asian Anglophone works of fiction, including Roy's *God of Small Things* (1997) and Sidhwa's *The Crow Eaters* (1978), Ibrahim in her aforementioned essay argues that "a balance between indigenous literature and "Westernized" literature written by someone from the same part of the world should be deliberately struck, reshifting formerly recognized categories" (38). The constructive possibility of reading Western literature in conjunction with indigenous writings echoes Spivak's assertion that literature should be "the staged battleground between epistemes" (154). Such an intervention in the received categories of east/west, colonial/postcolonial and us/them has the potential of blurring boundaries and thus presenting a more transcultural narrative, a contention that is similar to my main argument in this research project. The former critical methods that perpetuated binarism are being replaced with "literature that is emerging out of the ashes of decolonization" (Ibrahim 45). Ibrahim does not present a nomenclature for this literature/literary category, however, her ideas are similar to what Trivedi labels South Asian Literature. She also talks about the importance of regional ties, ushering a new era in South Asian Anglophone fiction, as she says: "with an increase in English writing and reading public this literature that establishes bonds between Indian, Pakistani and Sri Lankan sensibilities will increase" (45). The essay is short and doesn't present an in-depth analysis of any South Asian Anglophone works of fiction. Moreover, Ibrahim stresses the importance of a transcultural/transnational discourse but does not examine South Asian literature's ability to conjoin eastern and western literary materials. This gap is likely to be filled with my research project.

After contextualizing my investigation in contemporary critical sources, it is now likely to be useful to discuss the available critical scholarship that is directly or indirectly related to the works of fiction selected for this project.

(II)

2.4 Critical Anthologies of South Asian Literature

In this section, I have discussed some critical anthologies of South Asian literature. It is to be made clear that I have taken help from some of the anthologies in writing the introduction. Therefore, I have kept my reviews brief here.

One of the most influential anthologies of South Asian fiction that have helped me immensely in my project is *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia* (2003). Edited by Sheldon Pollock, the book comprises seventeen essays, each devoted to the analysis of one particular South Asian literary language tradition. This volume has helped me trace the literary genealogy of South Asia while situating key works of fiction in their respective political, social and historical setting in Chapter 1, Introduction so I have discussed this work very briefly here.

The editors and contributors have aimed to present a multilingual literary history of the region, dating back to the Sanskrit literary tradition while situating the works in their spatiotemporal setting. As Pollock has pointed out in the introduction: "The volume's main objective is to explore these resources in their historical variety and complexity, and thereby suggest ways of bringing these literatures back to scholarly attention. For too long they have occupied a marginal space" (2). Since my primary texts for analysis are in English, (Tagore's *Home and the World* is an English translation of his *Ghare Baire*) all the varying linguistic traditions explored in this volume were not that useful to me. However, Vinay Dharwadker's essay "The Historical formation of India English Literature" is relevent to my research. Dharwadker begins his analysis from the beginning of an English consciousness in the literature of South Asia and carries on his analysis to contemporary times. Thereby covering the Anglophone literary tradition of South Asia over the period of two centuries, starting from *The Travels of Dean Mahomet* (1794) to the 'boom' of South Asian fiction in the aftermath of *The God of Small Things* (1997). Pointing out the growth of literary readership in India and its critical reception in the metropolis, Dharwadker emphasizes that Indian-English literature:

> …is as much an original body of literature as a literature of translation…In its accumulation of two centuries as a body of translations, Indian-English Literature has overcome its predicaments—as literature written in a "foreign" language and as a "bastard child" of colonialism—by making itself inseparable from India as one of the subcontinent's many translated bodies. (Dharwadker in Pollock 260-261)

Although the book presents a comprehensive analysis of literature written in many South Asian languages, it comments upon the history of Anglophone fiction by writers of Indian descent only. My main argument is that presenting India as a representative of South Asia is a problematic generalization, one that needs to be contested. This research views South Asia as a contiguous literary category, where writers invoke specificity while straddling the global, transcultural/national spaces they occupy. The invisibility of a critical engagement with South Asian Anglophone fiction by writers other than India in the aforementioned essay vindicates this project.

What the aforementioned secondary source leaves out has been accomplished—to some extent—by two anthologies detailing contemporary Anglophone South Asian fiction. I will discuss each of them in temporal order, Paul Brians' *Modern South Asian Literatures in English* (2003) and Alex Tickell's *South Asian Fiction in English: Contemporary Transformations* (2013). Here I present a brief review of both anthologies, keeping in mind that these books have served as productive secondary sources in Chapter 1, Introduction.

Paul Brians's *Modern Asian Literature in English* (2003) is an anthology of Anglophone works of fiction by "…authors who were born and raised in South Asia (Brians 3)." Listing down the criterion for the assortment of writers and works, Brian explains that he has selected celebrated works by well-known authors who–except for Tagore—were writing in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. As he explains in the introduction: "…the purpose of this book is a pragmatic one: to help readers with books they are likely to encounter on the bestseller lists, in the classroom, and book groups" (6). That this book "…is not a comprehensive survey of classic South Asian fiction, but an introduction to some of its most interesting authors" (7). Each chapter critically engages with one work by one South Asian writer, opening with biographical details of the author. Brians also discusses indispensable political, social miliux that shape the narrative, as he elaborates in the introduction:

> The discussions provide historical and cultural background information that the Western reader may need to fully appreciate these works. Various aspects of novelistic style, structure, and characterization are commented on. I touch briefly on controversies over individual works, to convey a variety of alternative perspectives. (Brians 7)

Brians also addresses the usefulness of English in the present global scenario, primarily because it enables the writer to speak to a wider audience. Throughout his analysis of the selected texts, he argues that the narrative which the contemporary South Asia writers construct through their writing is not motivated by a need to cater to the Western audience. The writers depict a distinctly South Asian reality, telling the tales which are grounded in the historical, cultural, and socio-political environment from which they emerge:

> The world visible through these fictional windows are wildly varied. Rohinton Mistry and Bapsi Sidhwa portray the tiny Parsi community, Khushwant Singh depicts Sikhs, and others concentrate on the dominant Muslim, Hindu, and (in Sri Lanka) Buddhist cultures… South Asian literature is a colorful kaleidoscope of fragmented views, colored by the perception of its authors, reflecting myriad realities—and fantasies. (Brians 6)

As pointed out earlier, each chapter is devoted to analyzing one work of fiction. Placing the works in a temporal chronology, Brains starts his analysis from Tagore's *Quartet* (1915). He then goes on to discuss such influential works as Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938), Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956), R. K. Narayan's *The Guide* (1958), Attia Husain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961), moving towards more recent fiction by contemporary authors such as Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) and Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* (2000). Brians has carefully chosen those works which are celebrated and well-known in academia. Not only the social context and biography of the writer are discussed, but Brians also highlights important elements related to form, structure, and the narrative techniques used by these authors.

Brian describes the spatiotemporal setting of each of the works that he has selected for analysis, which has helped me immensely in Chapter 1. Furthermore, the biographical details about Tagore and the variety of secondary sources that Brians presents in each chapter have also been useful. However, Brians's analysis lacks a significant critical depth. Since the book is specifically designed to address students' needs, Brians's critique is simplistic. The theoretical baggage which terms like 'postcolonial' and 'South Asian' carry, is only touched upon vaguely in some essays. My critical stance, the need to recognize the South Asian literary category, is not addressed anywhere in the book and the present research is likely to fill this gap.

Alex Tickell's *South Asian Fiction in English: Contemporary Transformations* (2017) is another significant anthology of South Asian literature, which critically examines the contemporary Anglophone fiction of the region. By contemporary, Tickell means "the post-Cold War period to the early 1990s to the present…as one of particularly radical historical and cultural changes in South Asia" (3). In the introduction, the writer delineates the respective historical and political changes that each country belonging to the region of South Asia encountered after the Cold War. I have taken immense help from this section in my introduction; therefore, I have kept my review here brief.

The book is divided into two parts, titled "Regional Formations" and "Contemporary Transformations". Part I consists of four essays, with each essay explaining one particular region's literary output. The first essay reads the Af-Pak fiction written in the aftermath of 9/11, the second critically lists down Indian fiction in English after 1991, the third essay deals with English-language fiction of Bangladesh and the last essay reads Sri Lankan English fiction from 1994 to the present. Each chapter opens up with the beginning of the development of English literature in one particular region and examines what cultural, socio-political, and historical factors determined the creation and reception of writing in English. Part II consists of nine essays, thematically divided, set to analyze one particular critical strand of South Asian Anglophone fiction. The editor's and contributors' analysis which takes into consideration various social, political, and cultural aspects that shape the stories has been very helpful to me in locating my primary texts in the long literary history of South Asia. However, the book does not discuss the contiguous nature of South Asian literature and elides any critical discussion on the works which I have selected for analysis. My research is likely to fill this gap by analyzing the selected works of fiction as exemplifying a separate literary category.

2.5 Conclusion

In this section, I have reviewed an assortment of secondary sources relating to postcolonial theory, diasporic theory and South Asian Anglophone fiction. This review of the past literature is related to my critical framework which I have employed to analyze my primary texts. It has helped me contextualize my investigation and find gaps in the existing scholarship. It has also provided a critical context to my analysis of the selected South Asian Anglophone fiction. It was difficult to choose the most relevant sources available and I might have excluded some of the most significant ones. Though most of the works discussed above may not discuss the writers or works selected for my inquiry, they touch upon some critical points related to my project. I have attempted to relate these works to my analysis of the primary texts.

After situating my research premise in the contemporary critical scholarship and reviewing an array of selected sources, it is useful to outline my theoretical framework which is likely to support my analysis of the primary texts.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I have discussed the theoretical perspectives and the research methodology that I deem appropriate to analyze the selected works of fiction. A review of the available critical scholarship has enabled me to develop a critical insight into the theoretical approaches that can be effectively deployed to analyze my primary texts. Keeping in line with my broad thesis statement, it is to be explicated that an amalgamation of theoretical approaches related to Postcolonialism, subaltern studies, diaspora studies, cosmopolitanism and transnationalism/transculturalism are likely to provide the theoretical support for this project. I have examined my primary texts in the light of the above-mentioned theoretical positions, specifically the site where these theories intersect. Moreover, as my research lies in the qualitative paradigm, the research method which I have followed is largely subjective. Therefore, I have invoked Belsey's textual analysis—as presented in her essay "Textual Analysis as a Research Method"—to analyze my primary texts. Furthermore, the subversive claim that "Colonial sites like India need not enter cultural studies only through the lens of colonial discourse…" (Breckenridge and Appadurai 10) intrigued me to carry out this research. A meditative approach, which is not determined by center-periphery discourse, is likely to present a polyvocal and non-binaristic point of view. Moreover, textual analysis, which seeks to interpret a text by acknowledging contingency of meaning, is likely to be useful in reading my primary texts. For the sake of clarity, I have divided my theoretical framework into the following subheads:

- Conceptual Framework for this Study
- Research Methodology
- Conclusion

3.2 Conceptual Framework for this Study

The following research is principally based on the theoretical concepts of Pakistani-born American critic and memoirist Sara Suleri, specifically her criticism of colonial discourse as outlined in her book *The Rhetoric of English India* (1991). A supporting theoretical perspective for this analysis/reading comes from Harish Trivedi, specifically his definition of what constitutes South Asian Literature, as outlined in his essay “South Asian Literature: Reflections in a Confluence”. Sara Suleri critiques the alteritist discourse in (post)colonial theory, and in its position suggests a more inclusive critical approach that does not essentialize the dichotomy of east/west and colonial/postcolonial. I have attempted to utilize her theories to broadly describe the literary category of South Asia. Harish Trivedi’s essay gives contours to the literary category of South Asia and underscores the importance of locally produced theoretical frameworks. The following pages present a comprehensive detail of the ideas of these theorists. I have tried to explain that the literary category of South Asia attempts to emerge out of the binaries of West versus east/South Asia or colonial discourse versus postcolonial discourse. This blurring of boundaries makes South Asian literature an adherent of multiplicity and adaptability. I have comprehensively explained below how I attempt to substantiate my point by invoking the theories proposed by Sara Suleri and Harish Trivedi.

3.2.1 Sara Suleri and *The Anxiety of Empire*

Sara Suleri in her critical work *The Rhetoric of English India* (1992) is averse to the critical apparatus used by postcolonial theorists and writers. She presents a counter-discourse to postcolonialism and her book “attempts to question some of the governing assumptions of that [the local discourse about colonialism] discursive field” (1, parenthesis added). She asserts that Postcolonial theorists and writers—who desire a representation of the margin, or the other— follow the same Eurocentric binary that is set by the imperialist agenda. Thus, their attempt of “cultural decentring” fails or is at least deferred, as they are too concerned with the dichotomy of margin versus center (Suleri 1). For Suleri “the stories of English India… demand to be read against the grain of the rhetoric of binarism…” (4). Her thesis regarding “an (anti)alteritist reading of colonial cultural studies” is a discursive intervention in colonial discourse, since the replication of alterity or otherness by postcolonial writers is evocative of imperialist scholarship (Suleri 12, parenthesis added). The rhetoric of English India for Suleri includes both “imperial and subaltern materials and in the process demonstrates their radical inseparability” (Suleri 3), without privileging any one of the terms as opposed to the (post)colonial discourse. I have used these arguments as the theoretical lens to read my primary texts.

