HYPER-MEDIATED CITY SPACES: A STUDY OF PHANTASMAGORIA AND MYTHIC CONSCIOUSNESS IN SELECTED SOUTH ASIAN FICTION

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ISLAMABAD

August, 2024

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BS (HONS), ISLAMIA COLLEGE PESHAWAR, 2020

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

In **English**

To

FACULTY OF ARTS & HUMANITIES

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF MODERN LANGUAGES, ISLAMABAD

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF MODERN LANGUAGES   **FACULTY OF ARTS & HUMANITIES**

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Thesis Title: Hyper-Mediated City Spaces: A Study of Phantasmagoria and Mythic Consciousness in Selected South Asian Fiction

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Master of Philosophy
Degree name in full

English Literature
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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

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Candidate of **Master of Philosophy** at the National University of Modern Languages do hereby declare that the thesis **Hyper-Mediated City Spaces: A Study of Phantasmagoria and Mythic Consciousness in Selected South Asian Fiction** submitted by me in partial fulfillment of MPhil degree, is my original work, and has not been submitted or published earlier. I also solemnly declare that it shall not, in future, be submitted by me for obtaining any other degree from this or any other university or institution.

I also understand that if evidence of plagiarism is found in my thesis/dissertation at any stage, even after the award of a degree, the work may be cancelled and the degree revoked.

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ABSTRACT

Title: Hyper-mediated City Spaces: A Study of Phantasmagoria and Mythic Consciousness in Selected South Asian Fiction

The research studies the hyper-mediated South Asian Cities and their representations in literature. It aims to analyze Rohinton's Mistry *A Fine Balance* and Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography* by invoking the theoretical positions of Nadir Lahiji, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Cassirer, and John Eric Bellquist. They have enunciated their concepts like 'hyper-mediated city,' 'phantasmagoria,' and 'mythic consciousness' respectively in the works "Phantasmagoria and the Architecture of the Contemporary City," "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century," *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (Vol. 2), and "Mythic Consciousness: Cassirer's Theories and Strindberg Practices." I use these concepts to study the South Asian cityscapes. The central argument of this study is that South Asian cities exhibit features of hyper-mediation. I postulate that phantasmagoria and mythic consciousness of people in the contemporary cityscape have been significantly altered due to the omnipresence of media in the city spaces. The way people, living in cities, conceive, perceive, imagine, and experience cities is mediated by media and is, therefore, different from previous historical makeup. It is a qualitative research and Catherine Belsey's textual analysis is used as a research method. This research examines the selected novels for their representations of Bombay (Mumbai) and Karachi because they have been largely ignored in the available urban studies, especially in the Western critical scholarship. The study, therefore, is likely to contribute in the production of knowledge in the domain of South Asian Urban Literary Studies.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFB	*A Fine Balance*
Karto	*Kartography*
HMC	Hyper-mediated cityscapes

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Sibghatullah Khan, for his unwavering support, guidance, and mentorship throughout the entire journey of this thesis. His expertise, dedication, and constructive feedback have been instrumental in shaping this research and my academic growth. I am truly fortunate to have such a dedicated and inspiring mentor.

I am also deeply thankful to my friends, Sidra and Faryal, who have been a constant source of encouragement and support.

Thank you, all.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research work to my parents and husband.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The cities are a site of intense absurdities that are nowhere richer than in South Asia, where urban areas concurrently embody both the perimeters of globalization as well as the profoundly disconcerting social and political disparities of the Global South. While in Europe with their dwindling growth of population, the big cities like Paris, New York, and London, seem to have reached the culmination; this is not the case in South Asia where metropolitan cities, like Mumbai, Delhi, Dhaka, Karachi, and Lahore, are among the top twenty cities in the world, in terms of population. Moreover, South Asian cities are sites where one may witness facades of elaborated empowerment and disempowerment, "palimpsestic confluence of colonial oppression, anticolonial nationalism, postcolonial governance" (Chakraborty and Al-wazedi's n.p.n.) and the transnational capitalism of the twenty-first century. The research attempts to investigate the concepts of 'hyper-mediation,' 'phantasmagoria,' and 'mythic consciousness' by reading Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*[1] and Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography*[2]. I deploy Nadir Lahiji's concept of 'hyper-mediated cities,' Walter Benjamin's idea of 'phantasmagoria,' and Ernst Cassirer's notion of 'mythic consciousness' coupled with John Eric Bellquist's critical insights on Cassirer's 'mythic consciousness' as my theoretical props to examine the selected texts. South Asian Cities in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* and Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography* exhibit features of hyper-mediated cities in how they have decentering/disconcerting effects on human sensorium. The notion of 'hyper-mediated cities,' 'phantasmagoria,' and 'mythic consciousness' highlight how commodities and architecture of contemporary cities are reshaping human consciousness and, simultaneously, perpetuating the class division in South Asian cities.

In a time of mass-mediated modernity, the city becomes a constitutively 'mediated' city – "a medium through which global capitalism and its eye-catching imagery operate

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[1] Henceforth, I will be using *AFB* for *A Fine Balance* across my study.
[2] I will be using *Karto* for *Kartography* for the in-text citation from the novel.

effectively" (Lahiji 2). Scott McQuire, in his book *The Media Study: Media Architecture and Urban Space*, avers that "the contemporary city is a media-architecture complex resulting from the proliferation of spatialized media platforms and the production of hybrid spatial ensembles" (VII). While the process of cities becoming mediated space started in the mid-nineteenth century with the development of technological images, its repercussions can also be seen today with the addition of digital networks. Thus, the term 'media city' is used to highlight the function of media technologies in the vibrant production of present-day urban space.

The process of urbanization is so vigorous and fast that it comes as no surprise that the urban population of the earth, for the first time, is outnumbering the rural with people all around the world migrating to the world's great cities. Moreover, cities, unlike in previous centuries, are technologically developing all over the world. South Asia, though not near the peak of this development, appears to be somewhere in the middle of this process. The contemporary global cities – cities that are urban centers and have competitive advantages over other cities – are unvaryingly distributed around the world – from London to Paris, New York, Tokyo, Singapore, Hong Kong, Tehran, Beijing, Lagos, Mumbai, and Karachi – and all of these cities are recording the pressure of high-tech capitalism in different ways. Because of their technological and capitalist urbanism, which is like a multifaceted and vibrant congregation of people, media, technologies, spaces, construction, discourses, form, signs, practices, experiences, and institutions, Lahiji calls these contemporary cities "hyper-mediated cities" (2). Andreotti and Lahiji, in their book *The Architecture of Phantasmagoria: Specters of the City*, define hyper-mediated city:

In the lapse of time (almost a century) since Benjamin's writings, a radically new configuration of the city has emerged. Its decentering/ disconcerting effects are modifying the human sensorium in new ways and with deeply disturbing consequences. We call this new configuration the hyper-mediated city (HMC for short). The HMC is not an intensification of the technological metropolis of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is an ontologically new reality in which the totalization of earlier trends generates extreme and paradoxical levels of

concentration, disintegration, dispersal – new kinds of sensory bombardment, and new forms of control. (2)

Since the last century, media technology has altered significantly. The 'New' technology has intensified and transformed contemporary cityscapes and has a considerable impact on the lives of people living in a city (1). Hyper-mediated spaces are technologically developed city spaces as an individual living in the city encounters digital advertisement promoting capitalism, excessive surveillance through the medium of photography, and surveillance cameras. Living in the city, for an individual, has become a virtual reality. This technology of surveillance is supplemented by the idea of flâneur who strolls around in the city aimlessly and keenly observes people around him.

Phantasmagoria and mythic consciousness are subsumed under hyper-mediated spaces. Hetherington, in his essay, "Memories of Capitalism: Cities, Phantasmagoria and Arcades," traces the history of the word "Phantasos." He says "in mythology, Phantasos was the son of Hypnos and was one of the ancient Greek gods of dreams. […] Phantasos was responsible for sending dreams to people of inanimate objects, or things" (Hetherington 191). Walter Benjamin, while analyzing the cityscapes of Paris in his famous *The Arcades Project,* originally published in 1982, uses the idea of Phantasos and associates it with the commodity culture of Paris. In his 1939 essay, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century," Benjamin uses the term 'phantasmagoria' to define the "cultural values" specific to the consumerist culture of urban-industrial capitalism in the nineteenth-century Paris. The architectural environments of world expos, arcades, railway stations, and department stores served as arenas where the illusions of consumer culture were showcased, influencing human senses and perspectives, thereby fostering unique expressions of modern identity and detachment. By associating phantasmagoria with commodity culture and people's experiences of material and intellectual products, he expands on Karl Marx's statement on the phantasmagorical powers of commodity and how modern bourgeois civilization dreams of its existence through the commodity. According to Marx, "In a capitalist society, Phantasos has become the god of the commodity fetish: There is a definite social relation between men that assume, in their eyes, the [phantasmagoric] form of a relation between things" (43).

In the nineteenth-century city, the basic mediating technical apparatuses were magic lanterns, stereoscopes, panoramas, myriomas, dioramas, mirrors, mechanical spectacles, advertisements, photographs, and cinematic projections. All these new technologies organized/reorganized the human consciousness. Similarly, the phantasmagorias of commodity culture were displayed in architectural spaces such as arcades, train stations, universal exhibitions, and departmental stores in the nineteenth century. However, in the contemporary age of tele-technological and communicative capitalism, the latest technical innovations are reshaping even the most basic urban experiences, therefore, generating a 'hyper-mediated' subjectivity. Thus, it is observed that technological developments in the contemporary world have not only altered the cities but also human consciousness and their mode of perception. The experiences of people living in the contemporary high-tech, capitalist cities are significantly different from those of previous generations resulting in the radically new configuration of a city that Lahiji termed the 'hyper-mediated city.'

Cities are collective expressions of human consciousness and people's ability to transcend and adapt to their environment. Cities also facilitate people's individual and collective considerations of the nature and dogmatic role of consciousness. They do this because cities create a consciousness that people both contribute to as citizens and inhabit. While living in a city, an individual undergoes manifold experiences, as the city, being a field of experiences, shapes individual and collective experiences. The experiences are imbued with mythic forms that, according to Graeme Gilloch, "are characterized by particular forms of mythic consciousness' (171). Mythic consciousness, "according to Cassirer, is a mode of thinking symbolically, of synthetically conceiving and perceiving the self in its relationship to the world" (Cassirer qtd. in Bellquist 72). The mythic consciousness, through signs, symbols, artifacts, architectures, and arcades, forms human consciousness that helps people, living in the metropolis, in the construction of self through different experiences. These experiences, according to Gilloch, encompass "a number of interconnected tendencies," including "intensification, stultification, fragmentation, diminution, fetishization and sequestration" (171). Similarly, Lahiji examines how technology, media aesthetics, and perception are interconnected. He suggests that

technology influences modern individuals' cognitive processes, creating mental images. This influence varies depending on historical periods and the types of media used, such as technical and digital reproduction. Additionally, capitalism's methods of producing and exchanging goods shape these historical periods, affecting urban structures and how individuals perceive their surroundings. For example, in Mistry's *A Fine Balance*, the cityscapes and the identity of the four main characters Dina, Maneck, Omprakash, and Ishwar are connected. The experiences of these characters, living in the transitory places of a metropolitan city that is undergoing rapid technological and architectural development, aid in the characters' construction of identity and how they perceive themselves in relation to the city they are living in. Similarly, Shamsie's *Kartography* explores how the remapping of contemporary Karachi has a profound and lingering effect on the consciousness of the people living in the city. The remapping of Karachi functions as a catalyst for the protagonists' (Raheen and Karim) construction of identity and how they perceive themselves in relation to the city they are living in.