Suleri, at the very start of her work, rejects the collocation of the term English India as a geographical region and idea that is only defined and described due to its encounter with English colonizers. The British rule in India is an irremovable part of the region's history, however "English India is not solely… a slippage from history into language" (Suleri 3). "The idiom of English India" signifies a radical departure from the rigid distinction between the colonial and the postcolonial and presents these distinctions as less historically new (Suleri 3, my paraphrase). This negotiating characteristic of English India makes it more mediative and cohesive, which is indicative of its potential of engaging with multiplicity and adaptability.

Suleri is hence more deconstructive in her approach and stresses a need to bridge the gap between West and India, and/or colonial and postcolonial. She offers a rereading of major Anglo-Indian materials, underscoring "the anxiety of empire" which is characteristic of these narratives (5). She further points out that the Anglo-Indian writer, by employing the Eurocentric center-periphery discourse, "runs the risk of rendering otherness indistinguishable from exoticism" (12). Thus, enacting what might be called cultural amnesia; a tendency to overlook cultural imbrications. The imposition of the opposition of the colonial and the postcolonial is therefore limiting, and its place Suleri offers a more productive analysis. Such a reading has the potential of interrogating and eventually repudiating essentialist binaristic divisions and it is useful to my research project. As I have attempted to show through my analysis how both of my primary texts, *HTW* and *ITM* attempt to discard binaristic hierarchies by shedding the burden of the empire and at the same time rejecting nationalist ideologies. Suleri's celebration of discursive analysis and her deconstruction of essentialist binarism is a productive intervention in the dominant mode of criticism.

Although Suleri discusses these ideas while describing the rhetoric of English India specifically, her views can be applied to the theory of South Asian literature in general. First of all, India, erroneously so, largely represents South Asia. Secondly, various other theorists—in their attempt to describe what comprises South Asian literature—have given theories that coincide with Suleri's conceptions. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak stresses a need for "asymmetrical intimacy" between both the local and the foreign literary productions for the effective teaching of English literature in India (154). Huma Ibrahim also discusses a somewhat similar point in her essay "Transnational Migrations and the Debate of English Writing in/of Pakistan" where she suggests the reading of indigenous literature by conjoining it with the metropolitan literature (38, my paraphrase).

Suleri's theoretical perspectives are likely to be useful in reading my primary texts. I have invoked her arguments to analyze how the selected works of fiction address and intervene in the dichotomies of margin vis-à-vis center and colonial vis-à-vis postcolonial. Her recommendation of reading against binarism is likely to be expedient in analyzing both texts. Moreover, reading against the grain aids one in critiquing hierarchical distinctions and rigid divisions. This stance is likely to present a more pluralistic, inclusive perspective and a multicultural view. In my analysis, I have also attempted to show how the selected works—by defying essentialist dichotomies—represent the indigenous markers of South Asia while constructing a narrative that speaks to the world.

3.2.2 Harish Trivedi and the South Asian Literary Category

As I have already explained, Harish Trivedi's ideas support the theoretical lens I have drawn from Suleri's *Rhetoric of English India*. In his essay "South Asian Literature: Reflections in a Confluence", Trivedi comprehensively presents the journey of South Asian Literature as a separate literary category in academia:

> South Asia as a literary category is a new idea, the latest in a series of academic buzzwords. In Anglophone discourse, we have had the literatures of our world collectively described under several different labels, such as ''Commonwealth Literature", "Third World Literature", and "Postcolonial Literature…All these labels that the West has imposed on our literatures have one thing in common, which is that they are reminders of our colonial history as people subjugated and marginalized by the Western nations…But...what were two hundred years of … colonial rule in our long…civilizational history? (Trivedi 190-91)

This refusal of strict binaries and the inclusion of both colonial and postcolonial materials make South Asian Literature as a literary category negotiate a third space for itself: it rejects hierarchies and attempts to go beyond strict demarcations of what is considered as West or South Asian and/or as colonial or postcolonial—rather, it mediates these two spaces and cohesively attempts to surpass them. Trivedi further describes the literary category of South Asia as a thread, which “runs through and round the colonial to draw a line which connects the precolonial to the postcolonial…” (187). It includes the history of British rule in South Asia but does not consider this as the sole, defining moment in the region’s literary production and identity. Furthermore, Trivedi hints towards a need for locally produced critical trends. As he says:

> To think of our literature not through Western labels but rather as South Asian Literature is thus to return to the local and the indigenous. It is to affirm our long literary history, and furthermore, it is to align ourselves to our geography. (Trivedi 194)

Thus, for Trivedi, it is important for academics at home and abroad to understand the geographical, historical, and cultural contiguity of South Asia and therefore produce a critical apparatus that is inclusive without omitting difference. I have used these ideas as my supporting critical lens to read my primary texts. Trivedi’s delineation of the literary category of South Asia and the importance of the creation of locally formed theoretical perspectives has helped me construct my thesis statement.

Trivedi’s assertion—that western labels describing the literature(s) of South Asia have outlived their usefulness—is significant to this research. It has helped me construct my thesis statement—a need for having a separate critical trend to read the literary production of South Asia. Furthermore, Trivedi’s theories have helped me envisage South Asian literature as inclusive of the region’s (literary) precolonial history, its colonial encounter, and its present postcolonial state. I have harked back to his ideas in my analysis of the primary texts. Using Trivedi’s concepts is likely to help understand how these works address essentialist binaristic paradigms. Furthermore, how South Asian writers unpack their subject positions as postcolonials, located in a global literary marketplace. Moreover, it has also helped me examine how these writers construct a cosmopolitan narrative, without jeopardizing the region’s indigeneity.

3.3 Research Methodology

In the light of the theoretical framework outlined, the research employs a qualitative approach to analyze the selected literary works, and my analysis of the primary texts is largely interpretative and exploratory. As my reading of the selected texts sets out to explore the nexus between culture and ideology, through exploring an interplay of meaning and ideas, a qualitative approach and textual analysis are best suited to this critical investigation.

The research has employed Catherine Belsey's model of textual analysis as presented in her essay "Textual Analysis as a Research Method" included in Gabriele Griffin's book *Research Methods for English Studies* (2005) to analyze *Home and the World* by Rabindranath Tagore and *Island of a Thousand Mirrors* by Nayomi Munaweera. The reason is that Belsey's textual analysis is presented as a close reading of cultural production "…where cultural criticism includes English, cultural history and cultural studies, as well as any other discipline that focuses on texts" (Belsey in Griffin 157). Furthermore, her argument rests on a strong poststructuralist position: a play of signifiers leading to multiple interpretations and meanings. As she says: "According to the theory of language I have invoked, there can be no final signified: no one true meaning can come to light … Meaning is not anchored in anything outside signification itself … meanings are always ultimately undecidable" (Belsey in Griffin 172-173). In line with this argument, I have attempted to avoid any essentialist interpretation/s.

An inductive, largely exploratory position is likely to give me room for contestatory interpretations. The standpoint that meaning-making varies from theorist to theorist and is different in different contexts is the basis of textual analysis. This approach is likely to be useful to me as my principal theorist Sara Suleri proposes a counter-discourse to postcolonialism and the prevalent oppositionality discourse in academia. Suleri, therefore, attempts to subvert the Eurocentric binarism which is the foundation of these two literary categories and discourses. Thus, the ongoing research occasionally engages with deconstructive analysis, but deconstruction as a critical apparatus is not the purpose here. Furthermore, textual analysis as outlined by Belsey largely rests on a text's cultural background, its production, and consumption. It attempts to find out different interpretations of a text and assess how text is a product of different discourses. Keeping this in view, I would attempt to pull in different ideas and meanings comprising the "commingled waters" of South Asian culture, history, ideology, and politics that may shape the primary texts. (Trivedi 188).

Belsey incorporates Roland Barthes's "Death of the author" to substantiate the authority of the reader (as a destination) over the interpretation of the text. Since I bring in secondary sources to analyze my primary texts, Belsey's argument resonates well with my investigation. Bringing in secondary sources to analyze the given texts provides room for multiple, often contesting interpretations and opens critical avenues for further research. Using Belsey's textual analysis has helped me analyze my primary texts in terms of their ability to have multiple meanings which makes them open to further research.

3.4 Conclusion

I have used the theories proposed by Sara Suleri and Harish Trivedi to examine how authors of both the selected texts, *Home and the World* by Rabindranath Tagore and *Island of A Thousand Mirrors* by Nayomi Munaweera attempt to mediate the binaries between East/West and colonizer/colonized. I have further analyzed how the rejection of boundaries is preceded by a depiction of the region's distinctively indigenous characteristics, where novelists explore a complex web of culture and identity that may be influenced by the colonial encounter—since colonization is an important aspect of the history of South Asia—but is not defined by it. Moreover, Belsey's model for textual analysis is likely to be useful in unearthing new critical territories in the selected works of fiction in general and in South Asian Literature as a separate literary category at large.

The theoretical perspectives and the research method that I have employed for my research are likely to be useful in reading my primary texts, which I carry out in the next chapter. With these outlined, I set out to critically analyze the selected texts in the light of the conceptual framework discussed in this chapter. I have attempted to answer my controlling research questions through my analysis of the primary texts in the next chapters.

CHAPTER 4

TRANSCENDING PECULIARITIES, RETAINING AUTHENTICITY: TAGORE'S *HOME AND THE WORLD*

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I have analyzed Tagore's fiction *Home and the World* (originally published in 1916). I propose that the narrative of this novel is set beyond the divides of oppositional center-periphery narrative positions. I have also attempted to examine how, by transgressing monolithic dichotomies of East/West and Colonial/Anticolonial, *HTW* explores and engages with the transnational and transcultural subject-position(s). Tagore sets his tale in pre-partitioned Bengal and presents distinct cultural markers which bespeak the region's indigenous identity. Therefore, he foregrounds Bengal, by focusing on the socio-political and cultural climate of the region. Thus, it can be said that Tagore, through his narrative, complicates the previous (post)anticolonial methods of "…still referenc[ing] the West as the center and place themselves as other" (Lau and Mendes 4). Hence, by situating his tale beyond essentialist binarism, Tagore attempts to create a dialogue across borders.

The traditional postcolonial narrative also underscores indigenous South Asian identity and some of the works valorize cosmopolitan aesthetic. However, this attempt is largely aimed at snatching authority from West and can be viewed as a postcolonial revenge against the inflicted invisibility and/or demonization of indigenous rhetoric. Tagore and some other modern South Asian writers go beyond such victimary thinking, as they claim authenticity by presenting stories that do not have any political, emancipatory agenda.

HTW presents Tagore's resentment against such extremist sentiments which sought to divide India. On Tagore's indignation against nationalism, it might be maintained that through the eyes of Nikhil, the protagonist, Tagore scrutinizes and ultimately demystifies nationalistic ideals and a fervent religious zeal rising in the aftermath of anticolonial struggle. This critical angle in the text coincides with my theoretical framework. Suleri's assertion of reading "against the grain of rhetoric of binarism" resonates well with Tagore's rejection of binaristic divides (4). Similarly, Tagore's selection of indigenous subject matter—the Swadeshi movement in India and its influence on the masses—also coincides with Trivedi's proclamation of South Asian Literatures' need to "return to the local and the indigenous" (187).

In the pages that follow, I have discussed different thematic positions in *HTW* to address my controlling research questions. It is to be clarified that I have selected two works of fiction for my analysis: Tagore's *Home and the World* and Munaweera's *Island of a Thousand Mirrors*. I have analyzed these works following a temporal continuity. The reason is that *HTW* is set in the colonial times in pre-partition Bengal when the nationalist movements in India were on the rise, and *ITM* opens up with the colonizers leaving Sri Lanka. This stance is likely to aid me in exploring how the selected South Asian writers examine their social, political, and cultural milieux in a colonial vis-à-vis postcolonial scenario. It might also be useful to me in questioning how they interrogate some of the master discourse(s) relating to culture, ideology, identity, and selfhood in a colonized vis-à-vis postcolonial nation-state.

Belsey's assertion that "interpretation always involves extra-textual knowledge" invites one to explore the cultural and political condition of the time when Tagore produced *HTW* (Belsey 160). Therefore, it is useful to address the social, political, and cultural context of the time which might have influenced the course of the narrative. It is viable to discuss the historical background of the text, and the writer's political ideology to examine what discourses inform the text and determine its meaning. Keeping this in view, I have given a brief biographical sketch of Tagore, his political views, and the socio-political background of Bengal and India at large when Tagore was writing *HTW*, which is likely to help me in examining the ideological mechanisms that inform the text.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), is hailed as one of the most influential poets, playwrights, and thinkers from British India. Most famously known as the first non-European to win a Nobel Prize in Literature "…in 1913 …in recognition of his outstanding literary activities" (Gupta 3). Tagore is best known for *Gitanjali: Song Offerings* (1912), *Gora* (1910), and *Home and the World* (1919) (published in Bengali originally as *Ghare Baire*). He also traveled to many foreign countries "…to serve as a mediator between Western and Eastern cultures" (Gupta 5). Tagore became widely known in the western literary circle for his English writings, but his true literary craft finds representation in his Bengali works. He is remembered for modernizing Bengali

Literature by introducing modern forms of poetry and prose. His use of common, colloquial expressions is seen as freeing Bengali from traditional Sanskrit literary forms and linguistic strictures. Not only literature, but Tagore also revolutionized almost all the art forms in India.[20]

On May 6th in 1861 in Calcutta, Tagore was born in a high-class Brahmin family. Tagore's "…family name is Banerji…But Thakur ('Lord') is a common mode of addressing Brahmins…Anglicized as Tagore, it [the name Tagore] was taken over by [the]…family as their surname" (Thompson 13). He was born into a family of artists and poets and was therefore well-versed in classical Bengali, Sanskrit, and English literature. He refused to be educated in a school after being there for a brief period. Tagore didn't get much formal education, he was taught by his father, his older siblings, and private tutors. He viewed the traditional system of education with great suspicion. That is primarily why he set up an educational institute, The Visva Bharti, "modeled on the ancient forest hermitages of ancient India" (Gupta 6). The Visva Bharati at Shantiniketan also served as a mediator between East and West. Another institute named Shantiniketan was established for rural educational reconstruction, which also illustrates his efforts of harmonizing East and West.

Tagore was not only a literary figure; he was also politically active. He became intimately associated with the Indian National Congress, and the Indian independence movement. He supported the anti-imperialist agenda of the Indian National Congress and also befriended Gandhi whom he met for the first time in Shantiniketan. Though believed in different ideologies, both continued a friendship for a long time. Tagore also condemned the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in 1919 by writing a letter to the then Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, and renouncing his knighthood "…in protest against the inhuman cruelty of the British Government to the people of Punjab" (Gupta 3). He actively participated in the Swadeshi (indigenous) movement in India but later got disillusioned with it. It is important to discuss Tagore's political ideology and the political scenario of Bengal at the time when Tagore wrote *HTW,* as the narrative of this novel is set against a strong political backdrop. Since the text is a product of different discourses, as Belsey informs us, an overview of Tagore's biography, his political views, and the socio-political context is likely to aid me in understanding the meaning that the text offers (Belsey 160, my paraphrase).

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[20] For more on Tagore's life, see Rabindranath Tagore, *The Essential Tagore* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014)

4.2 Tagore, Nationalism and *Home and the World*

Home and the World is written during the rise of the swadeshi movement in India. The novel itself might be viewed as a political commentary on the swadeshi ideology. Therefore, it is important to discuss this movement and Tagore’s views on it. The Swadeshi movement in India was triggered in 1903, in the aftermath of the proposed partition of Bengal. It started as a boycott of all things Western and reached its pinnacle in the form of the Non-cooperation movement under Gandhi. Initially, Tagore supported nationalism and the Swadeshi movement, as he joined the cause of the Indian National Congress and supported its anti-imperialist agenda. However, Tagore became disillusioned with nationalistic ideals as the Swadeshi movement became less an anticolonial articulate and more a separatist agenda. As Manju Radhakrishnan and Debasmita Roychowdhury inform us: “In 1907 Tagore abruptly withdrew from the Swadeshi movement because of the violent and extremist nature the movement had acquired” (32). Tagore—who advocated humanism and supported Dalits, Muslims, and all those relegated to the category of ‘Other’—strongly condemned such a brand of nationalism that sought to create sectarian divisions. He believed in universal humanism and spiritualism:

> He discouraged Indian nationalist leaders from espousing nationalist sentiments among Indians. For him nationalism was an imported western category that was based not on social cooperation but on the spirit of conflict and conquest…according to Tagore, imperialism was an outcome of nationalism and so was cold-blooded nationalist terrorism. Tagore rejected nationalism but he recognized the need for anticolonial struggle. (Radhakrishnan and Roychowdhury 29)

Tagore’s political ideology and his resentment of nationalistic ideals are articulated in his essay “Nationalism in India”. In this essay, he critiques nationalism, which he views as a Eurocentric construct, and therefore, not applicable to India. As he says that “Nationalism…is the particular thing which for years has been at the bottom Of India’s troubles” (68). Tagore further explains that “I am not against one nation in particular, but against the general idea of all nations” (67). Thus, we may infer that

Tagore, through his political philosophy, suggested a rejection of oppositionality discourse and dismantles essentialist divides as he viewed nationalistic ideals with "a great menace" (Tagore 68). In his view, pitting the West against the East restricts constructive dialogue across nations, cultures, and borders. He was against the Gandhian philosophy of non-cooperation and stood for dialogue across borders. Thus, his views can be seen as a form of constructive intervention in the colonial vis-à-vis (post)anticolonial binary. Tagore's essay on nationalism provides him with the historical ballast to write anti-nationalist rhetoric which finds representation in his *HTW.* Thus, his narrative might be viewed as signifying "a radical departure from the rigid distinction between the colonial and the postcolonial" (Suleri 3). An understanding of Tagore's resentment for nationalistic ideals and his belief in cosmopolitanism is useful in reading *HTW* as a political allegory. In the following sections, I have analyzed Home and the World starting with the novel's brief introduction and its political backdrop.

Home and the World is set in 20th Century Bengal, during the rising National Movement of Independence in India. The opening of the 20th century saw many anti-imperialist movements in India and South Asia at large which sought to end the British rule. One such campaign was the Swadeshi movement which was aimed at restoring the indigenous Indian consciousness by boycotting all things Western. *HTW* is set at the height of the Swadeshi movement where Tagore explores and presents a commentary on the political climate of India at the beginning of the 20th century. He depicts the struggle for Bengal's political identity through the tragic love story of Bimala, Nikhil, and Sandip. As Atkinson (1993) in his paper "Tagore's *The Home and the World*: A Call for a New World Order" reads the text as a political allegory where Bimala "represents the beauty, vitality, and glory of Bengal… The struggle between Nikhil and Sandip for Bimala is, then, a battle for the future of Bengal, as they represent two opposing visions for Bengal" (Atkinson 49). Tagore not only engages with the politics of his time but also paints a clear portrait of the Indian culture showing what traditional Indian households were like in India at that time.

Home and the World is the story of three characters: Bimala, her husband Nikhil and an ardent nationalist, and Nikhil's friend Sandip. The novel consists of eighteen chapters and each chapter is a first-person narrative account, told from the point of view of either of these characters. Bimala is portrayed as a traditional Indian wife, who worships her husband and fulfills her duties as the lady of the house. Nikhil is portrayed as a benevolent husband who introduces Bimala to the public space by bringing her to a political rally at the beginning. There she sees Sandip, speaking at the rally. With the changing political climate of Bengal and the surge in nationalist movements such as Swadeshi, Bimala also goes through a change of heart, specifically concerning her feelings towards Nikhil and her political philosophy. Bimala is shown to be immediately fascinated by Sandip's oratory skills. Seeing Sandip speak at the rally changes her opinion about herself as well. As she starts viewing herself as "…no longer the lady of the Rajah's house, but the sole representative of Bengal's womanhood" (223).

Sandip's convincing powers brew a deep passion for Swadeshi in Bimala's heart which makes her join the cause. She invites him to visit her house, which Sandip starts using as the headquarters for the Swadeshi. Throughout the text, Bimala falls in love with Sandip, who convinces her to steal from her husband, for the cause of the movement. During the theft, Bimala realizes her mistake and is overcome with guilt. Towards the end, Tagore shows the Swadeshi movement turning into communal violence between Muslims and Hindus. Nikhil actively takes part in the riots to stop the violence while Sandip hides in fear. The novel ends with Nikhil's (possible) death and Bimala's epiphany. As she understands her true feelings for Nikhil and recognizes Sandip's unscrupulous nature.

It is likely that, through the conflict between the three main characters of *HTW*, Tagore articulates his political ideology and the warring influences which might have impacted the Indian/Bengali political climate. As I have discussed earlier, Tagore was against nationalist sentiments and considered nationalism as advocating divisions. Therefore, it might be said that he elucidates different ideologies and their constructive vis-à-vis destructive influences on the nation through the characters of Nikhil and Sandip. Bimala, or Bengal, is caught in the whirlwind of these ideas. For Nikhil, extreme patriotic pride "…is morally dangerous and subversive of the very goal it sets out to achieve—national unity that is based on worthy ideals of justice and equality" (Radhakrishnan and Roychowdhury 31). In contrast, Sandip is portrayed as an ardent nationalist, who, in his passionate attempt to boycott Western products alienates the low-class peasantry. Nikhil, like Tagore, is also opposed to the British rule in India but is against the boycotting of Western products, considering the damaging effects this has on the Muslim traders. Nikhil is also against Sandip's nationalist ideals as he cannot ignore the sectarian divisions which are a result of *Swadeshi*, giving rise to communal violence between Muslims and Hindus.

Moving with the assumption that the text of *HTW* invites the readers to identify a discourse and a political ideology that defies Eurocentric binarism is one way of approaching the text. Thus, Tagore's stance can be read as invoking a transnational dimension, entailing an intervention in normative, monolithic categories of East and West, colonial and postcolonial; broadly speaking Us vis-à-vis Them. Following this critical position gives me a possible direction for my analysis. It can help me—as Belsey instructs—interrogate how the text can be read, and explore the possible interpretations which the text seems to offer (Belsey in Griffin 167, my paraphrase). I have divided my analysis into the following subheadings:

- Bimala and Bengal: Domesticity, Duty and Desire
- Nihkil, Negotiation and Differential Epistemes
- Sandip and Swadeshi: *a malady of ideas*

4.3 Bimala and Bengal: Domesticity, Duty and Desire

Bimala can be called the central character of the novel as her narrative accounts titled, "Bimala's story" take most of the space in the novel, and she is at the center of the conflict. Bimala's first-person narrative accounts have a psychological depth that signifies her inner tumult. Throughout the novel, Bimala has to struggle with herself as she is torn between two opposing ideals; she has to decide whether to stay at home and attend to her duties or be seduced by Sandip's political ideals and venture out into the world. On a symbolic plane, if Bimala represents Bengal, her inability to decide between home/Nikhil and the world/Sandip is synonymous with Bengal's lack of political vision. Bimala gets seduced by Sandip's authoritarian nationalist ideals but later recognizes the shallowness of his vision and his covetous nature. She is also drawn to her home, (to Nikhil) whose political vision is not rooted in belligerent nationalism and who suggests the possibility of a more inclusive political order. In the very first chapter Bimala is shown as a content housewife who finds peace in worshipping her husband:

> I distinctly remember after my marriage, when, early in the morning, I would cautiously and silently get up and take the dust … of my husband's feet without waking him, how at such moments I could feel the vermilion mark upon my forehead shining out like the morning star. (Tagore 208)

Nikhil wants Bimala to leave her house and be intermingled with the public space, to "meet reality" (Tagore 214). As he believes that this would enable Bimala to not only understand her place and her relationship with Nikhil in her home but also in the outside world. He implores Bimala to leave the sanctuary of her home but she refutes his pleading:

> My husband was very eager to take me out of purdah.
>
> One day I said to him: 'What do I want with the outside world?'
>
> 'The outside world may want you,' he replied. (Tagore 214, single comma in the original text)

Bimala eventually does move out of the realms of domesticity or zenana, but not due to Nikhil's pleas. She frequently goes into the outer chambers of her house to see Sandip, which may be seen as representing a site of negotiation between the dichotomies of home and the world. After her frequent visits, she finds herself torn between her husband and Sandip. As the narrative unfolds, Bimala is introduced to the outer world in the form of an outsider, Sandip. The influence Sandip has on Bimala and her infatuation with his nationalist philosophy form the bulk of most of the novel.

Readers are introduced to the arrival of the spirit of Swadeshi in Bengal in chapter one. With the surge of Swadeshi, a fervent patriotic zeal rises in Bimala's heart: "As soon as the *Swadeshi* storm reached my blood, I said to my husband: 'I must burn all my foreign clothes'" (Tagore 219, single comma in the original text). Bimala's love for Swadeshi becomes manifest in the form of Sandip, whom she sees at a rally. She is enthralled by Sandip's oratory skills and pushes away the screen in front of her face to look at Sandip (223). This is the first instance where Bimala leaves 'Purdah'. She sees Sandip as a "champion" and a "hero" and therefore a living incarnation of her spirit of patriotism (224). Listening to Sandip moves Bimala:

> I was utterly unconscious of myself. I was no longer the lady of the Rajah's house, but the sole representative of Bengal's womanhood. And he was the

> champion of Bengal. As the sky had shed its light over him, so he must receive the consecration of a woman's benediction. (Tagore 223)

Bimala finds herself inspired by Sandip and is motivated to support the cause of the movement. As she reckons: “I returned home that evening radiant with a new pride and joy. The storm within me had shifted my whole being from one center to another” (224). This is also the first instance where she seems drawn out, to the world:

> Like the Greek maidens of old, I fain would cut off my long, resplendent tresses to make a bowstring for my hero. Had my outward ornaments been connected with my inner feelings, then my necklet, my armlets, my bracelets, would all have burst their bonds and flung themselves over that assembly like a shower of meteors. Only some personal sacrifice, I felt, could help me to bear the tumult of my exaltation. (Tagore 224)

Bimala’s “long tresses” and the ornaments which adorn her might be represented as a cultural metonym for society’s shackles over her. Her ardent wish of cutting off her hair and burst[ing] [the] bonds of ornaments placed on her by cultural dictates can be interpreted as her desire to break away from the sanctions that culture and society impose upon her. This is also the very first instance where Bimala sees herself as larger than life and embodying a deity’s spirit.