This study examines collective experiences and architecture in the hyper-mediated South Asian cities, Mumbai and Karachi, as the most tangible expression of their phantasmagoria and mythic consciousness. Sandten, in his 2010 research paper "Phantasmagorical Representations of Postcolonial Cityscapes in Salman Rushdie's *Fury* (2002) and Suketu Mehta's *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found* (2004)," defines phantasmagoria of South Asian Cities as "a complex juxtaposition of physical space and social strata, abundance and scarcity of resources, over-consumption and under-consumption, class formation, alienation, exploitation, and domination" (128). Phantasmagoria and mythic consciousness of these hyper-mediated cityscapes are validated by digital capitalism, fetishism, architecture, arcades, department stores, and train stations.

South Asian cities have witnessed a rapid transformation due to urbanization and advancement in technology and media. The proliferation of media in the urban spaces is changing the way people interact and engage with urban spaces. Lahiji's concept of 'hyper-mediated cityscapes,' Benjamin's idea of 'phantasmagoria' and Cassirer's notion of 'mythic consciousness' along with Bellquist's insights on Cassirer's 'mythic

consciousness' are suitable approaches to study the cityscapes of South Asia because they provide insights into how media is shaping the transformation and its impact on the human consciousness, culture, society, and the built environment. Moreover, studying the 'hyper-mediated cityscapes' also helps in understanding how media representations in the form of digital and print media, films, and television influence people's interaction and experiences in the cityscapes of South Asian cities.

1.1. Locating Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* and Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography* in the Tradition of City Fiction

In this section, I attempt to locate my selected texts within the tradition of city fiction. For this, I have made a historical survey of creative fictional texts from Greek literature to contemporary literature that predominantly explores the urban setting. As my selected texts belong to South Asia, I focus largely on the South Asian tradition of fiction writing, with a particular emphasis on how South Asian literature contributes to the discourse of City Literature.

The city is a place where humans and the natural world intersect. It is a place where the environment is regulated and controlled, and where basic human needs such as worship, protection, and community can be met. The origins of the city can be traced back to the establishment of central locations where wandering tribes could settle and bury their dead. An urban historian Mumford Lewis, in this classic work, traces the evolution of the city from ancient times to the modern day, arguing that the city emerged as a response to the basic human need for protection and the need to record and preserve information. He contends that the development of writing played a crucial role in the emergence of the city as a "permanent record" (*City in History* 97), and that the city has undergone a series of transformations as it has adapted to changing economic and cultural conditions. Richard Lehan, while tracing the history of representation of cities in literature, writes that the city is seen as evolving through three stages of development: a commercial city, an industrial city, and a "world stage" city (*The City in Literature* 3), and these stages of development are closely tied to the development of various literary movements, including the novel and its subgenres such as the utopian novel, the gothic novel, and science fiction. This historical

survey focuses on the representation of cities in literature at different ages of history. I have divided this overview into three parts. The first part traces the representation of cities from Greek Literature to the end of the 19th century. The second part focuses on literature from 1900 to 1960; while the third part of this critical survey focuses on contemporary South Asian Fiction.

<p style="text-align:center">I</p>

The representation of cities in literature has a long and varied history, reflecting the complex and often tumultuous relationships between urban spaces and the people who inhabit them. One of the earliest examples of the city in literature can be found in the ancient Greek epic poem *The Odyssey*, in which the city of Troy serves as a central setting for the story. The city is depicted as a place of both great beauty and danger, a hub of cultural exchange and political intrigue. Troy is described as a wealthy and powerful city that is besieged and ultimately destroyed by the Greeks. Anthony T. Edwards, in his 1993 article "Homer's Ethical Geography: Country and City in the Odyssey" maintains that the city in Homer's Odyssey is "plagues with violence, treachery, and greed" (Edwards 27). Similarly, In the Middle Ages, cities were often depicted in literature as places of corruption and moral decay, as in the works of Dante and Chaucer. The city, as in Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, is seen as a place where traditional values are threatened by the temptations of urban life, and where the rules of society are often flouted. Christine de Pizan's *The Book of the Cities of Ladies* is one of the earliest feminist literature on cities. The book does not represent a physical city, but rather an allegorical city, created by the three female figures of Reason, Justice, and Rectitude. The city represents a utopia for women, where they may live free from patriarchal constraints and pursue their intellectual and creative interests. However, during the Renaissance, the city began to be portrayed in a more positive light, as a place of opportunity and cultural richness. For example, the works of Shakespeare, such as *The Merchant of Venice*, frequently depict the city as a vibrant and dynamic place, full of energy and possibility, and provide a vivid and engaging portrayal of the city's culture, people, and values, which may be seen as a celebration of its vibrancy.

II

As the Industrial Revolution transformed the urban landscape, literature began to reflect the changing face of the city. Prominent theme in Victorian literature is the contrast between the city and the countryside. In many works, the city is depicted as a place of corruption and moral decay, while the countryside is presented as a haven of tranquility and purity. This dichotomy is seen in the works of writers such as Thomas Hardy, who often contrast the harsh realities of urban life with the peaceful beauty of the natural world. Charles Dickens' novel *Hard Times*, for example, depicts the city of Coketown as a bleak and soulless place, where the human spirit is crushed by the demands of industrialization. Another common theme in Victorian literature is the portrayal of the city as a place of opportunity and social mobility. The rise of the middle class and the expansion of the urban economy created new opportunities for social and economic advancement, and this sense of possibility is reflected in the literature of the period. For example, in *Sons and Lovers* by D. H. Lawrence, the city of Nottingham in England is depicted as a place of both opportunity and constraint. The novel portrays the city as a working-class industrial town, where the coal mines and factories dominate the landscape and the lives of the people who live there. The city is portrayed as a complex and multifaceted place, offering both opportunities and limitations for its inhabitants. It is a place of industrial progress and social change, but also of moral and sexual ambiguity. In novels such as Charles Dickens' *Hard Times*, the city is depicted as a place where hard work and determination may lead to success, while in others, such as Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton*, it is portrayed as a place where poverty and exploitation are rampant.

Victorian literature often portrays cities as crowded, dirty, and chaotic places, in contrast to the idyllic, rural settings that were often idealized at the time. This representation is seen in Charles Dickens' novel *Bleak House*, in which the city of London is depicted as a place of corruption and social decay, with its dense fog and polluted air contributing to the general sense of malaise. Similarly, in Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, the city of Liverpool is described as a place of "unhealthy" and "uncongenial" atmosphere, where the characters feel stifled and oppressed (Bliss 13). Thus, the representation of cities in Victorian literature reflects the complex and often fraught

relationship between urban and rural life during this period. While the city was seen as a place of opportunity and progress, it was also depicted as a place of corruption, decay, and social upheaval, reflecting the anxieties and uncertainties of the time.

Like previous eras, in the twentieth century, the city continued to be a central theme in literature, with writers such as James Joyce and T.S. Eliot exploring the theme of the modern city as a place of alienation and disconnection. Modernist literature often portrays cities as places of alienation and anonymity, where individuals are lost in the crowds and unable to connect with one another. Cities in modernist literature reflect the sense of disillusionment and disenchantment that characterized the era, as the destruction and trauma of World War I led to a loss of faith in traditional values and beliefs. This portrayal is observed in T.S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land*, in which the city is depicted as a barren and desolate place, characterized by its chaotic and fragmentary nature. Similarly, in James Joyce's novel *Ulysses*, the city of Dublin is portrayed as a place of alienation, where the main character, Leopold Bloom, is unable to find a sense of belonging or connection with others. Thus, the representation of cities in modernist literature reflects the complex and often ambivalent relationship between urban and rural life during this period. While the city was seen as a place of progress and modernity, it was also depicted as a place of isolation and rootlessness, reflecting the anxieties and uncertainties of the time.

III

Today, the city remains a central focus of literary representation, with writers and artists continuing to explore the complex and ever-evolving relationship between urban spaces and the people who live in them. Such representation can also be seen in the literature produced in South Asia. Cities have long played a central role in South Asian literature, serving as both settings and symbols for the social, cultural, and political developments of the region. One of the earliest examples of the city in South Asian literature can be found in the ancient Hindu epic *Mahabharata*, which describes the city of Hastinapura as a center of political power and cultural exchange. In the Islamic literature of the medieval period, the city is often depicted as a place of religious devotion and cultural diversity, as in the works of the Sufi poets Rumi and Kabir.

During the colonial and postcolonial periods, the city became a symbol of both resistance and collaboration, as writers such as Rabindranath Tagore, Muhammad Iqbal, and Mulk Raj Anand used their works to critique the impact of British rule on urban spaces. Rabindranath Tagore, a Bengali polymath, used his literature to describe cities in his works in a variety of ways. In his novel *The Home and the World*, Tagore portrayed the negative effects of British rule on traditional Indian society, particularly in the way it disrupted the traditional way of life in urban areas. He describes the city as a place where traditional values are replaced by Western ideas and customs, and where people are becoming more materialistic and disconnected from their culture and traditions.

In other works, such as the 1924 essay "City and Village," Tagore describes the city as a place of contrasts, where the rich and poor live in close proximity to each other. He also wrote about the beauty and charm of the city, as well as the hustle and bustle of city life. The essay also critiques urban life and argues how modern civilization is driven by greed and has taken the world to ruin. He says that in modern cities, Kubera[3] is the only presiding deity. Tagore's descriptions of the city in his works often serve as a commentary on the impact of colonialism on Indian society and culture, as well as the resistance to British rule. He uses the city as a metaphor for the broader changes happening in Indian society at the time, and the way they were being shaped by the forces of colonialism.

Mulk Raj Anand, an Indian writer of British descent, used his novels to describe cities in his works in a variety of ways. In his novels, Anand often depicted the harsh realities of life under British rule and how it affected the lower and working-class people of India. He described the cities as places where the poor lived in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions, and where they were often subject to discrimination and exploitation by the British colonial authorities and the upper classes. Anand also wrote about the impact of colonialism on Indian society and culture, and how it led to the erosion of traditional values and the rise of Westernization. He describes the cities as places where the traditional and the modern coexist, but where the traditional is being replaced by the modern, and

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[3] Kubera, in Hindu mythology, is the god of wealth.

where people are becoming more materialistic and disconnected from their culture and traditions.

For example, in his novel *Untouchable*, Anand uses the city of Chhokipur as a metaphor for the caste system in India and how it was aggravated by British colonialism. The novel depicts the city as a place where the untouchables are marginalized and discriminated against, and where they struggle to find their place in the city. Anand's descriptions of the cities in his works are often gritty and realistic, capturing the harsh realities of life for the lower and working-class people in colonial India, as well as how colonialism affected the society and culture of India.