Bimala sees in Sandip all those qualities which she was unable to find in Nikhil. As is shown in Nikhil’s narrative: “She loves to find in men the turbulent, the angry, the unjust. Her respect must have its element of fear” (236). Sandip’s unabashed pride and violent nature overpower Bimala’s love for Nikhil and she gradually weans away from her husband. Bimala’s personal turmoil is entangled with political upheaval:

> And just as the awakened country, with its *Bande Mataram*, thrills in salutation to the unrealized future before it, so do all my veins and nerves send forth shocks of welcome to the unthought-of, the unknown, the importunate Stranger. (Tagore 298)

Another instance where Tagore blends the personal and political is when Bimala steals from Nikhil. Sandip convinces Bimala to steal from her husband, for a great cause, however, during the theft, Bimala realizes her mistake. Here, Tagore links the personal narrative with the collective/national consciousness:

> I could not think of my house as separate from my country: I had robbed my house, I had robbed my country. For this sin my house had ceased to be mine, my country also was estranged from me… must I desecrate my country with my impious touch? (Tagore 358)

It might be said that by fusing the domestic with the narrative of the nation, *HTW* ostracizes previous postcolonial methods of representing national history in epic terms. As the text chronicles the personal/familial as national. Or in Bhabha's words, this intervention signifies how "…the intimate recesses of the domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions" (141). Thus, the fusion of the personal and political in *HTW* can be seen as a way of liberating narrative from the shackles of historical accuracy and blending the boundaries between fiction and history.

Bimala's venture into the outside world (represented by the outer chambers of her house) opens new avenues for her. Her estrangement from home enables her to recognize what Bhabha calls "the unhomely", a site of (re)negotiation of the public and the private (141). Bimala, after mingling with the world, can comprehend her position in the domestic as well as the public space. She is also able to understand her relationship with Nikhil, as, towards the end, she realizes her true feelings for him. Being at the margins allows Bimala to repudiate essentialist dichotomies which gives her a privileged perspective. This argument can be read in a similar way where Bhabha describes the 'unhomed', in his essay "The World and the Home". He underscores the relocation and displacements of home and the world in the consciousness of the "unhomed":

> In the stirrings of the unhomely, another world becomes visible…The home does not remain the domestic life, nor does the world simply become its social or historical counterpart. The unhomely is the shock of recognition of the world-in-the-home, the home-in-the-world. (Bhabha 141)

Bhabha uses the concept of the "unhomely" or "unheimlich" to characterize the experience of the postcolonial or diasporic subject. However, if Bimala is understood as Bengal on a symbolic plane, the text offers varying interpretations. Bengal, as mediated by British colonialism, enables it to have a more transnational experience. As Tagore in his essay "Nationalism in India", hails the contact of the colonizer with the colonized as progressive:

> We must recognize that it is providential that the West has come to India…I am not for thrusting off Western civilization and becoming segregated in our independence. Let us have a deep association. (Tagore 67)

Thus, the colonial experience entails a positive cosmopolitan/transnational identity. Characterized in this way, Bimala's character becomes a metaphor for cultural (re)negotiation. However, it is important to remember that Bimala also represents tradition. Among the three main characters, the indigenous, South Asian cultural markers find representation in Bimala's character the most. The very first chapter "Bimala's Story" opens with the description of Bimala's traditional bridal outfit and the value that has in traditional Bengal:

> Mother, today there comes back to mind the vermilion mark…at the parting of your hair, the sari…which you used to wear, with its wide red border, and those wonderful eyes of yours, full of depth and peace. They came at the start of my life's journey, like the first streak of dawn, giving me golden provisions to carry me on my way. (Tagore 207)

Here, Bimala is likely to evoke her tradition-bound duty as a woman and lady of the house which she has inherited from her mother. The novel is replete with cultural markers. Tagore magnifies the traditional, Indian nuclear/joint family system which enables him to evoke the indigenous South Asian identity. Moreover, occluding the colonial/postcolonial, East/West divides enables Tagore to appeal to the cosmopolitan aesthetic of South Asian fiction. Thus, he can "transcend peculiarities while invoking regional specificity" (Rajan and Sharma 151).

Characterizing Bimala in the image of Bengal, thus enables one to visualize Sandip and Nikhil as presenting two different political ideologies towards which Bimala is drawn. It is useful now to discuss both of these characters.

4.4 Nikhil and Differential Epistemes

Nikhil is portrayed as a devoted husband and a modern man with progressive ideals. At the very start of the novel, Bimala draws Nikhil's portrait in stark contrast to that of her in-laws~~.~~ At the start of the novel, Nikhil seems to stand for innovation and modernity, in contrast to his parents' conservatism:

> My father-in-law's house was old in dignity from the days of the *Badshahs*. Some of its manners were of the Moguls and Pathans, some of its customs of Manu and Parashar. But my husband was absolutely modern. He was the first of the house to go through a college course and take his M.A. degree. (Tagore 209)

Nikhil also educates and attempts to modernize Bimala by introducing her "…to the modern age in its own language…" (210). Not only in terms of education, but Nikhil also attempted to modernize Bimala in terms of fashion and culture. As Bimala reveals in the first chapter how Nikhil "loved to adorn" her in "many-colored garments of modern fashion" (213). Nikhil is also modern in his views about women:

> I remember I once told him: 'Women's minds are so petty, so crooked!' 'Like the feet of Chinese women,' he replied. 'Has not the pressure of society cramped them into pettiness and crookedness? They are but pawns of the fate which gambles with them. What responsibility have they of their own?' (Tagore 213, single comma in the original text)

Nikhil, due to his modern sensibilities may seem like an ardent follower of West and Western materials, however, in his character, we see a lack of absolutism. His character has the potential to cut across the boundaries of modernity and tradition. To show how Nikhil imbibes various influences, it is important to highlight his political views. As the novel is set against the backdrop of the Swadeshi movement in India, Nikhil's views are not only voiced by himself in his narrative, but also by Bimala and Sandip. His ideas on Swadeshi and nationalism are aptly summed up in Bimala's words:

> …it was not that my husband refused to support *Swadeshi*, or was in any way against the Cause. Only he had not been able to whole-heartedly accept the spirit of *Bande Mataram*.
>
> 'I am willing,' he said, 'to serve my country; but my worship I reserve for Right which is far greater than my country. To worship my country as a god is to bring a curse upon it.' (Tagore 221, single comma in the original text)

Nikhil's refusal to support the spirit of Bande Matram—the worship for the motherland—is grounded in his resentment of absolutism. Nikhil resents any use of force to achieve ones' ideals. His refusal to use force on Bimala when he sees her infatuated with Sandip and his ideas, also bespeaks his non-violent nature.

Nikhil is portrayed as a voice of reason who believes in the moral and intangible against Sandip's passionate and violent outlook on life and political ideology. He is one of the three characters in whom Tagore hints towards a possibility of a co-existence of the ancient and the modern, the East and West. Nikhil's morality is grounded not in nationalism but spirituality. He deems any use of force or violence to protect patriotic pride as impeding the anti-imperialist agenda. As he says "To tyrannize for the country is to tyrannize over the country" (316). He discards nationalist ideals when he says to Bimala: "'Neither am I divine: I am human. And therefore, I dare not permit the evil which is in me to be exaggerated into an image of my country—never, never!'" (232, single comma in the original text).

Nikhil resents all such ideals which create divisions: "…if we should perish in the attempt to save the country from the thousand-and-one snares—of religion, custom and selfishness—which these people are busy spreading, we shall at least die happy" (348). This dialogue resonates with Tagore's statement in his essay "Nationalism in India": "…it is my conviction that my countrymen will truly gain their India by fighting against the education which teaches them that a country is greater than the ideals of humanity" (65). Thus, Nikhil might be viewed as Tagore's self-portrait. Therefore, we may say that through the character of Nikhil, Tagore critiques and ultimately rejects received categorization.

It is likely that Tagore is not trying to abolish difference, he is attempting to interrogate monolithic conceptions of identity, selfhood, and borders. As Nikhil is not only shown as a man with progressive ideals, he is also a true adherent of Swadeshi (the idea, not the movement) or the indigenous. Towards the end of the novel, Bimala portrays Nikhil as a practitioner of Swadeshi, who is proud of his indigenous heritage. Nikhil thus stands for respect for indigenous identity and culture which is not rooted in ethnic particularism:

> My husband still sharpens his Indian-made pencils with his Indian-made knife, does his writing with reed pens, drinks his water out of a bell-metal vessel, and works at night in the light of an old-fashioned castor-oil lamp. But this dull, milk-and-water Swadeshi of his never appealed to us. Rather, we had

> always felt ashamed of the inelegant, unfashionable furniture of his reception-rooms, especially when he had the magistrate, or any other European, as his guest. (Tagore 300)

Nikhil envisions India as a nation-state where different religions and races coexist in a harmony. In his dialogue with Sandip—where Sandip views Hindus as the rulers of India in the aftermath of anti-colonization—Nikhil stresses the harmony between Muslims and Hindus. "'If the idea of a United India is a true one,' objects Nikhil, 'Mussulmans are a necessary part of it'" (239-40, single comma in the original text). The communal violence which breaks out at the end of the novel might foretell the intolerance and horror that are a result of ethnic divisions.

Nikhil represents the fluidity of ideas and a spirit of tolerance against Sandip's separatist ideals. In the character of Nikhil, we see a cultural harmony that helps Tagore in articulating a literary imaginary that is both regionally ethnic, with an appeal to the global audience. Through the character of Nikhil, Tagore voices his resentment against dividing political ideals. One might visualize Nikhil to be Tagore's self-portrait. As the resentment which Nikhil shows against aggressive Nationalism—its ability to turn violent and create divisions among different sects— coincides with what Tagore says in his essay about nationalism:

> India has never had a real sense of nationalism. Even though from childhood I had been taught that idolatry of the Nation is almost better than reverence for God and humanity, I believe I have outgrown that teaching, and it is my conviction that my countrymen will truly gain their India by fighting against the education which teaches them that a country is greater than the ideals of humanity. (Tagore 65)

It is useful now to comment upon the character of Sandip, who stands in stark contrast to Nikhil. Through the character of Sandip, Tagore seems to be critiquing and ultimately demystifying nationalistic ideals by portraying him as self-centered and superficial. It is also likely that readers' sympathies are invited to lie with Nikhil. Nikhil's injury at the end, Sandip's cowardice, and Bimala's realization all resonate well with this assumption.

4.5 Sandip and Nationalism: *A Malady of ideas*

Sandip is the third main character of the novel, who is Nikhil's friend and Bimala's potential lover. Sandip supports a violent brand of nationalism and doesn't eschew theft or corruption for the 'great cause'. Sandip's political gains are also rooted in personal motives. Tagore's warning that "…the basis of nationalism is wanting" clearly reflects in the character of Sandip (75). Readers are informed about Sandip's self-indulgence at the beginning of the novel in chapter two: "What my mind covets, my surroundings must supply" (240). Sandip champions nationalism and the Swadeshi cause. Unlike Nikhil who views the country's worship as impeding national progress, Sandip worships the nation and soil. As he says, "True patriotism will never be roused in our countrymen unless they can visualize the motherland. We must make a goddess of her." (Tagore 330)

We may say that through Sandip's character, Tagore articulates his anti-nationalist sentiments. It is also likely that Sandip's invocation of nationality and motherland are repudiated as essentialist constructs, which he uses to rationalize communal violence—namely protecting the motherland from foreign influence. As, whenever Sandip is about to commit an act of injustice, he cries *Bande Matram* (for example when he implores Bimala to steal from Nikhil's treasury pg. 324). Sandip's efforts for 'the great cause' are financed by Nikhil, as Bimala informs in the very beginning:

> Sandip Babu used to fleece him [Nikhil] on the pretext of *Swadeshi* work. Whenever he wanted to start a newspaper or travel about preaching the Cause or take a change of air by the advice of his doctor, my husband would unquestioningly supply him with the money. This was over and above the regular living allowance which Sandip Babu also received from him. The strangest part of it was that my husband and Sandip Babu did not agree with their opinions. (Tagore 219)

Sandip will allow nothing to stand in his way to further the cause or to achieve his personal gains. His political ideology is aptly summed up when he says: "Whenever an individual or nation becomes incapable of perpetrating injustice, it is swept into the dust-bin of the world" (281). And, "Successful injustice or genuine cruelty have been the only forces by which an individual or nation has become millionaire or monarch" (281). His speeches have a significant impact on Bimala, who slowly starts shrinking away from her responsibilities as a wife and lady of the house. He creates an illusion of Bimala as inhabiting a larger-than-life reality. As he tells her "…in you, I visualize the Shakti of our country…" (274). Sandip encourages Bimala to leave the realms of domestic space and be intermingled with the world. Here, we see a similarity in his and Nikhil's character. However, where Nikhil wants Bimala to be in the outer-world to see reality and understand her position, Sandip's motive is different:

> 'Are you forever determined,' he cried after a pause, 'to make gods of your petty household duties—you who have it in you to send us to life or to death? Is this power of yours to be kept veiled in a zenana? Cast away all false shame, I pray you; snap your fingers at the whispering around. Take your plunge today into the freedom of the outer world.' (Tagore 275, single comma in the original text).