R.K. Narayan, an Indian novelist and short story writer, used his writing to describe cities in his works in a variety of ways. In his novels and short stories, Narayan often depicted the everyday life of the people in the fictional South Indian town of Malgudi. He described the city as a place where people's lives are shaped by both timeless customs and contemporary issues. He paints the city with a sense of nostalgia, showcasing the simplicity and charm of small-town life, while also highlighting the struggles and challenges that the characters face in their daily lives.

Narayan's descriptions of the city often serve as a commentary on the impact of modernization and urbanization on Indian society, as well as the continuity and changes in the traditional way of life. He also wrote about the impact of colonialism on Indian society and culture, and how it changed the traditional way of life in the rural and urban areas of South India. In his novels and short stories, Narayan often used humor and irony to convey the complexities of life in the city and how it was affected by the changes brought about by the colonial rule and the modern times. The depictions of cities in his works are often warm, nostalgic, and full of humor, capturing the everyday life of the people in South Indian towns and how it was affected by colonial rule and modern times.

The 1970s and 1980s were periods of significant political upheaval in South Asia, marked by widespread protests and demonstrations, military coups, and changes in government. This period of political instability was reflected in the literature of the time,

with many writers using their works to critique the social and political conditions of the region.

In Pakistan, for example, the 1980s was a time of military rule and political repression, and many writers used their works to speak out against the government's abuses of power. In the 1980s, literature produced in Pakistan focused on the urban experience, particularly in cities such as Lahore and Karachi. Many writers of this period wrote about the political and social issues faced by Pakistani society, including poverty, inequality, and corruption. The works of writers such as Muhammad Hanif, and Bapsi Sidhwa, were particularly influential during this time period and continue to be studied and celebrated in Pakistani literature. Hanif's novel *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* portrays the city of Islamabad as a mediated space. The novel depicts the role of media and technology in shaping public opinion and awareness about political issues, as well as the use of social media and other digital platforms as a means of communication and building networks of support. For example, in the novel, the PM addresses the nation on television. He also broadcasts his charity programs. These writers often used their work to comment on the political and social issues of the day, and their works continue to be read and studied today.

In India, the 1980s was a time of economic liberalization and the rise of globalization, and many writers used their works to explore the impact of these changes on society. Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things*, for example, portrays the city of Ayemenem as a place where traditional values are threatened by the forces of modernization and globalization. Similarly, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness,* by Arundhati Roy, portrays the city of Delhi in a complex and nuanced way, reflecting the multifaceted nature of the city itself. Throughout the novel, Delhi is portrayed as a city of contradictions, where beauty and ugliness, wealth and poverty, tradition and modernity, all exist side by side. Other writers, such as Amitav Ghosh used his works to critique the social and political implications of these changes.

Several Anglophone South Asian writers such as Bapsi Sidhwa, Hanif Kureishi, Amitav Gosh, and V.S. Naipaul were part of a wave of South Asian literature that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. These writers helped to establish a distinctive literary tradition of

city fiction that continues to thrive today. For example, Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *The Crow Eaters* is set in Lahore, Pakistan, and depicts the lives of the Parsi community in the city. Similarly, Hanif Kureishi's novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* is set in London and explores the experiences of a young man of mixed race who navigates his identity in a multicultural city. *Trickster's City* by Shveta Sarda is a novel that portrays the city of Delhi in a unique and nuanced way, depicting the city as a place of contradictions, complexity, and multiplicity. The novel offers a rich and multifaceted portrait of the city, highlighting its social, cultural, and economic diversity. Moreover, V.S. Naipaul's novel *A Bend in the River* is set in a fictional African city and examines the postcolonial struggle for identity and power in the city. In South Asian cities, the rapid expansion of digital infrastructure, including internet connectivity, mobile networks, and smart technologies, has reshaped the urban landscape. These novels also portray cities as technologically developed mediated spaces where the constant flow of media and technology shapes the daily experiences of its residents. These novels depict the pervasive influence of media and technology in shaping the social and cultural landscape of the city. South Asian city fiction also highlights the digital disparities and inequities that still exist in technologically advanced cityscapes. These authors draw attention to the differences in access to opportunities, information, and digital technology, which exacerbate already-existing socioeconomic gaps.

Here I locate Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* and Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography*. Both explore the complexities of life in urban settings in the 1970s and 1980s. For example, In *A Fine Balance*, Mistry portrays the vibrant and chaotic city of Mumbai (formerly known as Bombay) in India during the mid-1970s. The novel follows four characters from different walks of life who come together and form unexpected bonds while trying to survive in the city's harsh and often cruel conditions. Through their struggles and triumphs, Mistry offers a vivid and powerful portrayal of the city and its people. Similarly, in *Kartography*, Shamsie explores the city of Karachi in Pakistan, particularly in the aftermath of the country's partition in 1947 and the 1971 Pakistan Civil War. The novel follows the lives of two friends, Raheen and Karim, as they navigate their relationships and identities in a city divided by politics, religion, and ethnicity. Through their stories, Shamsie offers a nuanced and complex portrayal of the city, highlighting both

its beauty and its challenges. Both novels use the city as a backdrop to explore broader themes of identity, belonging, and the human experience. They offer rich and multi-layered portraits of the urban experience, revealing the ways in which cities shape the lives of people who inhabit them. Although the selected texts are set in the late 20th century, they exhibit features of hyper-mediation, a concept explored in Lahiji's 2015 work. Lahiji's notion of hyper-mediation is thus employed to study how these city spaces are represented to demonstrate the intricate and mediated realities within these urban environments.

In view of the above discussion, the representation of cities in South Asian literature reflects the diverse and often conflicting experiences of urban life in the region. From the ancient kingdoms of Hindu mythology to the crowded streets of contemporary megacities, South Asian writers have also used the city as a lens to examine the social, cultural, and political realities of their time. South Asian cities, like many other cities around the world, have experienced significant growth in technology and media usage in recent years and this recent development is recorded by the fiction writers in South Asia. In these works of fiction, the portrayal of South Asian cities as hyper-mediated spaces reflects the complex and multifaceted nature of contemporary urban life in the region, highlighting the ways in which media and technology shape the social, cultural, and economic landscape of these cities.

1.2. Delimitation

The study is delimited to Rohinton *Mistry's A Fine Balance* and Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography*. The two texts are analyzed from the perspective of Nadir Lahiji's concept of 'hyper-mediated cities,' Walter Benjamin's idea of 'phantasmagoria,' and Ernst Cassirer's notions of 'mythic consciousness' together with John Eric Bellquist's critical insights on Cassirer's 'mythic consciousness.'

1.3. Thesis Statement

The South Asian Cities in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* and Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography* exhibit features of hyper-mediated cities as to how they have

decentering/disconcerting effects on human sensorium. Nadir Lahiji, Walter Benjamin, and Ernst Cassirer's notion of 'hyper-mediated cities,' 'phantasmagoria,' and 'mythic consciousness' respectively showcase how capitalist commodity culture and architecture of the contemporary cities are reshaping human consciousness and, simultaneously, perpetuating the class division in the South Asian cities.

1.4. Research Questions

1. What are the prominent features of hyper-mediated city spaces in the selected texts?
2. How does the concept of phantasmagoria play out in the selected fiction?
3. How is the mythic consciousness of characters related to the construction of self in the selected texts?

1.5. Research Plan

The study is organized in six chapters. In the first chapter, I introduce the topic by defining my controlling concepts and give a rationale of the study. Afterward, I locate my chosen texts in the tradition of South Asian city fiction, and then I state my research questions. I conclude the chapter by providing the significance of my study.

In chapter two, I thematically review the existing relevant scholarship. I provide a critical summary of the books and research articles relevant to my study, identify the research gap, and discuss how my study intervenes in the already existing scholarship.

In chapter three, I have discussed the rationale of my theoretical framework by giving a detailed account of Lahiji's concept of 'hyper-mediated cityscapes,' Benjamin's concept of 'phantasmagoria,' and Cassirer's notion of 'mythic consciousness' along with Bellquist's insights on Cassirer's definition of 'mythic consciousness.' Afterwards, I talk about the research methodology along with the research method that I have used to analyze my selected texts.

In Chapters four and five I provide my textual analysis of the selected texts. I start with Lahiji's concept of "hyper-mediated cityscapes" to analyze the features of hyper-

mediation in South Asian cities. Subsequently, I analyze how Benjamin's concept of "phantasmagoria" plays out in the selected texts. In the last part of my analysis chapters, I analyze how media impact the mythic consciousness of citizens and its role in shaping individual experiences in the city. Lastly, in chapter six, I conclude my study by discussing my research findings, and I also give recommendations for future studies.

1.6. Significance of the Study

Contemporary South Asian novels based on cities often contain a detailed literary representation of urban life worlds. The study is helpful since the textual analysis of these novels may help the researchers access the city-specific patterns of thoughts, actions, and feelings that shape the consciousness of people living in hyper-mediated cities. Moreover, most of the work in the field of city literature is Eurocentric, mainly focusing on European cities like Paris, London, and New York, while the urban imaginaries of the third world and postcolonial countries are ignored altogether. Since the urban imaginaries of South Asian cities are different from those of European cities, studying them has helped me highlight the troubling social, economic, and political inequalities of the global south. Thus, by focusing on South Asian cities, this thesis intervenes productively in the domain of City Literature.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of the literature review is to highlight the significance and validity of the proposed project by placing the current study in the context of existing scholarship and identifying gaps in the available critical scholarship.

As this research focuses on the phantasmagorical representation of the "hyper-mediated" cityscapes of South Asian cities in South Asian fiction, the sources under review include critical texts on city literature, phantasmagoria, and South Asian literature that address the key themes of this study. The review is organized thematically into three parts and relevant secondary resources are categorized accordingly.

The first section provides a concise overview of the study and outlines the goals of the literature review. The core analysis of secondary sources is found in the second part, which evaluates the relevance and significance of the critical works under review in relation to the project being analyzed. To make the analysis more organized, this section has been divided into three sub-sections. The final part concludes the review and indicates the gap in contemporary critical scholarship in my area of research. Due to the abundance of literature on city fiction, I have chosen only those texts for my review that directly align with my research domain.

This chapter has helped me identify areas where previous scholarship is lacking avoid duplicate research by examining existing critical works, and make suggestions for future research.

I have divided my literature review into the following parts with reference to my focus on city literature, phantasmagoria, and scholarships on South Asian cities. I have reviewed critical texts that fall within the following three themes:

I.Scholarship on City Literature

II.Scholarship on South Asian Urban Literature

III.Scholarship on the Selected Texts

(I)

The Society of Spectacle, written by Guy Debord in 1967, explores and presents the idea of the Spectacle. He contends that the spectacle is an inverted image of society, wherein relationships between commodities have taken the place of interpersonal interactions, and passive identification with the spectacle has replaced active engagement. The spectacle, according to Debord, "is not a collection of images, it is a social relation between people that is mediated by images" (2). Debord contends that all that was once directly lived has become mere representation" as he charts the evolution of modern society, where true social life has been replaced with its representation (2). He offers a Marxist critique of the development of social existence, arguing that "being" has given way to "having," and "having" has become essentially a possession (5). He refers to this situation as a historical juncture where commodities have entirely taken over contemporary social life.

In his critique of the spectacular society, Debord observes that the quality of existence is degraded, with a lack of authenticity that affects human perceptions and an accompanying degeneration of knowledge that impedes critical thought. Debord examines how knowledge is used to distract people from reality. He argues that the spectacle obscures history by fusing it with the future to create a homogenous mass that resembles an endless present, preventing people from realizing that the society of spectacle is merely a historical moment that may be changed through revolution. Although Debord talks about how commodities and mass media are reshaping human consciousness and collective experiences of mankind, he leaves a gap in his study because he does not engage with the idea of human consciousness and the reshaping of collective experiences through media in the 'hyper-mediated cityscape.' Therefore, I have used Lahiji's concept of 'hyper-mediated city spaces,' Walter Benjamin's concept of 'phantasmagoria,' and Ernst Cassirer's notion of 'mythic consciousness' to study the cityscapes of contemporary South Asian Cities in the selected fictions.

Anne Whiston Spirn, in her 1988 article "The Poetics of City and Nature: Towards a New Aesthetics for Urban Design," describes a completely new view of cities and envisions a new urban design that encapsulates both nature and culture. She believes that such design includes function, a sense of understanding, and the meaning that it carries within itself. Such cities urge the visitors and bystanders to contemplate it. The author has used a theory of city culture based on an understanding of nature and culture as both these terminologies are intertwined and mixed. They exhibit a complex and intricate order that holds across vast scales of spatial orders. The schema of new urban design yields a fresh and new look of urban form as it is dynamic in approach and keeps evolving in different yet similar ways.

Her theory's centrality lies in its connection with time, purpose, communication, and response. The city's new forms are the result of complex, intertwined narratives that together formulate the storylines and context that cities create in the future. It becomes the reason people relate to any particular place. These narratives also bring with them the baggage of issues like time, change, process, pattern, being and doing, and the meanings that are formed later on. This aesthetics promotes a new taste and appreciation for forms of the past and demands new forms and representations. Although the author of the article talks about the city spaces that shape individual and collective experiences, she limits her argument only to mediated cityscapes. As the mass media and technology are growing rapidly, I use Nadir Lahiji's concept of 'hyper-mediated city' to study the contemporary South Asian cityscapes and how they shape individual and collective experiences.

The trends of modification in architecture are quite evident in the postmodern discourse and the theoretical problems that surround them are expounded by Frederic Jameson in his conception of postmodernism in the essay "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" published in his 1991 book *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. According to Jameson, "high modernism is credited with the destruction of the fabric of the traditional city and its older neighborhood culture" (2). He avers that high modernism takes credit for destructive discourse that favors the destruction of the culture of the old neighborhoods and traditional cities. He has pronounced that postmodernism in architecture is a kind of "aesthetic populism" (2). If the rhetoric of populism is evaluated,

one thing that presents itself as a fundamental feature is the construction of the rhetoric of populism between high culture and commercial culture. Theories of postmodern culture bear a strong connection and resemblance with sociological generalization. It rings the arrival of the new society, the tech industry. Jameson also opines that every position that postmodernism takes in culture is a political stance on the nature of capitalism. Jameson talks about the new trends in architecture in postmodern times and the impact of postmodern architecture on the cultural values of the postmodern time generically. I intervene in Jameson's study by studying the postmodern architecture of the South Asian cities, Mumbai and Karachi, by analyzing Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* and Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography*, respectively. The destruction of slums and old architecture in the name of the beautification project in *A Fine Balance* and the remapping of Karachi in *Kartography* have a profound effect on the social and cultural life of people living in these cities.

A lot of authors and critics have critically evaluated Walter Benjamin's essays on cities, phantasmagoria, and arcades. Kevin Hetherington's 2005 essay "Memories of Capitalism: Cities, Phantasmagoria, and Arcades" reviews Benjamin's essays and delimits his approach on only two principal themes in his work that have a huge impact on Benjamin's understanding of contemporary city life: "ruin/emergence and phantasmagoria," (188), and how they define the character of the modern city. The author strolls through Manchester and his recollection and research along with Benjamin's essays' theoretical underpinning have resulted in this critical endeavor. He points out that Benjamin's work does not focus directly on different class strata and new ways of experience as he has wished for but his work opens the possibility to have an encounter with *Urbis*[4] (city). His work is not limited to the matter of representations only. It concerns itself with the figurative image that the city holds outside and within the discourse. While places, images, tourist representation, and heritage regeneration acknowledge its existence, it also leads to phantasmagorical misrepresentation.

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[4] Urbis is a Latin word meaning city.

In order to understand spatiality, the contemporary geography of culture needs observers to be attentive to the "performative and the non-representational" knowledge (Hetherington 198). In contrast, Benjamin opines that along with this one should consider what comes before these performative demands and the aura that comes in spatiality. The author suggests whether one looks before or after the performative and non-representation, it seems as if these dialectic images are part of the same figure. The thesis has limited its scope to a European city, Manchester, and leaves a gap for the discussion of South Asian cities. I have used Benjamin's notion of 'phantasmagoria' to study the cityscapes and urban imaginary of the South Asian cities.

Margret Cohen has given a detailed account of her understanding of the arcades in her 1989 essay "Benjamin's Phantasmagoria: *The Arcades Project*" and calls his Arcades Project "Parisian production cycle" which in archeology emerged as high capitalist modernity. Benjamin engaged himself in studying the arcades from the late twentieth century until his death. Benjamin chooses Paris as a site to locate modernity's pinnacle. The reason for this is that he was captivated by France's Premier who had made significant contributions to the political and cultural trends of modernity.

Paris has been the home of artistic modernity as represented in both the realist and avant-garde aesthetic movements that eventually gained fame globally. Benjamin has always kept culture and politics in the highest regard and has accorded them a special place in his archeology of modernity due to his dedication to his own political and cultural avant-garde. In the late 1920s, when Benjamin initially began working on his arcades project, he was first fascinated by the prospect of thinking that the birth of a "narrative would achieve such graphicness by incorporating into its construction expressive forms from the historical moment" (Cohen 203). He kept a record of details on the practices of the nineteenth century that were concerned with the supernatural, keeping it with the archeological understanding to know the historical motifs and how they are embedded in them. Benjamin feels it to be the first step in understanding the deployment of motifs in any historical archeology. The article deals with the architecture, modernity, and phantasmagoria of Paris, a European city and, therefore, leaves a gap for further study. I have employed Benjamin's concept of phantasmagoria to study the 'hyper-mediated cities' of South Asia.

Hans Harder, in his 2016 article "Urbanity in the Vernacular: Narrating the City in Modern South Asian Literatures," identifies a number of angles of erudite urbanity in postmodern South Asian literature similar to Hindi, Bengali, Urdu, and Marathi. He says that literature in the local languages of South Asia provides a rich record of the representation of metropolis and exchanges regarding urbanity – a library that is largely overlooked especially when compared to the amount of English works correspondingly. The city and the metropolitan area with us, without question and specifically its exaggerated structures, are preceded by mega, the megacity or megapolis." One of the controlling tenets of inquiry could be the search for alternate urbanism in these local or non-English works. These urban communities are, besides, presently not restricted to any specific area of the planet, yet appear to arise all around the planet. It seems that we haven't yet reached the peak of this development, but we are somewhere in the middle of it. While in Europe with its decreasing population the large urban areas might appear to have arrived as far as they could go, this is not valid for different areas of the planet and not so much for South Asia, whose greatest urban areas (Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Dhaka, Karachi) are among the twenty top urban areas on the planet in terms of population.

Moreover, he asserts that the narratives concerning the city do not follow a straightforward path of development. If one were to discover a more compelling trajectory, it would likely necessitate the exploration of additional material, potentially leading in entirely different directions. While this may be seen as a negative outcome, it may actually serve to challenge prevailing assumptions about the bias towards rural over urban in vernacular creation, which is not the case. Additionally, there appears to be a notable inclination to portray the urban environment primarily through the lens of human interactions. He concludes his article by highlighting the dearth of meticulous descriptions of streets, and cityscapes, as well as limited coverage of the infrastructural, spatial, and architectural features of urban life within the models that have been discussed.

A metropolitan values system is discernible in the portrayals of ethnic, social, and etymological variety among citizens. In the instance of Calcutta, which was the focal point of the last study, scholarly portrayals reflect general discernments and concur with an articulated self-reflexive city talk. Although the research deals with the representation of

South Asian cities in South Asian fiction, it does not highlight the high-tech capitalism that leads to the hyper-mediation of contemporary cities. In this study, I have highlighted the features of hyper-mediated cities in South Asian fiction by using Lahiji's concept of 'hyper-mediated cityscapes.'

Huma Yusuf, in her 2008 research thesis *Tactical Cities: Negotiating Violence in Karachi Pakistan*, studies the connection between urbanity and violence. She uses the city of Karachi as a case study to examine how violent metropolises are conceived and endured by citizens. Her dissertation relies on a diversity of speculative and cognitive architectures from metropolitan research to deconstruct the social, cultural, and historical operations of urbanization that have directed the image of Karachi as a megacity of violence. She studies Michel de Certeau's seminal composition *The Practice of Everyday Life* and uses the difference he draws between the master plan and tactic to analyze how citizens of Karachi inhabit, visualize, and construct their city during the evil of ongoing metropolitan violence. By applying de Certeau's rationale to situate ethnographic exploration, individual narrative, and media representation, she maintains that the routine practices of citizens like blogging, driving, and remembering are tactics for generating emblematic spaces that are not affected by violence. Although her thesis deals with the mental image of the cities, it does not address how these images shape the individual and collective consciousness of people living in a metropolitan. In my study, I have used Cassirer's concept of 'mythic consciousness' along with Benjamin's notion of 'phantasmagoria' to study how mental images shape the individual as well as collective consciousness.

(II)

Amanda Shubert in his 2020 article "A Bright Continuous Flow": Phantasmagoria and History in *A Tale of Two Cities"* explores Charles Dicken's representation of history in his famous novel. The historical novel is based on the backdrop of the French Revolution. It deals with the concept of phantasmagoria and other optical tools prevalent in the nineteenth century. This novel stands out as distinctive and unparalleled within its genre, making it challenging to align with the conventions of nineteenth-century literature and writing. Dicken's lifelong interest in magic, magic lanterns and other optical

instruments has affected and influenced the imagistic and metaphorical registers but also its formal and narrative practices.