Sandip wants Bimala to cast aside all shame and indulge in passion. Thus, keeping in line with the argument that Bimala might represent Bengal, we can see two different ideologies awaiting Bengal's political awakening and rise to self-government. Where Nikhil's political ideology is a philosophy of harmony and coexistence, Sandip's ideas work on the exclusion and purity of the culture. Sandip wants to see Bimala as "…the living image of Kali, the shameless, pitiless goddess" and wants to set Bimala on her "altar of Destruction" (287). This might refer to a violent brand of political ideology that resulted in sectarianism and later ethnic cleansing. Tagore might be prophesying future xenophobia rooted in love for one's nation.

The possibility of coexistence that we see in Nikhil is absent in Sandip as he believes in reductive nationalist strictures which entail division. The sectarian division which Nikhil anticipates as a consequence of nationalism, manifests itself in the form of Sandip, for example when he says:

> Our work proceeds apace. But though we have shouted ourselves hoarse, proclaiming the Mussulmans to be our brethren, we have come to realize that we shall never be able to bring them wholly round to our side. So, they must be suppressed altogether and made to understand that we are the masters. They are now showing their teeth, but one day they shall dance like tame bears to the tune we play. (Tagore 282)

The consequences of Sandip's nationalist malady manifest in the form of the communal riots which break out in the novel towards the end. Tagore's horrifying prediction that aggressive nationalism is inimical to unity, came true in the form of the partition of India and Pakistan and later, Pakistan. The twenty-six years-long civil unrest in Sri Lanka is also one significant example. Sandip wishes to boycott all foreign clothes and is unable to recognize how disadvantageous that is to the peasantry. As Radhakrishnan and Roychowdhury inform us: "The consequences of the communal violence at the end of the novel illustrates Sandip's failure to recognize the mood of the downtrodden and the dispossessed peasantry" (32).

Another instance where Sandip stresses upon purity and essentialist categories is when he refuses a co-existence of religion and nationalism:

> We must have our religion and also our nationalism; our *Bhagavadgita* and also our *Bande Mataram*. The result is that both of them suffer. It is like performing with an English military band, side by side with our Indian festive pipes. I must make it the purpose of my life to put an end to this hideous confusion. (Tagore 283)

Sandip may be referred to as the anti-hero of the novel. Even though he returns the stolen money at the end and loses his heroic aura, Tagore doesn't show him evolving into a better version of his character. Sandip is shown to be fleeing when Swadeshi riots break out. Therefore, Tagore reveals him as shallow and superficial. Bimala also sees Sandip's true colors, as she says towards the end: "The moment I had stolen my husband's money and paid it to Sandip, the music that was in our relations stopped. So Sandip has lost his aspect of the hero…" (371).

Through the character of Sandip, one sees personal motive and self-interest masked in the cloak of national cause. Sandip's passion for Swadeshi is confined to rhetorical outbursts and plundering in the name of the cause. Bimala's short-lived infatuation with Sandip, which leaves her robbed of righteousness, can be taken as Bengal's nationalistic political view. Though violent and powerful, the Swadeshi movement in India failed to develop "…partly because in Bengal there was no one capable of wearing the mantle of leadership" (Radhakrishnan and Roychowdhury 32). Moreover, Tagore characterizes Sandip in stark contrast to that of Nikhil, which is also significant. The text likely invites us to view the character of Nikhil as heroic because he is portrayed as a savior. In contrast to him, Sandip is represented as an antihero. Such a critical stance invites one to view Nikhil and Sandip as pertaining to different ideals. Thus, Tagore might be signifying alterity, as the range of different positions in the text seems to hint towards an acceptance of difference. As Huma Ibrahim informs "hyphenating identities gives room to difference and has the potential of blurring boundaries" (47). She argues for "simultaneity rather than privileging one over the other" (47). Such a stance is likely to present an unbiased point of view and facilitate a poststructuralist reading which defies hierarchies and boundaries.

4.6 Tradition and Conservatism: Grandmother and Chandranath Babu

Nikhil's grandmother (unnamed) and master, Chandranath Babu, are two minor characters, who are elders in the family. Their characterization can be read on a symbolic plane, as, even though elders, do not resent modernization. In these two characters, we see a possibility of harmony between the old and the new, tradition and modernity.

Initially in the text, Nikhil's grandmother is portrayed as a metonym for tradition against whom Nikhil represents modernity. As Bimala says "… grandmother did not like the dresses and ornaments my husband brought from European shops to deck me with" (216). However, later in the text, in grandmother's character, we see a pliancy towards coexistence, as she adapts to change. As Nikhil "… had filled more than a hundred and twenty percent of the house with the twentieth century, against her taste; but she had borne it uncomplaining" (216). Moreover, we know from Bimala's narrative: "The influence of the modern age fell so strongly upon her, that her evenings refused to pass if I did not tell her stories out of English books" (216). Characterizing the grandmother in this way gives room to the inference that at the very start of the novel, Tagore takes a middle ground; giving space to both modernity and tradition. Furthermore, the essentialist territories of East and West are contested.

Chandranath Babu is described by Sandip as an "…incarnation of a school" (256). He is revered by not only Nikhil but also Bimala and Sandip. He strongly resents Sandip's nationalist rhetoric. During a dialogue with Sandip, he strongly denounces his ideals:

> …'Seethe by all means,' he said, 'but do not mistake it for work, or heroism. Nations which have got on in the world have done so by action, not by ebullition. Those who have always lain in dread of work, when with a start

> they awake to their sorry plight, they look to short-cuts and scamping for their deliverance.' (Tagore 258, single comma in the original text)

Chandranath Babu's dismissal of oratory and vain ebullition as mere rhetoric becomes a prophecy when Sandip flees the riots. We may say that through the character of Chandranath Babu, Tagore is denouncing nationalist ideology as mere 'talk' with no substance. Nikhil's active participation in stopping the riots and injury (possibly death) upholds what Tagore deems as true nationalism.

Another minor character is Amulya, a young student of Sandip, who is devoted to the cause of Swadeshi. Sandip was able to inspire Amulya and awaken a true nationalist spirit in him. Against the character of Sandip, who is no more than rhetorical superfluities, Amulya stands as a genuine supporter of the Swadeshi as he dies in the riots (425). Tagore blends personal and national tragedy at the end. The communal violence entangles Amulya's death and Sandip's injury.

4.7 Conclusion

Tagore, through his narrative in *Home and the World,* complicates the previous postcolonial methods, based on Eurocentric binarism and projects an interweaving of difference and alterity. This enables him to situate his narrative beyond the breaches of the dividing lines of colonial/postcolonial, East/West, public/private, and personal/political. Through the trope of the love triangle between Bimala, Sandip, and Nikhil, Tagore projects the conflict of the nation. Sexual/romantic politics seem to inscribe state politics: the contest which Bimala faces between Nikhil and Sandip can also be read as a contest between two political ideologies which Bengal faces: one working on binaries, exclusion, and inclusion and the other offering a possibility of harmony and coexistence. Furthermore, by temporally situating the work in the Swadeshi movement in India, Tagore evokes regional indigenous identity and foregrounds the local considerations. His use of soliloquy as a first-person narrative account where perspectives are constantly shifting divorces the narrative of any finality of meaning. Situating the narrative as such also gives it a postmodern edge where plurality and polyphony are celebrated and monolithic divisions are contested.

CHAPTER 4

COMPLICATING NATIONALISM, BELONGING AND RHETORIC: MUNAWEERA'S *ISLAND OF A THOUSAND MIRRORS*

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present my analysis of Nayomi Munaweera's Anglophone novel, *Island of a Thousand Mirrors* (2012). I argue that Munaweera, being diasporic, energizes the liminal while at the same time portraying the national, cultural, and social imaginaries of Sri Lanka. She constructs a narrative that complicates essentialist hierarchies and rigid categorizations. She has roots in Sri Lanka, which enables her to authenticate her position as an interlocutor of South Asia. In her narrative, she critiques the regional politics of Sri Lanka, the exilic experience of the diasporic community and also explores the traditional Sinhalese as well as Tamil households in Sri Lanka. *ITM* is told from the perspective of two women, from different ethnic backgrounds. Thus, the text contests the grand narrative of history by depicting small, subjective, individual accounts of history that rely on memory. Chronicling war from the perspective of two women from two different sides also gives the narrative room for an inclusive, polyvocal perspective and complicates particularism. By straddling different narrative positions, Munaweera attempts to evade monolithic labels. This enables her to contest binaries and invoke contingency of meaning, identity, and representation. Moreover, Muvaweera's tale focuses on the Sri Lankan civil war: its impact on those who constantly live in the shadow of the war—the diasporic community—and the active participants of war—the freedom fighters. By doing so, she foregrounds the national and collective identity of Sri Lanka and complicates the normative: central position given to the West in the narrative of the postcolonial.

Where Tagore's *Home and the World* is set against the backdrop of Colonization, *Island of a Thousand Mirrors* opens up with the colonizers leaving the Island, "laboring and groaning under the weight of purloined treasure" (5). Thus, where Tagore explores what it means to live in the colonial moment, Munaweera interrogates the politics of the post-colonial. She magnifies the Sri Lankan civil war, which arose as part of an autonomous Sri Lankan political identity. Therefore, what Tagore predicts to be the outcome of nationalistic pride—division culminating into ethnic violence—manifests itself in the form of the horror of the Civil war. This is why I have selected this novel for analysis. The narrative unfolds the tragedy and horror of the civil war, as navigated by a Sinhalese (Yashodhara) and a Tamil (Saraswathi) narrator.

Belsey informs us that "interpretation attends to all the quotations that make up the text, the traces by which it is constituted" (166). The text emerges from a cultural, political, and personal matrix. Therefore, it is useful here to briefly describe the writer's biography and the cultural, political, and social fabric of Sri Lanka. Since Munaweera is diasporic, it is also likely to be important to take into account how she addresses a real or imaginary homeland and represents a complex negotiation of home, belonging, and nostalgia. Reading the text in this way is likely to help me answer my controlling research questions. Furthermore, acknowledging that "the text sets the agenda" enables me to read the text as a product of different, contesting discourses and how they contribute to the meaning of the text (Belsey 171).

Nayomi Munaweera was born in Sri Lanka in 1973. She migrated to Nigeria at the age of three and moved to the US in her teenage years. *Island of a Thousand Mirrors* (2012) is her debut novel, which won the Commonwealth Book Prize for the Asian Region in 2013. Her next publication, *What Lies Between Us* (2016) won the Sri Lankan National Book Award for best English novel. Being from the margins, Munaweera explores the Sri Lankan diaspora. In both of her novels, she interrogates the diasporic community's relation to their imagined or real homeland and details their migratory experiences in the host countries. Throughout the text of *ITM*, the description of the Island seems like a part of memory and the desire to go back; it has a hint of nostalgia and even unrealism. Moreover, Munaweera belongs to the Sinhalese ethnicity. It is important to address how she views the war as someone from the majority ethnicity and as a diasporic.

The story of *ITM* revolves around two women, Yashodhara and Saraswathi. Yashodhara belongs to the upper-middle-class Sinhalese family, which moves to the US when race riots break out in Sri Lanka. She devotes much of her narrative to the description of her exilic experience, what it means to live in the shadow of the civil war as a diasporic, and her sense of unhomeliness in the US. Saraswathi, who belongs to a lower-middle-class Tamil family, aspires to be a teacher. However, she becomes the victim of gendered violence when race riots break out in Sri Lanka. She is gang-raped by Sinhalese soldiers and in order to hide her shame, she is forced to leave her home and join the militant group LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam). Saraswathi becomes trained in combat and eventually kills herself in a suicide bombing. Yashodhara's sister Lanka is also one of the victims of this attack. Thus, the tales of a Sinhalese and a Tamil may seem to have a separate trajectory but they are interlinked, invoking a collective Sri Lankan national consciousness. The text, therefore, chronicles the devastating impact of war on two families, while tracing the Tamil political resistance.

ITM's dilution of strict hierarchies, the interrogation of center-periphery discourse, and depiction of a narrative that attempts to be more polyphonic resonate with Suleri's assertion that stories from English-India need to be read against the rhetoric of Eurocentric binarism (3, my paraphrase). Furthermore, by focusing on the Civil war, Munaweera ties her narrative to the geography and the national history of Sri Lanka. This stance aligns with Trivedi's proclamation: "To think of our literatures as South Asian Literature…is to align ourselves to our geography" (189). Thus, the theoretical framework which I have outlined in Chapter 3 seems appropriate to analyze the range of positions that the text offers. Furthermore, Belsey's textual analysis, aimed at exploring possible interpretation through studying a range of contesting positions, is likely to aid me in reading this text and explore how it negotiates multiple narratives. For ease, I have divided my analysis into the following subheads:

- Multiplicity and Multilocality: The Narrative Voice in *Island of a Thousand Mirrors*
- Indigenous Colonization: *A war waged between related beasts*
- Sea as Motherland: Indigeneity and Cultural Markers

5.2 Multiplicity and Multilocality: The Narrative Voice in *Island of a Thousand Mirrors*

ITM is the first-person narrative account told from the perspective of two women; Yashodhara and Saraswathi are the main characters and also at the heart of the conflict. Yashodhara belongs to the Sinhala majority and Saraswathi to the Tamil minority. Both women present their subjective, different, and often differing perspectives on the Civil war. Presenting different perspectives enables Munaweera to construct a polyphonic narrative, dismantling the Eurocentric assumption of the finality of meaning and a plausible, omniscient perspective. Saraswathi details her experience as a Tamil minority in the Northern part of Sri Lanka. From a vulnerable girl, who aspires to become a teacher, she turns into a suicide bomber, motivated by radical political ideology. Through the character of Yashodhara, Munaweera details the exilic experience of civil war and contrasts it to that of the people living in Sri Lanka.

It is useful to discuss the novel's title which might be indicative of its non-essentialist standpoint. Island of a thousand mirrors is the name Munaweera gives to Sri Lanka with mirrors as images of the island. Munaweera is likely to refer to her tale about Sri Lanka as one possible image from a thousand different stories. Yasodhara, one of the main characters, at the beginning of her first-person narrative account introduces her story as: "one possible narrative of my island" (7). The plurality of subject-position and perspective allows one to assess the text by discarding Universalist assumptions about the finality of meaning and therefore assents to Belsey's assertion that "meaning is inevitably plural" (167). Such a potentially poststructuralist standpoint enables one to discard prejudices and divisions as formerly propagated by Eurocentric binarism. Later in the text, we also get a graphic explanation about why Munaweera chose this title as Yashodhara reminisces:

> Farther out beyond the reef, where the coral gives way to the true deep, at a certain time of day a tribe of flat silver fish gathers in their thousands. To be there is to be surrounded by living shards of light. At a secret signal, all is chaos, a thousand mirrors… (Munaweera 8)

The nostalgic, slightly exoticist portrayal of Sri Lanka is a constant motif in the text. The immigrant nostalgia and the longing to reclaim a lost home are indicative of Munaweera's diasporic identity. Her diasporic consciousness finds representation in her depiction of the Island and its people. Both the narrators lament the loss of motherland in their way. Yashodhara experiences the yearning for a lost home as a diasporic, while Saraswathi expresses a longing for the pre-war era which she has never seen. We might infer that Munaweera is melancholic about migration and also longs for a pre-war Sri Lanka. Her engagement with the legacy of civil war might also be viewed as her attempt to reclaim her Sri Lankan identity. Thus, in the narrative of both the protagonists, we find a longing for the past, lost glory which is characteristic of diasporic fiction. The engagement with an indigenous reality and itemizing the experience of a migrant is very significant. It can be viewed as an attempt to shed colonial influence and to establish an autonomous Sri Lankan identity by commenting on the contemporary time and age. Thus, Munaweera attempts to bring to the forefront the South Asian local.

As pointed out earlier, *ITM* is a first-person narrative account of two women. However, there is one little detail that deviates from this narrative style. At the end of chapter two, there is a paragraph in italics that tells about a four years old Tamil boy witnessing ethnic cleansing at the hands of the Sinhala mob. As the text informs: "There is, of course, another child in this tale, a Tamil child growing up in the north…" (27). The boy, although four, is described as being able to vividly remember the violence perpetrated on the Tamil minority. This instance is given from the memory of the Tamil leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran. From this instance, it seems that the readers' sympathies are invited to lie with him. As these images justify his struggle for a separate land, Elam: "these are the images he will offer when asked why" (28). Munaweera's use of multiple narrators, and even an omniscient narrator at one point, might underscore the fact that no single perspective is adequate to narrate the trauma of war and that all the characters are connected to it. That the main characters are divided by ethnicity but connected by trauma, all embroiled in the turmoil that devastated the nation. Thus, the distinction between individual and national consciousness relating to the trauma of war is complicated. The use of multiple narrators, who offer different perspectives on war can be seen as a move away from personal memory to shared, national consciousness. Furthermore, it is likely that chronicling war through the eyes of female protagonists—and even from the eyes of the leader who instigated the need for a separate homeland—does not supplant the orthodox historical narrative. Also, the incorporation of real-life persons/events to narrate the legacy of war-time violence blurs the boundaries of fiction and history.

It is useful to identify disparities in both the main characters' narratives to highlight the discrimination and inequality faced by the Tamil minority, as the text offers various such instances. Where Yashodhara's account tells of progress and an affluent lifestyle in the capital Colombo and later in Los Angeles, Sarawathi's narrative centers around destitution, loss, deprivation, and the horrors of the war to which she is a witness. Munaweera contrasts their narrative by the use of the symbolism of the sea versus the lagoon, where Yashodhara associates most of her memories with the sea and Saraswathi with the lagoon. The sea here might represent abundance and opportunity and the lagoon might stand for scarcity and insufficiency of resources. Yashodhara remembers the sea as "water that stretches warm and endless to the very rim of the world" which is "crowded" with "sea creatures" (109, 7). Saraswathi describes the lagoon as once replete with prawns but now carrying the remnants of war: "shreds of uniform, ripped flak jackets, hard round helmets…fragments of bone" (144). Both are nostalgic about past glory, however, their longing stems from different reasons. Yashodhara is nostalgic about the homeland as a diasporic, but Saraswathi's nostalgia emerges from a yearning to experience the pre-war era. However, her yearning of pre-war Sri Lanka relies on memories of her parents as she has never seen peace:

> I've grown up inside this war, so now I can't imagine what it would be like to live outside it. When Amma and Appa tell stories of before, it is that world with plenty to eat and no air strikes that is alien to me. What would it mean to live without the soldiers in their sandbagged checkpoints? Without the barbed wire? Without the giant photographs of martyred Tigers? (Munaweera 130).

Similarly, Yashodhara's narrative centers on the rich culinary aesthetic of the Sinhalese:

> The family eats puddings and soups, beefsteaks and muttonchops, boiled potatoes, orange- and crimson-tinted sandwiches. They take tea at five, with sugar and milk, choose pastries off a multilayered silver tray. In December, there is Christmas cake, fruitcake, cheesecake. (Munaweera 15)

Where Yashodhara describes the abundance of spices, the richness of flavors, and expert cooks, Saraswathi describes the scarcity of food:

> When they [soldiers] left, Luxshmi and I fell upon their banana leaves, scooping up the last bits of appam, rasam, the precious bits of fried fish into

> our mouths; we gnawed on those bones until they were sharp dry splinters. (Munaweera 132)

Their memory of war also emerges from different sources. Yashodhara mainly recounts the stories she has heard from others or what she sees in the media. Saraswathi, however, is an eyewitness to the horror. Therefore, where Yashodhara and her sister merely live in the shadow of war, with constant news pouring from home, Saraswathi is an eye-witness and later becomes an active part of the war as a militant.

Now it is likely to be useful to discuss how the narrators narrate their experience of war. The engagement with the theme of violence in war is significant. Not only war is a universal phenomenon, highlighting war-related violence gives Munaweera a sense of mobility in the global readership. Furthermore, Yashodhara's diasporic consciousness and the impact of war on her dramatizes the transnational dimension of ethnic conflict, highly misconstrued as a localized civil war.

5.3 Indigenous Colonization: A war raged between related beasts

The text of *ITM* can be regarded as presenting an account of the civil war from start to finish. It starts with the ethnic prejudice and racism faced by Tamils on a domestic level, leads the readers to how this discrimination quickly turns into dehumanization and othering, which fuels separatist sentiments in the Tamils, and ends with the war coming to a close after the loss of an estimated 80,000 lives. The civil war is an important part of Sri Lankan history. As Ranasinha informs us:

> Twenty-six years of armed conflict (1983-2009) between the Sinhala majority-led government of Sri Lanka and the Literation Tamil Tigers of Elam (LTTE) fighting for a separate Tamil state cost the small island nation of Sri Lanka 80,000 to 100,000 lives (Ranasinha 117).

The first line of the novel is symbolic and tells about Munaweera's postcolonial subject position, as the text opens with the British colonizers leaving and the birth of an independent Sri Lankan state. The novel opens with this line: "It is 1948 and the last British ships slip away from the island of Ceylon" (5). This can be read on a symbolic plane. The colonizers' symbolic retreatment can be read as an end to the era of foreign rule, not only politically but also ideologically. It is likely that the writer is informing the reader that she has to attend to more immediate concerns: commenting upon the state of Sri Lanka after the end of colonial rule, its socio-political climate, the war, and its impact on the citizens. This attempt seems to be in line with what Trivedi has opined: “what were two hundred years of colonial rule in our long and wounded but unfractured civilizational history?” (189). Behind the leaving colonizer, an independent Sri Lankan political identity emerges.

At the very beginning of the novel, Munaweera foreshadows the civil war. The novel opens with the description of the Sri Lankan flag which consists of different colors that stand for different ethnic groups. The green strip “represents that small and much-tossed Muslim population” (06). And the orange stripe stands for the Tamil minority. However, Munaweera clarifies: “… in the decades that are coming, race riots and discrimination will render the orange stripe inadequate.” (6). Therefore, at the beginning of the novel, Munaweera informs her readers what her narrative is going to explore: indigenous colonization and sectarian violence culminating in civil war. The text invites the readers to interrogate the cultural rift between the two ethnicities that culminated into war, notably the prejudice against the Tamils which primarily stems from colonial binarism of us vis-à-vis them.

Throughout the narrative, the text explores the racist attitudes of Sinhalese towards the Tamil minority culminating into ethnic cleansing, portrayed with vividly violent imagery. This division is mirrored in two stories of the house where Yashodhara grew up at the Wellawatte beach. The intolerance is reflected at the start of the text when Yahodhara quotes the dialogue of Seeni Banda, her grandfather’s friend:

> Of the two races on this island, we Sinhala are Aryans and the Tamils are Dravidians. This island is ours, given to us from the Buddha’s own hand long, long before they came. And now they have come and we are forced to share this place. But really it belongs to us. (23)

Ethnic prejudice on the national level is mirrored in the feuds between Yashodhara’s Sinhalese grandmother, Sylvia Sunethra, and her Tamil tenants, the Shivalingams, reflecting intolerance and the cultural rift between the two ethnicities in Sri Lanka. Sylvia Sunethra advertises for her upstairs house for rent and upon getting a call from a Tamil family, named Shivalingam, she billows: “Anyone but them” (36). However, upon getting advance rent of three months, Sylvia offers her house for rent but she still deems the Tamils as alien, other, and different:

> Overnight, the upstairs becomes foreign territory, ruled by different gods and divergent histories, populated by thick-braided, Kanjivaram-saried women; earnest bespectacled young men; a gang of kids; one walnut-skinned grandmother; and the unsmiling patriarch. (Munaweera 36)

Thus, the personal narrative becomes intertwined with national rhetoric. As Yashodhara remarks, "This is the beginning of what we will come to call the Upstairs-Downstairs, Linga-Singha wars" (36). Much like in Tagore's *Home and the World*, in this text also, Munaweera's attempt of intertwining the personal and political, fiction and history is significant. Her attempt can be seen as dismantling the grand-narrative of history as she mixes fiction with historical events. Yashodhara narrates 26 years of armed conflict: she tells instances of racial discrimination that rely on memories of others or on media images, which are not reliable sources. This can be interpreted as liberating fiction from the shackles of historical accuracy.

A significant motif in the story that repeats in the two generations who grew up inside the war is the love story of a Sinhala and a Tamil. In the beginning, Visaka and Ravan's unrequited love echoes the impossibility of Tamil-Sinhala harmony. It can be read as a contest not between just a man and a woman but also between a majority and minority ethnicity. However, through the love story and eventual marriage of Yashodhara and Shiva, that narrative is also dismantled. Much like in Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924) which ends with Fielding questioning Aziz "Why can't we be friends now?" (288). There, the question is directed towards a harmony between the British and the Indians and is answered with "'No, not yet,' and 'No, not there'" (288). However, in the context of *ITM,* that question is directed towards a possibility of Tamil and Sinhala harmony. Thus, South Asian Literature's need to address indigenous issues and a rejection of the looming authority of the center are more important concerns for contemporary fiction writers.