In this particular novel, Dicken makes a conceptual and historical relationship between phantasmagoria and the French revolution. The novel alludes to Victorian life-like and real images and optical instruments of light and shadow. The phantasmagoria is presented as a leading concept. Its main aim is also to revive the past, even though from a safe and considerable distance. It also accounts for the "desire of history" (Shubert 697) as it uses language pregnant with conjuration and resurrection, putting the historian in the position to summon the "phantasmagorical ghosts of the past to deliver historical evidence for the reader" (698). The technique of projecting phantasmagoria, for Dickens, has its essence in the tools of the showman i.e., his projectors and slides, and further in his ability to influence the credibility of spectators. The current study deals with phantasmagoria as the "ghost shows of the late eighteen-century and early nineteen-century Europe – illusionistic exhibitions and public entertainments in which 'specters' were produced through the use of a magic lantern" (Castle 27) and its impact on the consciousness of people. It does not address the phantasmagoria of postcolonial cityscapes. This concept has been redefined while dealing with postcolonial cityscapes in a neocolonial world. The South Asian urban spaces are understandably the postcolonial cityscapes in the contemporary neocolonial world. As Sandten observes (and I paraphrase), the phantasmagoria of South Asian cities is an intricate interplay between physical landscapes and social hierarchies, the presence of both abundant and scarce resources, excessive consumption contrasted with insufficient consumption, the emergence of social classes, feelings of estrangement, instances of exploitation, and exercises of control (128).

Ritam Sarkar and Somdatta Bhattacharya, in their article "Postcolonial Spatial Construction: Reading Sarnath Banerjee's *The Barn Owl's Wondrous Capers*," talk about space, place, and postcolonial city and show how trajectories of comics in South Asia as a visual-verbal medium are different than that of European and American counterparts. This visual has always been considered sacred and auspicious in the subcontinent till postcolonial studies intervened, which suggested that how the visual register along with the textual is fraught and has multiple dimensions. This paper shows what comic in

postcolonial means and how it has affected the discipline of South Asian comics. It focuses on South Asian comics and the nature of urbanity by studying and analyzing Sarnath Banerjee's *The Barn Owl's Wondrous Capers* (2007).

The novel is set in Calcutta and gives an account of social products, culture, and cultural practices that are uniquely inherent to the inhabitants of Calcutta. The cultural turn of geography has enabled how popular culture enables and qualifies one's own position in society in relation and connection to other individuals, people, or groups of people. The paper also sheds light on tapestries of local culture and how they are woven into the visual-verbal play of the formation of the city. All this interplay helps in the formation of city-making and results from the image and representation of the city to its inhabitants and outsiders. The current study addresses the issue of postcolonial spatial construction and stratification and the effect of resultant destabilization on individuals. It discusses the nature of urbanity and the interrelations that are given in the text, governed both by the semiotics of comics studies and the politics of the city. However, it does not engage with idea of how mass media and technology affect the lives of individuals living in cities. In my study, I have used Nadir Lahiji's concept of 'hyper-mediated cityscapes' to study the hyper mediated cityscapes of the postcolonial South Asian cities.

Diti Viyas in her article, "City, Challenges and Children in *The Riddle of the Seventh Stone,*" deconstructs a fantasy tale for children and opines that tales for children can be both realistic mirrors and mitigate the concept of the city, its challenges, and other cities developing in the nations. She explicates Monideepa Sahu's novel *The Riddle of the Seventh Stone* (2010) which is set in the old city of Bengaluru. It revolves around the siblings Deepak and Leela who team up with Rishabh and Shashee, the rat and spider respectively, to save their home from evil property dealer Shark. Even before the reports surface that Bengaluru is not livable and is classified as a dead city, this narrative poses a threat to the property of people living there as the ruthless owners, property grabbing builders and land mafia start depleting green cover and urban sprawl. Both the children decide that the grandfather's Thatha and grandmother Ajji's ancestral home needs to be preserved and protected as it holds historical value and cultural fabrics it stands for. Once

in their household, both Rishabh and Shashee are included and welcomed as part of their family.

As the novel depicts the motifs and themes of children's literature where adults feel helpless at most times, children turn out to be the saviors and harbingers of hope and change. The rat cracks the riddle of the seventh stone and saves the city from destruction. This insinuates the need to conserve the past and derive life and strength from it. The study deals with the challenges one faces while living in an almost-dead city; however, it does not address the issue of rapid technological changes in the contemporary city. In my thesis, I have utilized the idea of 'hyper-mediated urban spaces' proposed by Nadir Lahiji to study the rapidly developing technological South Asian cities i.e., Mumbai and Karachi, and the experiences of people living in these cities. I have explored how technology mediates urban life in these cities, considering factors such as digital infrastructure, connectivity, surveillance cameras on the roads and markets, advertising through neon signs, and the impact of technological change on social dynamics and lived experiences.

Harismita Vaideswaran, in his article, "Memories of Erstwhile Homes: Recollecting and Narrating Cities through Food in Intizar Husain's *The Sea Lies Ahead*," takes the readers on an itinerary of erstwhile homes, where one recollects and narrate cities through food. He uses Intizar Husain's *The Sea Lies Ahead* for this endeavor. In this piece of fiction, Majju Bhai exclaims as he remembers the most awful thing. He opines that there are people who would not let the thought of new land coming near them but as soon as it comes or one thinks about it, it automatically seizes them. Narratives surrounding the partition to and from India and Pakistan are often replete with the memories of and attachment to homes left behind. Places of belonging and attachment suddenly become inaccessible and hence the attachments and rootedness of erstwhile homes now exist alongside forward-looking imperatives of nation-building, a task ahead of them in new countries and new places.

This paper examines the ways in which space of affective attachment, cities, districts, and villages that lie across newly created borders are narrated and explicated through memory, dreams, nostalgia, and longings, and uses the theoretical underpinnings

of Lawrence Buell and Yi-Fu Tuan. This paper argues that Intizar Husain's novel *The Sea Lies Ahead* is a complex network of practices of constructing, remembering, and narrating cities and geographies, and in doing so tension seeps into the community and on an individual level about the possibility of their reunion to old places where decades of their lives are spent. The intertwining of these acts of recollection, and consequently, the self-defining process within the context of Karachi, becomes the new focal point in the lives of these individuals. Although the article talks about the experiences of people who have migrated to a new city, it does not engage with the idea of 'phantasmagoria' and 'mythic consciousness.' In my study, I have talked about the experiences of protagonists who migrate to and live in the metropolitan cities, Mumbai and Karachi, by using Benjamin's notion of 'phantasmagoria,' and Cassirer's concept of 'mythic consciousness.'

(III)

Nair Anandha Lekshmi M., in her 2021 article "The Politics of Space and Identity in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance,*" argues that the definition of home is different for every individual. According to her, the concept of home and identity, in the novel, are inseparable and by evaluating their relationship, the idea of how spaces or spatial construction influence the experiences of characters becomes clear. The influence of space regarding characters' construction of identity "explains the physical and psychological dispossession that they encounter and holds the social, political, and economical forces accountable" (42). The de-idealized representation of the urban-rural dichotomy and also the alienated spaces in the city shatter the dominant idealized versions of the city. It accurately demonstrates the troubles of the marginalized communities in the country.

The article also studies the never-ending quest of the oppressed and the marginalized for identity as they are constantly displaced. The home becomes a requirement for political and social identity, and "homelessness becomes illegal" (42). Nair's study, though it deals with the cityscapes and how they help shape one's identity, does not address the phantasmagoria of the hyper-mediated Mumbai (Bombay).

Tirtha Pratim Deb and Sarbani Mohapatra, in their 2017 article, "The Bombay of Rohinton Mistry: Mapping the Cityscape in *A Fine Balance* and *Such A Long Journey*" compare and contrast two of Rohinton Mistry's novels, *Such A Long Journey* and *A Fine Balance*, says that the notion of a city undertakes a receptive structure. On one side, there is the body of the city in the form of tall buildings, as a confirmation of its impressive urbanity, intensifying an attack on the senses and mesmerizing the bystander with the sheer variety of sensitive prints it may induce. On the other side, there is the mind of the megacity, represented by an implacable, humanized fiber that enables it to engross almost any level of distress and shock. In both novels, there is a direct link between the deluge of crises and the extent of resilience; the more its body undergoes brutalization, the more the mind becomes adaptable. The researcher also expounds that while moving in the voids of mind and body of the cities, the inhabitants carry a myriad of experiences, struggles, solutions, emotions, and memories. The novel, set against the backdrop of the late 1970s and early 1980s, highlights the continuous struggle between the historical forces and uncertainties of the present-day city.

In *Such A Long Journey*, the narrator comments on how the metropolis has coped poorly while dealing with the sudden, unrehearsed, and incomplete spatial change from the nineteenth-century to the twentieth century. It exemplifies this fraught transformation through the neighborhood of Dr. Paymaster's dispensary. While fundamental issues like sewage problems, water supply, rodent infestations, and scrap disposal continue to exist, the neighborhood undergoes cosmetic transformations such as the new billboards with eye-catching names, moderately renovated residences, and the establishment of new motor repair shops. Similarly, in *ABF,* the already marginalized communities living in slums are further marginalized by the destruction of slums in the name of city's beautification process. The article deals with Mumbai as a megacity and the experiences of people living in a megacity, but it does not address the issue of how mass media and technology are changing both the collective and individual experiences of people living in a metropolis.

David Waterman, in his 2014 research article "Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography* and the Itinerary of Cultural Identity: Mapping Traumatic Experience within the 'Canker' of History Keep Moving, It's Not Our Destination, Yet…♦ Faiz Ahmed Faiz," takes the

readers on an itinerary and explicates Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography* and cultural identity. The author has mapped the traumatic experiences within the "Canker" of history and how it is not our destination. The novel has blurred and dissolved the boundary between private and public where geographical events are experienced on an international scale and re-experienced at the levels that are relished or experienced by friends and family. The author points out that identity should be less about either/or and more about both/and union.

Karachi has a long history of people facing a clash between the Karachiites and immigrants that come as a backdrop of partition, the politics of the city act as a tool of partial identity. In the novel, the character Zafar points out that Pakistan should change its name as much has happened after 1971 and it has not remained the same one. This comment can be seen in the backdrop of partition and the trauma that runs in the family. Before the war, Raheen's mother was engaged to Ali (Karim's father) and her father Zafar was engaged to Maheen (Karim's Mother) and later, due to the Civil War, the fiancée exchange occurred, resulting in national and collective trauma and making it a part of family history. This silence, also known as aphasia, is the representation of a character's intergenerational trauma, where much is spoken and much remains unspoken. The readers understand the way these characters, though they live the same events, do not have the same interpretation of stories and histories. The article talks about the cultural identity and the trauma of the past while living as a migrant in a metropolis city, it does not address how phantasmagoria shapes mythic consciousness. In my study, I have highlighted how the cityscapes of Karachi are hyper-mediated and phantasmagorical representations that form mythic consciousness.

In this chapter, I have conducted a thorough review of related and appropriate secondary sources, including books, research articles, and critical essays on city literature and South Asian fiction centered on cities. It establishes a background for the textual analysis of my selected novels in later chapters. Given the extensive existing scholarship on city literature and South Asian fiction, it was challenging to choose the relevant secondary sources, therefore, I carefully selected the sources relevant to my study. Based on the reviewed sources, I have identified a gap in South Asian fiction regarding the lack of exploration into the phenomenon of hyper-mediation within urban environments and the

resultant phantasmagoria of South Asian cities, which, in turn, impacts the mythic consciousness of city dwellers. Studying hyper-mediation of South Asian cityscapes in South Asian literature provides me an opportunity to analyze how technologies such as social media, augmented reality, and surveillance systems are transforming the fabric of daily life in cities like Mumbai and Karachi. Moreover, by exploring the phantasmagoria of the contemporary hyper-mediated cityscapes, the shifting kaleidoscope of images, sounds, and narratives that define urban life, I offer insights into the mythic consciousness of South Asian societies as to how do these mediated experiences shape individual perceptions of reality. By identifying these gaps in existing scholarship, I have been able to find my direction in terms of using the appropriate theoretical framework and research methodology that I have discussed in the forthcoming chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the previous chapter, reviewing secondary sources proved helpful in selecting an appropriate theoretical approach for analyzing the selected primary texts. In this chapter, I provide a rationale for the theoretical perspectives that I have chosen to employ for this analysis. My research is primarily qualitative, exploratory, interpretive, subjective, and nongeneralizable. First, I intend to discuss the theoretical framework for this research project and then explain the research methodology I have used.

I have thoughtfully selected the theoretical support that may help me read the selected texts, push my argument through and analyze my selected texts. I have invoked Nadir Lahiji's concept of 'Hyper-mediated Cityscapes' and triangulated it with Walter Benjamin's idea of 'Phantasmagoria' and Ernst Cassirer's notion of 'Mythic Consciousness' in tandem with John Eric Bellquist's critical insights on Cassirer's theory of 'mythic consciousness' in order to analyze the selected South Asian Fiction. I have incorporated Bellquist into my theoretical framework because he elaborates on Cassirer's concept of 'mythic consciousness' and provides valuable critical insights. These different theoretical positions work as a bricolage for my study. I have tried to discuss these terms in the order in which I elaborate them from 'hyper-mediated cityscapes' through 'phantasmagoria' to 'mythic consciousness.'

I have used all these notions to highlight various aspects of city fiction. By using these concepts as my theoretical props, I identify the ways in which characters engage with the urban environment and the ways in which they reflect or challenge dominant social and cultural norms. Additionally, these props have provided me a way of analyzing the formal and aesthetic elements of the texts, and how they contribute to their overall meanings and impact. I have elaborated the theoretical framework of my research under the following:

3.1. Hyper-Mediated Cityscapes

Modern and postmodern cities have always been mediated through various forms of communication and media. From the invention of the printing press to the rise of mass media in the twentieth century, metropolitan cities have been documented, represented, and experienced through newspapers, magazines, photography, radio, and television. These mediated cityscapes provided a glimpse into urban life, offering information, entertainment, and a sense of collective identity. However, with the advent of the internet and digital media, the concept of the cityscape has undergone a profound transformation as cities have become 'hyper-mediated'. The 'hyper-mediated cityscape' refers to a landscape saturated with multiple layers of digital information and mediated experiences. It is characterized by the proliferation of screens, mobile devices, augmented reality, and social media platforms that have become integral parts of urban life.

I have deployed Nadir Lahiji's concept of the 'Hyper-Mediated City (HMC)' as outlined in his 2015 essay titled "Phantasmagoria and the Architecture of the Contemporary City" to analyze the works of Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* and Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography*. It is important to note that Lahiji has also explored this concept further in the book *The Architecture of Phantasmagoria: Specters of the City* (2016), co-authored with Libero Andreotti. Since I am using Lahiji's essay that was published before his book co-authored with Andreotti, I credit Lahiji for the concept of 'hypermediation' because the essay was solely published by him. Lahiji refers to his subsequent collaborated work as "an extended analysis" of his argument in this essay (see Note 1 in Lahiji 2015: 12). I therefore want to clarify that I am not using Lahiji's work co-authored with Andreotti (as mentioned in this paragraph); I am drawing upon Lahiji's 2015 essay to employ the concept of 'hypermediation' for the analysis of my texts. In his essay, Nadir Lahiji avers that the cities of the twenty-first century are 'hyper-mediated cities.' He argues:

> The phantasmagoric images in the configuration of the hyper-mediated city, grounded as they are in the "new" technology, have not only altered our cities, but they have also altered the human sensorium and the mode of perception in the

subject's experience in a way that is qualitatively different from the previous historical make-up. (2)

Lahiji's notion of hyper-mediated cities in the quote above serves as one of the two lenses I invoke to read my selected texts. The concept of 'Hyper-Mediated City Spaces' describes how the integration of digital technologies into urban environments is transforming the ways in which people experience and interact with their surroundings.

Lahiji uses the term "hyper-mediated city" to describe the contemporary condition of urbanism shaped by technology and capitalism. He draws inspiration from Scott McQuire's concept of the "Media City," which emphasizes how the city functions as a medium for global capitalism and its spectacular imagery (2). McQuire uses Benjamin's works as a framework to explore the "deterritorialization and dislocation" of urban spaces and buildings throughout the 20th century (2). While McQuire does not explicitly refer to Benjamin's notion of "Phantasmagoria," Lahiji argues that it holds significant importance for understanding the 'hyper-mediated city', its architecture of spectacle, and the economic forces that shape it. The concept of Phantasmagoria, which Benjamin used in his Arcades project to examine the structures of the 19th-century city, is proposed as having explanatory power in informing the new configuration of cities in our current economic and technological era.

Lahiji argues that the proliferation of phantasmagoric imagery and spaces in urban environments is suggestive of a larger cultural shift towards the virtual and the imaginary. He draws his argument from Benjamin's 1939 exposé, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century," and argues that Benjamin employed the term "phantasmagoria" to explore the economic and technological aspects of the city in the 19th century and how the reification and commodification of civilization in the 19th century resulted in new forms of behavior and creations. Benjamin linked phantasmagoria to the "cultural values" of commodity culture in urban industrial capitalism, emphasizing its deceptive and dazzling nature (3). The term encapsulates the capitalist production process and its power dynamics between those who carry it out and the broader societal impact.

Lahiji quoted Margaret Cohen's study on Walter Benjamin and suggests that Benjamin's examination of the cityscape includes various technical apparatuses such as "stereoscopes, magic lanterns, panoramas, dioramas, myrioramas, georamas, mechanical spectacles, mirrors, photographs, advertisements, and cinematic projections," which played a mediating role in the city's visual culture (Cohen qtd in Lahiji 4). The architectural spaces of universal exhibitions, arcades, train stations, and department stores became sites where the phantasmagorias of commodity culture were displayed, shaping the human sensorium and perception, and giving rise to distinct forms of modern subjectivity and alienation. Cohen highlights Marx's characterization of commodity fetishism as "phantasmagorical" to represent an experience stemming from the proliferation of the commodity culture within social interactions, particularly in industrial capitalism.

Nadir Lahiji, while talking about the state of phantasmagoria in contemporary cityscapes, iterates Norbert Bolz's argument that Walter Benjamin's theory is relevant only when grounded in the theory of modern media. Benjamin's writings, along with Carl Einstein's, are seen as bringing an "end to the philosophy of the subject grounded in self-consciousness" (4) and replacing it with a form of perception dependent on media. Bolz and Andreas Michel propose that human sensibility becomes a function of media i.e., "dependent upon a priori condition of media," shaping perception through technological apparatuses (4). Lahiji explores the connection between technology, media aesthetics, and the structure of perception. He avers that technology is connected with the "psychic apparatus" of the contemporary citizen, producing cognitive specters. The effects of technology vary depending on historical stages and the types of media involved, such as technical reproducibility and digital reproducibility. These stages are molded by the way capitalism exchanges and manufactures commodities and, therefore, influences the structure of the city and one's perceptual experiences.

Additionally, Lahiji writes that Benjamin's concept of "phantasmagoria" is relevant not only for understanding contemporary perception but also for linking these issues with socio-political-economic conditions. Benjamin adopts Marx's idea of the commodity to assume a phantasmagoric relation between things, but he separates it from Marx's ideology critique. Benjamin focuses on commodity culture, which is promising yet deceptive. The

thoughtful changes in apperception of architecture and the city for Benjamin, and today's "hyper-mediated" city and its computer-generated spectacle architecture are intrinsically to linked commodification culture.

Nadir Lahiji, while discussing the phantasmagoric and hyper-mediated perception, quotes from Susan Buck-Morss's seminal essay "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered." She defines the concept of "anaesthetics" as the "sensory experience of perception" and argues that the perception of the modern city in the nineteenth century caused a "sense of shock" in the citizen (Buck-Morss qtd in Lahiji 4). Their experience of the contemporary hyper-mediated city is characterized by generalized anaesthetics. This anaesthetics is a defense mechanism against the sensory overload of digital media technology and urban stimuli, resulting in a "total breakdown of experience" (4). Buck-Morss suggests that the cognitive system of synaesthetics, which connects perception and sense memories of the past, has been reversed in the hyper-mediated city. It now functions to numb the organism, dull the senses, and suppress memory, resulting in an impoverished experience. In this context, phantasmagorias are described as "technoaesthetics" with a social function of intoxication that becomes a means of social control. The technology works twofold, extending human senses and increasing perception while also providing defensive insulation through illusions. The contemporary hyper-mediated city is a narcotic city, similar to the effects of "absinthe or hashish in the middle nineteenth century" (7). Its citizens are seen as technological junkies: their senses are anesthetized and numbed, subjected to a system of social control and political power that relies on intoxication. Benjamin's ideas on phantasmagoria are seen as particularly relevant for describing this state of affairs.

Buck-Morss draws parallels between the "total environment" of the hyper-mediated city and Richard Wagner's concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which aimed to create total environments through music dramas. She refers to Theodor Adorno who, influenced by Benjamin's notion of phantasmagoria, analyzed Wagner's work in connection with Marx's concept of "commodity fetishism as phantasmagoria" (Lahiji 7). Adorno saw "illusion as the absolute reality of the unreal" (7) with phantasmagoria becoming a function of the commodity and purveying illusion. Adorno criticized Wagner's Gesamtkunstwerk,

arguing that it turned the unconscious into ideology and aimed to warm up alienated and reified relations through music. Buck-Morss adds to this critique, describing Wagnerian music drama as a consoling phantasmagoria and a form of oceanic regression. Lahiji argues that the architecture of spectacle in the hyper-mediated city operates similarly to Wagner's Gesamtkunstwerk, serving as a vehicle for providing aesthetic totality and an intoxicating experience.

Lahiji refers to Douglas Spencer's argument from the essay "The New Phantasmagoria: Transcoding the Violence of Financial Capitalism," that the architecture of finance capitalism and mediated digital technology present a "New Phantasmagoria." Like Adorno's critique of Wagner, Spencer argues that contemporary architectural phantasmagorias are invested in obscuring the production process and creating intoxicating environments. Much of contemporary architecture aims to appeal to affectivity and maintain the subject in a state of full immersion, eliminating any inconsistencies or interruptions that might disrupt the effective spell.