Another significant instance where Yashodhara witnesses the racist attitude of her grandmother, Sylvia Sunethra towards Shiva (the Tamil boy living upstairs) is when Shiva gets slapped for speaking Tamil:

> We had been talking in our own shared language, that particular blur of Sinhala, Tamil, and English much like what our mothers used in the early days, when suddenly my grandmother, her attention telescoped on us, pins him like an insect. Her iced voice, incredulous, “Are you teaching my granddaughter Tamil?” Her hand smashing hard across his cheek. (Munaweera 62)

This is a moment of realization for Yashodhara: “It was the first time we knew without question that we were different, separate and that this difference was as wide as the ocean” (62). Here, the text underscores the politics of linguistic identity, as an intricate part of national identity that has the potential of fueling essentialist constructs of Tamil and Sinhala, thereby erecting a further division into the two ethnicities. Thus, the discrimination at the personal, domestic level is a microcosm of the conflict and later war on the national level.

Upon the burning of the Jaffna library in June 1981(discussed in detail in Chapter 1, introduction), rioters invade Tamil households and kill men, women, and children with the remaining fleeing the city. The text presents a vivid description of violence and it is here that nationalistic divides are dismantled and readers’ sympathies are invited to lie with Tamils, their separatist agenda is almost justified:

> Arteries, streams, and then rivers of Tamils flow out of the city. Behind them they leave: looted, soot-blackened houses, the unburied or unburned bodies of loved ones, ancestral wealth, lost children, Belonging, and Nationalism. It is a list that stays bitter on the tongue, giving birth to fantasies of Retribution, Partition, Secession. They flee to ancestral villages abandoned decades ago, and it is in these northern places that the events of this June will make them the most militant and determined of separatists. (Munaweera 91)

With the rise of the Tamil separatist movement in Northern Sri Lanka, under the Tamil leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, riots broke out in Colombo. Through the narrative of Yashodhara, we get to know about the motivation of Tamil separatists and the resulting ethnic cleansing of Tamils at the hands of the Sinhalese mob. Foregrounding the indigenous colonization—as opposed to the previous methods of referencing British imperialism—is significant. It can be read as an attempt to shed the burden of the empire and bring out the indigenous, cultural/political identity of Sri

Lanka. One important instance which describes the Sinhalese mob rioting and looting the Tamil families is this:

> They dragged out fathers and mothers, girls and grandmothers, ripped clothing, shattered bone, and cut through flesh. They burned homes and houses, bodies and businesses. They set fires on front lawns, threw in furniture and children over the wailing of mothers. They committed the usual atrocities in the usual ways, but here was something unexpected and incongruous. In their earth-encrusted, calloused fingers, they clutched clean white pages, neatly corner-stapled. Census accounts, voting registrations, pages detailing who lived where and most important, who was Tamil, Burgher, Muslim, or Sinhala. And in these lists was revealed precision and orchestration in the midst of smoky, charred flesh–smelling chaos (Munaweera 83).

The possible complicity of the Sinhala-majority lead government with the rioting mob is indicated here. The brand of violent nationalism of which Tagore warns in *Home and the World* manifests here as an institutionalized massacre. Furthermore, the invocation of national specificity can be viewed as denying the colonizer its previous predominant presence in the history of Sri Lanka.

Yashodhara and her family move to the US, fleeing the war-ravaged country and the readers are introduced to Saraswathi. Being a part of a lower-class Tamil family, Saraswathi experiences loss and trauma in the form of poverty and also as a woman, belonging to the Tamil minority. She loses her brothers to the Tamil Tigers but keeps feeding herself war-rhetoric to soothe the trauma. Saraswathi is thus triply marginalized: as a woman, due to being from a lower class and also as an ethnic minority. Though she doesn't comprehend the senseless violence before becoming active in the war, she tries to rationalize the methods used by Tamil tigers: "They are forced to fight because of what the soldiers are doing. They are standing up for our ways, our lives, our culture" (146). Saraswathi is forced to flee her home and join the Tamil Tigers after being raped by the Sinhala soldiers. There, motivated by her loss, and the rhetoric fed by Tamil separatists she becomes an instrument of violence, eventually killing herself in a suicide bombing:

> The soldiers have left me a blank page. They used me, spoiled me, and then threw me away like a piece of refuse. They did not expect me to survive.

> They should have killed me, but they didn't, and this is their mistake. Now the Tigers write upon my surfaces. I learn the ways in which Tamil blood has been spilled by the Sinhala for centuries; the myriad ways they have excluded, humiliated, and destroyed us. I learn the ways in which they hate us. I had not thought that such ferocious hatred could exist. But the memory of bullet-riddled cement walls, a perfect square of sky, reminds me that hatred is real, and that between us and them, it is the only thing. (Munaweera 183)

Saraswathi, therefore, wants ethnopolitical recognition. The gendered sexual abuse which she faces as a minority makes the reader sympathize with her. Moreover, her hope of imagining a new home in the form of Elam—the free Tamil state which the leader of LTTE has promised his followers—and working towards that end do not seem immediately deplorable. However, her act of suicide bombing can be seen as nationalistic discourses culminating in senseless violence. Her assault at the hands of Sinhalese soldiers results in her using her body to inflict violence, which ends with her body becoming the instrument of death. Earlier in the text, in US Yashodhara watches the dead body of a suicide bomber on TV and questions her motivation:

> What could have led her to this singularly terrible end? What secret wound bled until she chose this most public disassembly of herself? Just moments earlier she had been just another nameless woman in the teeming crowd; now, blown to bits, she was either martyr or mass murderer, according to one's taste. Either way she had attained instant immortality. But what had led her to that moment? This is a question that haunts me. (Munaweera 121)

Yashodhara's interrogations are answered with the narrative of Saraswathi, who brings great detail into articulating her motivation. Thus, the official account of national history seems to be in a state of ruckus. By presenting the in-depth psychology of the perpetrator, the text seems to interrogate and eventually repudiate nationalistic divides. Yashodhara's sister, Lanka is also one of the victims of suicide bombing which devastates her. She regrets her decision of coming back to Sri Lanka and she again leaves the country to settle in San Francisco: "Shiva and I, we fled that shattered country like tongue-tied, gaunt, and broken ghosts" (226). Upon being questioned about the war in Sri Lanka, Yashodhara maintains an unbiased view: "There are no martyrs here. It is a war between equally corrupt forces" (223). The war finally comes to an end with the death of the Tamil leader, however, Yashodhara questions the cost that Sri Lankans have paid and explains the exploitation perpetrated by the state over the Tamils, and hints towards the hollowness of nationalist rhetoric:

> The president, he is a man who has been accused of war crimes, whom the UN has censored for his relentless pursuit of the enemy at the cost of civilian lives. At this moment he is victorious. He has triumphed over the cruellest of enemies by using the cruelest of means, and all is justified in the minds of his populace. They call him King Mahinda. (Munaweera 235)

Now, it is useful to discuss some significant South Asian novels that explore regional ties, intermingled South Asian histories, and facilitate an indigenous narrative, defying the burden of colonization and thus complicating the formerly practiced, "anxiety of empire" (Suleri 5). The declaration that "Tagore's critique of nationalism is extremely relevant even today in an increasingly separatist and fragmented world" invites one to discuss South Asian fiction which explores war, division, and ethnic discrimination. (Radhakrishnan and Roychowdhury 39). What Tagore predicted to be the outcome of nationalism: sectarian division leading to ethnic cleansing and senseless slaughter, took form in the case of the partition of India and Pakistan (later East and West Pakistan) and the civil war of Sri Lanka.

Many South Asian writers in the recent decades have set out to fictionalize the historical and political consciousness of South Asia which involved sectarian divisions and even massacres at the hands of extremists. One such event was the partition of India, of which Tagore may have warned in his rhetoric. There is a copious body of literature from both sides which chronicles the communal violence that broke out during partition. One significant work in the tradition of partition fiction is Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* (1980). Although the text discusses familial relationships and is largely autobiographical, the setting in most part is around the partition of India. The book, therefore, shows the tension between Hindus and Muslims and the communal riots which broke out as a result of these tensions. That Desai deals with the autonomous Indian political identity in the aftermath of colonization is significant. It may be viewed as a rejection of nationalist ideology, which only results in divisions. As Huma Ibrahim points out:

> Desai uses the dead cow, which is also regarded as a bride in Hindu culture, as an analogy of the newborn nation which is turning against its own people rather than celebrating the departure of the colonial masters (Ibrahim 41).

A discussion of fictional representation of partition fiction is incomplete without the mention of Bengali writer Tahmima Anam's *A Golden Age* (2007) and its sequel *The Good Muslim* (2011). Both the texts chronicle the Bangladeshi Liberation war, the gendered abuse, and wartime violence. She does not only narrate the physical aspects of violence of war but also, "how [wartime violence] changes the psyche of victims, perpetrators and witnesses" to convey the horror and pain which war has left on the psyche of the citizens who grew up inside it (Ranasinha 115). One such important work which narrates the separation of East Pakistan from the Pakistani side is Surriya Khan's *Noor* (2006). Her focus is on the gendered and sexual violence in the liberation war. All of the three aforementioned texts belong to the tradition of breaking institutionalized silence on the gendered and otherwise atrocities committed by the Pakistani Army in the 1971 war, which has been rendered invisible in the official/political accounts of Pakistan. Thus, the violence which Tagore hints at the end of *HTW* becomes manifest in the official accounts of the history of South Asia.

Munaweera also presents in graphic details the rape of Saraswathi at the hands of the Sinhala army (152). The novel's literary representation of sexual/gendered violence underscores the instruments of violence and the emptiness of nationalistic ideals. The fictional representation of rape inscribes suppressed trauma into the historical, political, and national consciousness of the nation. Detailed rape scenes in all the above-mentioned works of fiction might be viewed as itemizing the suppression of gendered/sexual violence, in the name of patriarchal codes of honor.

Not only politics, but Munaweera also presents details about the culture and geography of Sri Lanka, thus tying her narrative to the indigenous land. In the next section, I have discussed some of the significant cultural markers which the text highlights.

5.4 Sea as Motherland: Indigeneity and Cultural Markers

Sea is a recurring symbol throughout the novel, while it represents the geographical landscape of Sri Lanka, it may also represent the indigenousness and the complex cultural matrix of the land. Yasodhara, Lanka, and Shiva are all taught to swim and glide into the waters of the sea. This may hint towards an acceptance of indigenous Sri Lankan identity, after ages of colonial cultural plundering:

> He [Yashodhara's father] teaches us to dive, passing on fisherfolk lessons. Teaches us to plunge fearlessly into the surf, eyes open despite the rushing strength of the water. It sends us tumbling head over heels, swallowing brine. We emerge spluttering, almost drowned, dizzy. But in the ensuing years, all three of us learn to negotiate the waters until we are as agile as otters, as sinuous as eels, delighting in the suspended weightlessness of liquid. (Munaweera 63)

The image of the sea is often juxtaposed with the image of the womb and vice-versa. As Yashodhara describes herself as being in her mother's womb as "nestled and suspended in the seas within her" (58). She further refers to her and Shiva's birth as entering the world: "on waves of our mothers' iron-flavored blood" (59). The sea is also associated with the comfort of a mother's womb. Yashodhara also expresses her longing for the Indian Ocean, in terms that describe ocean as a mother:

> The ocean we grew up with was as warm as bathwater, pulling you in to hold you tenderly; you could fall asleep in such water, lulled and embraced, the temperature at one with that of your own body. (Munaweera 70)

Almost all the instances of birth/childbearing are associated with the sea. For example, when Mala gives birth to her child, she refers to him/her as "…the amphibious creature as it gasps for air, tiny eyes blinking, a deepsea fish hooked and dragged too quickly into light. Its gills fluttering as it drowns in air" (90). The motif of the sea, therefore, might represent the indigenous land, Sri Lanka. The characters' relationship with the sea mirrors their association with the motherland. That Yashdhara's account is replete with the imagery related to the sea and Saraswathi's with lagoon also becomes symbolic in this sense. Colombo, which is mainly populated by the Sinhalese, is depicted as the city of opportunities with the sea representing freedom, financial prospects, and even escape. It is described as "endless", and a source of "sea creatures" (109). However, the lagoon in Northern Sri Lanka, populated by Tamils mainly, is shown as only carrying remnants of war with no source of food. Using these motifs might be an illustration of the disparity between the two communities and the scarcity of resources and opportunities for the minority Tamils.

The myth of the birth of Sri Lanka with which the writer introduces the novel is significant as it signifies the common histories of South Asians. That Sinhalese believe "… that they are descended from the lovemaking between an exiled Indian princess and a large jungle cat" (06). The portrayal of intermingled histories at the very start of the novel can be interpreted as dismantling the regressing constructs of borders and nations. It is indicative of the dilution of strict binarism. Thus, Sri Lanka as the land of hybrids is established through the myth of its creation, which nullifies the separatism culminating in civil war. This lovemaking resonates with the lovemaking that is described in the prologue, between a Sinhalese and a Tamil (I preface).