Lahiji, while talking about the mediated experiences of contemporary digital architecture in hyper-mediated cities, states that with the rise of digital technology and an excess of stimuli, architecture has become increasingly "digitized" (8). The avant-garde architects of today are the ones who have embraced the "digital turn" and view the design process as a form of computational thinking. They utilize ideas and principles from cognitive sciences and biogenetics and employ terminologies such as "complex and nonlinear," "morphogenesis," genetics fields, including the "complex and nonlinear," "morphogenesis," "animate and inanimate," "network," "blob," "fold," "fields," "fractal," "swarms," "informal," "self-organization," and "architectures nonstandard" (8). However, despite the allure of these terminologies, the original design of buildings in this new paradigm often reduces to the 'modernist dichotomy of skin and bones" (8). The strategy may result in digitally distorted buildings that are raised to the position of reminiscent and ecstatic "illuminated sculptures." Within this framework, architects become designers who focus on creating luxury objects for wealthy clients. They are concerned with "datascapes" and the "flow of data," aiming to shape and sculpt information through their work. Cities seek global recognition and status through iconic architectural projects. Examples include

the CCTV headquarters and the Beijing Olympic Stadium in Beijing, the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles, the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, and buildings by architects like Zaha Hadid and Santiago Calatrava in Zaragoza, Spain.

Lahiji further studies the link between architecture, capitalism, and media in contemporary cities. He argues that the prevailing mode of capitalist consumption and reproduction, identified as "flexible accumulation," is promoted by shopping malls cultural and entertainment centers, museums, and privatized public spaces. Moreover, these architectural spectacles are the product of the hegemonic culture of design and are often experienced as images rather than physical spaces. They serve as symbols for cities and companies, appearing in magazines, billboards, and various forms of media. While these high-end buildings may possess an aura and special visual effects, they are mainly consumed through media channels. They are captured in photographs, filmed by television crews, and utilized as reference points in navigation devices and mobile phone apps. As a result, the modern city dweller increasingly experiences architecture through the lens of media. In highly mediated urban centers such as Leicester Square, Times Square, or Shibuya Crossroads, the proliferation of digitally produced architectural spectacles reaches a point where the sensory experience becomes overwhelming, leading to a state of anesthetization, as described by Susan Buck-Morss. The urban environment becomes saturated with a form of "urban trash," to which one can only react through a sense of numbness or, as exponents of this architecture argue, complete acceptance and immersion.

Lahiji critiques the commodification of architecture and its reduction to images and media objects within the contemporary capitalist system. He suggests that the proliferation of spectacular architecture and its consumption through media channels contributes to a modern experience that may be either numbing or all-encompassing, with little room for critical engagement or genuine human interaction with the built environment. For Lahiji, Benjamin's concept of phantasmagoria is an appropriate framework to study and understand the transformation of cityscapes. The framework offers an explanation of how contemporary cities transformed into hyper-mediated cities and the resultant consequences of it. He says that Benjamin's notion of phantasmagoria helps researchers to study the complex dynamics at play in this digital era, where the consumption and reproduction of

media and images shape how we perceive and understand the world. Further, I propose a working definition of the hyper-mediated South Asian cityscapes. By this I mean the urban spaces of South Asian cities that work through the proliferation of digital technologies and media platforms. Through this system, certain groups gain greater access to resources, opportunities, and representation, while others are further marginalized and excluded. I argue that this kind of hyper-mediation of the South Asian cities intensifies their marginalization by amplifying existing power discrepancies and inequalities. The digital divide amplifies as marginalized communities face barriers to accessing and utilizing technology; therefore, perpetuating their socio-economic disadvantage. Additionally, hyper-mediated narratives and discourses often prioritize dominant perspectives, reinforcing stereotypes and marginalizing alternative voices and experiences. These dynamics are evident in the selected texts, *A Fine Balance* by Rohinton Mistry and *Kartography* by Kamila Shamsie, where the authors depict how marginalized communities struggle against systemic inequalities, thereby illustrating the broader implications of hyper-mediation in South Asian cityscapes.

Lahiji, in his essay, provides an in-depth analysis of the relationship between the contemporary city and its phantasmagoria. He highlights the need for a more critical approach and suggests that architects and urban planners need to be more mindful of the ways in which their designs add to the phantasmagoric atmosphere of contemporary cities and work together to create more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable urban spaces.

3.2. Phantasmagoria and Mythic Consciousness

I have triangulated Lahiji's concept of 'hyper-mediated cityscapes' with Walter Benjamin's concept of 'Phantasmagoria, 'Ernst Cassirer's notion of 'Mythic Consciousness,' and John Eric Bellquist's theorization of Cassirer's concept of 'mythic consciousness.' In the essay "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century," Walter Benjamin uses the concept of phantasmagoria to describe the experience of modern urban life. He suggests that the city of Paris is like a phantasmagoria show, where reality and illusion, past and present, merge into one another. Walter Benjamin was fascinated by the idea of

'phantasmagoria' and used it as a term to describe the experience of the Arcades in Paris. Benjamin holds that phantasmagoria consists in

> [I]mages in the collective consciousness in which the new and the old are intermingled. These images are ideals, and in them, the collective seeks not only to transfigure, but also to transcend, the immaturity of the social product and the deficiencies of the social order of production. In these ideals there also emerges a vigorous aspiration to break with what is outdated—which means, however, with the most recent past. . . . The experiences of this society, which have their store-place in the collective unconscious, interact with the new to give birth to the utopias which leave their traces in a thousand configurations of life, from permanent buildings to ephemeral fashions. (79)

The concept of phantasmagoria presented in the quote above serves as my theoretical support for analyzing the selected texts. Benjamin's essay is a complex examination of modern urban life in the city of Paris. For Benjamin, the city of Paris is a place where the traditional boundaries between the real and the imaginary are blurred. He describes the architecture, advertising, and consumer culture of the city as creating a "dream-like" environment that is similar to the illusions of a phantasmagoria show, blurring the boundaries between the real and the imaginary.

In the essay, Benjamin discusses the phenomenon of world exhibitions and their role in glorifying commodities and distracting people from themselves and others. He suggests that the world exhibitions were seen as places of pilgrimage for the fetishization of commodities. These exhibitions originated from national exhibitions of industry, which started in 1798 with the aim of entertaining the working class and serving as a festival of emancipation. The Saint-Simonians, who advocated for the industrialization of the earth, adopted the idea of world exhibitions. However, they failed to anticipate the class struggle that would arise in the process. The exhibitions primarily focused on promoting the exchange-value of commodities, pushing their use-value into the background. As a result, "they opened up a phantasmagoria into which people entered in order to be distracted" (Benjamin 82). As people immersed themselves in this phantasmagoric world, they

willingly embraced their own alienation. They became passive consumers, surrendering to the manipulations of the entertainment industry and indulging in their detachment from themselves and others. The emphasis on exchange-value and the distraction provided by the exhibitions and entertainment industry further reinforced the separation between individuals and their true selves, as well as the disconnection among people in society.

After discussing how the world exhibitions have become a site for phantasmagoria, Benjamin moves on to talk about the "phantasmagoria of interior" (83). During the historical period the Louis-Philippe, private citizens experienced a distinction between their living space and their place of work for the first time. The interior of the home became a separate realm, while the "counting-house" complimented it as a workspace. The private citizen, focused on his business affairs, sought to maintain illusions in the interior and suppressed social concerns in his private environment. This led to the creation of phantasmagoric interiors that served as the universe for the private citizen, assembling distant elements in both space and time within their drawing rooms.

Benjamin discusses Baudelaire's poetic genius to highlight how Baudelaire's poetry made Paris the subject of lyrical expression for the first time. He states that the gaze upon the city was that of an alienated individual, characterized by the perspective of the flâneur. The flâneur retained a sense of detachment and observed the growing destitution of people in the bustling city with a conciliatory gleam. Neither fully belonging to the great city nor the bourgeois class, the flâneur sought refuge in the crowd: "The crowd was the veil from behind which the familiar city as phantasmagoria beckoned to the flâneur" (84). The city transformed into both a landscape and a room, and these elements influenced the construction of the department store. The department store utilized the very essence of flânerie in its operations, becoming the ultimate culmination of the flâneur's experience. Benjamin in his *The Arcades Project* suggests that the architecture of the big city is not the work of individualists. It expresses the already realized collective unconsciousness of a whole society and the crowd is an ever-present phantasmagoria whose experience is composed of contrasts, of lights and shadows, of the unexpected and the unforeseeable (Benjamin 44). For Benjamin, the collective unconsciousness of society is expressed in the built environment of the city, which creates a phantasmagoric experience for the urban

dweller. He argues that the experience of modern life in the city is characterized by a sense of constant change and transience, which further contributes to the phantasmagoric quality of the urban environment.

Furthermore, Benjamin opines that the concept of the commodity, particularly as a fetish, serves as a dialectical image and embodies the illusion of novelty. Novelty, detached from the use value of the commodity, is the source of the illusion inherent in images generated by the collective unconscious. Benjamin says that this illusion is deeply intertwined with false consciousness, perpetuated by fashion as its tireless agent. The illusion of novelty reflects in the illusion of infinite similarity, culminating in the phantasmagoria of the "history of civilization" in which the bourgeoisie immersed itself in false consciousness.

Benjamin also connects the concept of phantasmagoria to the rise of mechanical reproduction and the loss of the "aura" of traditional forms of art. He highlights how Haussmann's urbanistic ideal and its alignment with Louis Napoleon's idealism resulted in the transformation of Paris. Haussmann aimed to ennoble technical exigencies with artistic aims, creating long street-vistas that framed the institutions of bourgeois rule. However, his efficiency and the speculative boom in Paris led to expropriations and false speculation, alienating the Parisians from their own city.

Similarly, Walter Benjamin explores the concept of collective consciousness and its relationship to modernity in the city of Paris. Benjamin suggests that the city of Paris is characterized by a "mythic space," or "*Urgeschichte*" which is composed of a complex network of historical and cultural symbols and associations that have been layered onto the urban environment over time (Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 83). Benjamin argues that this mythic space serves as a kind of collective memory for the city, a repository of cultural and historical meaning that is continually reinterpreted and reimagined by its inhabitants, i.e. eternal return. This eternal return, according to Benjamin is "the fundamental form of the *urgeschichtlichen*, mythic consciousness" (119). He, in *The Arcades Project,* writes that the cultural monuments and works of art that the crowd has passed by unnoticed, leaving them to the lonely contemplation of an exceptional few, will be the ornaments of a

future, already transformed into legend. Benjamin suggests that the cultural monuments and works of art in the city are transformed into legend by the collective memory of the city's inhabitants, becoming part of the mythic landscape of the urban environment.

By exploring the relationship between the new means of production and the collective consciousness, Benjamin specifically focuses on the intermingling of old and new images and ideals. These ideals, according to him, represent the collective's aspirations to transcend the deficiencies of the social order and the immaturity of the social product. They also mirror an aspiration to break away from the recent past by integrating the elements of a classless society and prehistory. The advent of technology in the form of machines is an important factor in modeling these ideals. However, the direct expression of this fact in utopian presentations is hindered by the amoral nature of market society and the false morality used to support it. For example, the Fourier's Utopia, where the phalanstery, originally conceived as a social institution, is transformed into dwelling places within the arcades. This transformation reflects a reactionary tendency that turns social architecture into individualized spaces.