As I have analyzed in the previous pages, throughout the novel, the text seems to subvert some grand narratives related to history, politics, and ideology. One such narrative is prejudice against dark skin color, rooted in Imperialist xenophobia. Dark skin in the context of Sri Lankan cultural polity is associated with the low caste. As Yashodhara's grandmother, Beatrice Muriel expresses her concern over the birth of a dark-skinned daughter:

> Beatrice Muriel…cries, "If only it had been the boy who was so dark! This black-black girl! We will never get her married." To which her mother joins, "A darkie granddaughter. Such a shade we have never had in our family. Must be from the father's side!" There, revealed for all to see, on the skin of this girl, the stain of low-caste origins. Beatrice Muriel, torn and exhausted from birthing, hangs her head in shame. (Munaweera 10)

The colorism associated with the colonizers' prejudice against natives is replaced with an indigenous narrative rooted in ethnic discrimination. Thus, black skin color is abhorred not because of the aftereffects of colonization but because it is associated with the low caste Tamils. Colonizers' rhetoric against dark skin color is likely to be replaced with an indigenous construct. This complicates the previous, postcolonial obsession with narrating the colonizer/colonized binary and instead shifts its focus on the present cultural, social landscape of the land. Mala, whose skin color is resented by her mother, becomes desirable by most men of her university, where the colonial, white supremacist narrative is rejected, and a "rhetoric of equality" emerges (49):

> The sway in Mala's waist, the curve of her hip beneath the folds of her sari, have caught the eye of many young men, each of whom is secretly willing to denounce the colonial prejudice of skin color by falling in love with her. For the first time in her life, history and circumstance have conspired to make her a desired commodity. (Munaweera 49)

However, it is significant to note that dismantling binarism and colonizers' rhetoric does not entail denunciation of Western influence which is an intricate part of the postcolonial identity. It is rather an attempt of decentring the supremacy of the West. *ITM* is replete with western influence on various characters. For example, the "rhetoric of equality" that is booming in the University campus, where Nishan and Mala study also echoes an acceptance, even positive use of Western ideology (49):

> The campus has turned rebellious. Students read Lenin, Marx, Trotsky, and debate with their teachers, taking on the plight of the common man, class inequality, corruption, and nepotism. Old separations and prejudices are dropping away. (Munaweera 49)

Thus, the text includes both "imperial and subaltern materials and in the process demonstrates their radical inseparability" (Suleri 3). Such a stance is likely to help read the text against the grain, thus defying received characterization, which is limiting.

The discrimination against low castes, which is characteristic of South Asian culture also manifests itself in the form of discrimination against the latrine emptying coolie. Much like Bakha in Anand's *Untouchable* (1935) the latrine emptying coolie is seen with contempt in Sri Lanka as well:

> Often Beatrice Muriel finds him in conversation with … the Tamil coolie who comes to empty the latrine buckets each dawn. When she sees him talking to this blackened djinn who smells of shit and carries the stiff-bristled broom with which he performs his inauspicious duties, it takes all her willpower to walk past them, her stiffly held head eloquent in its disapproval." (Munaweera 11)

That one can find parallels between Bakha from *Untouchable* (1935), Velutha from *God of Small Things* (1997), and the latrine emptying coolie in *ITM* is significant as it can be seen as an attempt of portraying "…intermingled, relational South Asian histories…" (Ranasinha 102). It can also be read as South Asian literature's attempts to forge a dialogue with its neighbors and as a move away from the essentialist colonizer/colonized binary, "floating on the commingles waters of our common heritage and sensibility" (Trivedi 194). It can be interpreted as an attempt to circumvent binarism, by engaging in a dialogue with the South Asian neighbors rather than with the former British colonizer as has been done in the past.

South Asian regional ties also find representation in another instance where "similarities … quickly turn into differences and differences as easily into similarities" (Trivedi 229). Yashodhara's landlady in Los Angeles thinks that Yashodhara's family is Indian:

> She drags her equally overweight dachshund on the end of a leash and gossips about us to the dog. "Ohhh, are they making your nose twitch, my Wogums? These Indians. Always cooking with their onions and their curry. How can they breathe in there? Must be used to it. Where they come from, it must seem like a palace."
>
> Inside, La and I stifle giggles. She thinks we are Indians. We have never even been to India. (Munaweera 112, double commas in the original text)

The commonality which is being discussed in the text might hint towards engaging in a dialogue with South Asian neighbors. That the recognition of a common colonial past and "common culture, the shared mode and idiom of daily existence" (Trivedi 299) is important and demands fictional representation in the present postcolonial scenario.

5.5 Conclusion

Like Tagore's *Home and the World*, Munaweera in *Island of a Thousand Mirrors* also attempts to subvert the dominant ways in which East/West relations are depicted. Through presenting multiple perspectives, Munaweera attempts to break the silence on the Sri Lankan civil war and shifts the focus from the colonial power to the region's indigenous issues. Thus, she explores the impact of shared trauma by foregrounding the legacy and aftermath of the indigenous civil war, disavowed by the previous postcolonial ways of keeping the West as the center of the conflict. By doing so, the Eurocentric obsession with the colonizer/colonized binary is challenged. Moreover, by intermingling personal and political, fiction and history, Munaweera also deconstructs grand narratives related to identity, history, and politics. This aids the text in shedding the "anxiety of empire" (Suleri 5) and thereby presents a more inclusive, polyphonic narrative defying particularism.

An analysis of both texts has enabled me to assess where these texts stand in their representation of center-periphery discourse. In the next chapter, I conclude my discussion by summing up my findings and assessing the viability of the research methods and theoretical framework which I have invoked to analyze my primary texts.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

To conclude this research, it would be useful to reiterate my research premise to examine the efficacy of my theoretical framework, which I have employed to read my primary texts. I have examined Rabindranath Tagore's *Home and the World* (1919) and Nayomi Munaweera's *An Island of a Thousand Mirrors* (2016) through the critical lens invoked from Suleri's counter-discourse *The Rhetoric and English India* (1992). I have supplemented my primary critical lens with Trivedi's ideas relating to the description of what constitutes South Asian Literature, as presented in his essay "South Asian Literature: Reflections in a Confluence". I have opted for a qualitative approach, using Catherine Belsey's textual analysis. Moreover, my reading of the primary texts is largely interpretative, exploratory, and subjective. It is worthwhile to conclude my research by investigating if the theoretical framework and the research methodology which I have outlined have proven viable in answering my controlling research questions.

This study was based on the premise that South Asian writers try to come out of their marginal roles as formerly colonized people by telling tales that do not work on binaristic hierarchies, without undermining the legacy of colonization and its impact on the region. With the help of the theoretical framework outlined, I have shown through my analysis that they explore their identities in transgressive/liminal spaces, rendered hybrid in the present cosmopolitan world order and due to colonization. The research has attempted to demonstrate that writers of South Asian fiction attempt to liquidate binaries, mediate polarities by engaging with both colonial and postcolonial, eastern and western materials without privileging any one specific term. The rejection of binaries aids them in depicting an untainted picture of South Asia, its culture, and indigeneity. This stance offers an engagement with the global and the transcultural.

Sara Suleri's argument, in her work *Rhetoric of English India* (1992) against postcolonial discourse has been particularly useful in analyzing my primary texts where she suggests abolition of alterity and offers a dialogic relationship with colonizers, specifically in the context of English India (3, my paraphrase). As quintessential post/anti-colonial narrative rests on the polarities of Us versus Them, margin versus center, which is inherently Eurocentric, Suleri deconstructs post/anti-colonial narrative on the grounds of being complicit with imperialism and its agendas (Suleri 79, my paraphrase). I have invoked her theories to read my primary texts. Harish Trivedi's ideas relating to the literary category of South Asia have served as my secondary lens, specifically his call for a new nomenclature to refer to the literary production of South Asia.

In the course of the research, I have attempted to explore that in the present cosmopolitan world—specifically in the context of South Asian Anglophone fiction—the dyads of East/West and colonial/postcolonial have become less acute and chiefly, the distinctions between ruler/ruled and domination/subordination have mixed to the extent of being completely dissolved. Thus, it may be asserted that the essentialist anti/postcolonial rejection of all things western and colonial is a thing of the past; South Asian literature is more polyvalent, depicting the colonial encounter between East and West as a given. Contemporary South Asian writers, by complicating received categorization(s), bring discursiveness to the field of South Asian literature. They claim authenticity by writing about the political, social, cultural realities of their region as distinct—though not separate—from the colonial encounter. They proclaim to cast aside the victimary thinking of the past and bring into the spotlight the indigenous realities and issues and carry out a (re)negotiation of the liminal space/s between a precolonial past and a present postcolonial identity.

Through my analysis of Tagore's *Home and the World* and Munaweera's *Island of a Thousand Mirrors*, I have attempted to show that the writers in both of these works construct a narrative that is not trapped into the cycle of margin vis-à-vis center. However, both the selected writers, while dismantling essentialist binarism, do not erase the distinct "Southasiannes" to which they belong and from where their stories spring. Transgressing boundaries doesn't entail an erasure of indigenous South Asian identity, it is rather an attempt of defying regressive categorization. As I have attempted to show through my analysis, both Tagore and Munaweera present distinct cultural markers in their stories, which bespeak the region's indigenous identity. I have also explored how both the aforementioned texts defy the normative, monolithic conceptions of identity/selfhood, culture, nation, and borders. Thus, transgressing the strictures of boundaries enables these writers to invoke transnational representations that transcend borders and nations. Their focus on the political crises of their respective countries enables them to foreground South Asia. Furthermore, by paying careful attention to their respective backgrounds of Bengal and Sri Lanka—*Home and the World* is set in modern-day Bengal and *Island of a Thousand Mirrors* is (mostly) set in Sri Lanka—these writers destabilize the central position given to India as a stand-in for South Asia.

In my analysis, I have also attempted to investigate how the selected writers foreground South Asia, not only in terms of a distinctive space with a unique culture and socio-political climate but also as located in a more global/cosmopolitan scenario. The selected South Asian writers, through their stories, chart the political histories of India and Sri Lanka and explore how the political turmoil of their respective countries impacts the resident or diasporic citizens. Their stories emerge from the lesser-known parts of South Asia and thus dislodge Indian dominance over the Anglophone literature. Moreover, the rhetoric of binarism is less useful in reading these texts as British colonization of South Asia has receded and its place more immediate, indigenous matters demand a comment. The divides erected between local/global overlook the possibility of a shared cosmopolitanism in the context of globalization. Thus, the literature of South Asia needs to be read in the context of transcending nationalist paradigms and towards a focus on a transnational identity.

South Asian writers reimagine nationhood, by interweaving concrete national realities with the intimacies of domestic life. Their engagement with war-related violence of South Asian national imaginaries invites one to read these works as a cohesive body of literature that transcends the decolonizing agenda—a continuation of Eurocentric binarism—as offered by the previous generation of postcolonial writers/theorists. Furthermore, these writers' insistence on small narratives (*petit recit*)[21] underscore the relationship between South Asian neighbors and demand a new nomenclature: South Asian literature, as the previous terms to refer to the literature of these parts of the world are insufficient.

The recent spate of fiction by South Asian writers does not subscribe to the postcolonial methods, where some writers represented their fiction with an exotic flair to cater to the western gaze. Instead, they present an ethnic undertow that attends to the indigenous issues. For example, they explore the realities of the politics of their time and shifting borders (there is a copious body of South Asian fiction detailing the partition of India and Pakistan and later, East and West Pakistan). They also comment upon identity as being multiply located by conjoining the local and the global. They enact a sense of relationality, by breaching the divides of class, race, and gender to situate themselves in a shared, cosmopolitan space. A comment on their day and age, not only affirms the issues of authenticity but also presents a statement on universal humanism. One such topic is war and sectarian division, which I have discussed in the previous pages. In today's increasingly separatist world order, with systemic racism embedded into the psyche of white supremacists, the readers can identify with the discrimination faced by minority sects as projected in the novels I have discussed.

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[21] Lyotard pp 60 in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979). For detailed reference, see works cited.

Not only grand agendas of emancipation, but the recent South Asian writers also attend to discussing the idiom of living. The contemporary South Asian writers represent a shift portraying subjective social experience, which is simultaneously relatable on humanistic terms. In both the texts which I have selected, we see the writers portraying a similar mode of fictional representation.

My research maps out a new theoretical framework that is needed to conceptualize South Asian fiction in order to scrutinize its (re)construction of personal, political, and national identities within a context of globalization and cosmopolitanism. It is a productive intervention in postcolonial theory and subaltern studies and is likely to change the course of research in the area of South Asian studies.

6.1 Recommendations for Future Research

There is a pressing need to discover and discuss the ever-growing body of South Asian literary production. It is high time that the belated visibility of South Asian Literature in academia is recognized through a spate of critical scholarship in the area of South Asian studies. My research could be a useful source in exploring South Asian fiction, especially from the lesser-known parts of the region. This project could be a starting point to underscore the hitherto recessive position of Sri Lankan, Nepalese, and Bangladeshi Anglophone fiction. It is recommended that critical attention on overcommodified diasporic writings is shifted to South Asian literature which is out there ready to be tapped. If the future scholars prefer to work on the marginal South Asian writings, it is also likely to help dislodge the central position given to India, due to its greater visibility and saleability in Western academia.

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