Moreover, Benjamin studies the relationship between phantasmagoria and collective consciousness in the cityscapes. He suggests that the mythic landscape of the city functions as a foundation for its phantasmagoria. Similarly, the phantasmagoria of the city in the form of arcades and other architectural features helps in the construction of the collective dream world for the inhabitants of the city. I propose that the phantasmagoria of contemporary digital cities is interconnected with the mythic landscape of the city, which serves as my framework to study the mythic consciousness of individuals in contemporary urban life of South Asian cities. For this, I am primarily invoking Ernst Cassirer's concept of 'mythic consciousness' from his 1955 book *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms (Vol 2)*. He defines 'mythic consciousness' in the following words:

> [I]t knows nothing of certain distinctions which seem absolutely necessary to empirical-scientific thinking. Above all, it lacks any fixed dividing line between mere "representation" and "real" perception, between wish and fulfillment, between image and thing … [t]he undifferentiated, unreflecting consciousness [that] refuses

to draw a distinction which is not inherent in the immediate content of experience, but which results only from reflection on the empirical conditions of life, that is, from a specific form of causal analysis. (36-37)

Cassirer's concept of mythic consciousness is a mode of thinking that is not limited to empirical-scientific thought. It is a form of consciousness that lies somewhere in-between representation and perception, wishes and fulfillment, and images and reality. Instead of imposing distinctions through reflective analysis of empirical situations, it reflects an undifferentiated and unreflective state that does not impose distinctions unless they are inherent in the immediate experience content. Since Bellquist has expanded on Cassirer's definition of mythic consciousness across his 1987 essay "Mythic Consciousness: Cassirer's Theories and Strindberg's Practice," and offered certain useful insights that extend the scope of mythic consciousness. I keep Bellquist on board as part of my theoretical framework. This helps ground and develop my argument in an enabling mode and also provides support to the analysis of texts. Bellquist emphasizes on the mythic consciousness as "a mode of thinking symbolically, of synthetically conceiving and perceiving the self in its relationship to the world" (72). He refers to Cassirer's elucidation of mythic thought and highlights the inherent fluidity and interconnectedness within the mythic realm. According to Bellquist, this synthetic mode of thought leads to a spiritual understanding of the world, one that transcends conventional boundaries and embraces the symbolic richness embedded within human cognition and cultural expression. Through Cassirer's notion of 'mythic consciousness,' Bellquist advocates for a reevaluation of the significance of mythic consciousness in shaping our understanding of reality and the human experience.

Spiritual immanence, the belief in the presence of the divine or sacred "is sought and found not apart from the world but in the world" (Gore v), has gained renewed significance in a world increasingly dominated by technology and media. Now 'the presence of the divine' has been replaced by the spirit of the city that is internalized by people through the accumulated effect of the commodities and technology in daily life. The urban dwellers experience this kind of spiritual immanence (in contemporary hyper-mediated cities), which is not strictly religious in the normal sense of the world. Similarly,

the collective imaginary associated with the old gods (mythological gods and goddesses, religious icons, war heroes, freedom fighters) has been supplanted by new ones mediated through technology (movie stars, billboards, advertisements, commodities). This shift reflects a transformation in the mythic consciousness, where traditional spiritual symbols are reinterpreted or replaced by media. The new "gods" of the modern world, represented by media and technology, reflect a changed consciousness that redefines how individuals relate to the world around them. My work explores this shift as part of the broader impact of mythic consciousness, and this is part of my contribution to the production of knowledge.

Benjamin's notion of 'phantasmagoria,' Cassirer's concept of 'mythic consciousness,' Bellquist's insights on Cassirer's theorizing, and Lahiji's notion of 'hyper-mediated' cityscapes are connected in the ways the contemporary city and its representation shape one's experiences and perceptions of urban life. Lahiji argues that due to our intense reliance on mediated representations to navigate and understand the cityscapes, our consciousness of the city has become significantly altered. Similarly, in contemporary times, the commodification and hyper-mediation of urban space has a profound impact on its phantasmagoria. As a consequence of this, the cityscapes have turned into a spectacle of consumption. Moreover, Cassirer's notion of mythic consciousness deals with the citizen's synthetic mode of thinking shaped by the way a contemporary city is perceived, experienced and represented. In the hyper-mediated cityscapes, the mythic consciousness is shaped by the media and technology. In the view of above-going discussion, all three concepts offer a complementary perspective on the ways in which contemporary cities shape our experiences and perceptions of urban life. The next section of the chapter deals with the research methodology I have used in my study.

3.3 Research Methodology

The present study falls under the category of qualitative research. It is interpretive and exploratory research and it uses Belsey's method of textual analysis as a research method to interpret the selected texts by employing Nadir Lahiji's notion of 'hyper-

mediated city,' Walter Benjamin's notion of 'phantasmagoria,' and Ernst Cassirer's notion of 'mythic consciousness' along with Bellquist critical insights on Cassirer's definition of 'mythic consciousness.'

Qualitative methodology is a research approach that relates to the study and interpretation of subjective experiences, meanings, and perspectives. This approach is often used in social sciences and humanities research. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2008), qualitative research is "multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter" (3). They emphasize that qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the social and cultural contexts in which people live, and use a variety of techniques to uncover the meanings and interpretations that people attach to their experiences. Similarly, Kathy Charmaz and Robert Thornberg (2021) note that qualitative research is focused on understanding the "experiences and perspectives" of individuals and groups (13) and "to make processes explicit […], theorists study actions as well as meanings and show how they are connected" (4). She argues that qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the social processes that shape people's lives, and seek to uncover the meanings and interpretations that people use to make sense of their experiences.

For my research project, I have chosen novels as my primary texts. This is because the qualitative approach is particularly well-suited to studying issues in great detail. By avoiding preconceived categories of analysis, it is possible to conduct a thorough and comprehensive investigation. Qualitative research suits inductive analysis to identify significant patterns, themes, and linkages within the phenomenon being studied. This approach is holistic, context-sensitive, and nongeneralizable.

However, it is important to note that complete objectivity is impossible in qualitative analysis, and "pure subjectivity undermines credibility" (Patton 41). Therefore, the researcher must strive for balance, understanding and depicting the authenticity of the world in all its complexity while maintaining self-awareness and reflexivity. As such, throughout this study, I have been thoughtful about my interpretation and perspective.

For my research method, I have used Catherine Belsey's textual analysis. In her 2013 essay "Textual Analysis as a Research Method," Belsey emphasizes the importance of incorporating additional research methods and perspectives to support one's reading. Her method of textual analysis involves close reading of literary texts in order to reveal the underlying ideological assumptions and power relations that shape their meanings. Belsey's approach to textual analysis involves conducting background research into the cultural artifact under scrutiny, its production, content, and consumption (Belsey in Griffin 12). Belsey stresses the need for the researcher to refer to the original sources and understand the process of meaning-making as it relates to the relationship between the cultural artifact and the consumer. By doing so, the setting in which the cultural artifact was produced is reinforced, and signification becomes relative.

Belsey subscribes to the idea of the "death of the author," which is presented in Roland Barthes' essay "Death of the Author," and puts the responsibility of meaning-making on the reader (165). Many critics assert that only their understanding of the text is correct, which may be condescending and limiting in terms of the meaning-making process (165). Belsey believes that literary texts are not neutral and objective representations of reality, but are instead constructed through language and shaped by social, cultural, and historical contexts. She argues that these contexts give rise to particular ideologies and power structures that influence the way we interpret and understand literary texts.

To uncover these underlying assumptions and power relations, Belsey employs a variety of critical techniques, including deconstruction, feminist analysis, and Marxist analysis. These methods involve questioning the assumptions and values embedded in the language and structure of the text, as well as considering the historical and social context in which the text was produced.

To ensure clarity, the following are the specifications of Catherine Belsey's textual analysis that inform my study.

1. The textual analyst maintains a degree of independence within the dialogue. (163)

2. The resulting interpretation should make sense to others and not be seen as free association by maintaining a sense of dialogue between what is brought to the text and what is found in it. (166)

3. Ideally, the text sets the agenda, and it takes priority in the analysis. 167)

4. A textual analyst needs not to settle on a final meaning (173).

To analyze and explicate South Asian cities in the selected fiction, I have taken specific lines and paragraphs describing cultural artifacts such as buildings, monuments, arcades, architecture, and department stores from the selected texts and have employed particular theorists using Belsey's method of textual analysis.

To wrap up, I have tried to give a rationale of why I have deployed Nadir Lahiji's concept of 'hyper-mediated cityscapes,' Walter Benjamin's notion of 'phantasmagoria' and Ernst Cassirer's notion of 'Mythic Consciousness' as my theoretical props to seek answers to my controlling research questions. In my analysis of texts, I have used these concepts to study the cityscapes of South Asian cities. I have employed a qualitative approach and Catherine Belsey's method of research analysis to critically examine my chosen texts in chapters four and five. In the forthcoming chapters, I have analyzed Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* and Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography.* I have employed Lahiji's notion to study the features of hyper-mediation in the cities represented in these novels. Then, I have analyzed how Benjamin's concept of phantasmagoria plays out in the hyper-mediated cityscapes of Mumbai and Karachi. Lastly, I have analyzed how mythic consciousness helps in the characters' construction of self in the hyper-mediated urban tapestry.

CHAPTER FOUR

HYPER-MEDIATED CARTOGRAPHIES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ROHINTON MISTRY'S *A FINE BALANCE* AND KAMILA SHAMSIE'S *KARTOGRAPHY*

The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images.

— Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle,* 5

In the era of modernity, every city is intricately entwined with technological mediation, and no city exists without its spectral presence. The term 'spectral presence' refers to the idea of something existing in a ghostly or intangible way (Merriam-Webster). Though María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren do not define 'spectral presence' in *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory,* they refer to it in the following words: "when a spectral presence is detected, the first, dual question asked tends to be: who haunts and who is being targeted? Even if a definitive identification often remains elusive, ghosts are not interchangeable and it matters greatly (in terms of the effects and affects produced) in what guise they appear and to whom" (309). As I understand the term in context of my argument, the haunting presence of technology in the urban spaces is a replacement of "who haunts" in the description of spectral presence mentioned above. Naturally the city dwellers are the ones who are being targeted. Therefore, for me, the term 'spectral presence' suggests that something is not directly visible or tactile but has *effects* or *affects* on the surroundings. In the context of mediated cityscapes, I use the term to refer to how technology is incorporated into modern cities in ways that may not always be obvious but yet have a significant impact on the city and its residents.

The fabric of contemporary social life is undeniably shaped by the influence of media cities, where the experiences and interactions of individuals are increasingly intertwined with mediated environments. "Asia Pacific, which makes up 60% of the world's population, is emerging as a dynamic region in the world in terms of economic and technological growth" (Phan & Damian 1). The nineteenth and twentieth century witnessed significant technological advancements in communication and media technologies. The proliferation of television, radio, print media, and later, the internet, led to the establishment of media infrastructures in metropolises. These developments allowed for the dissemination of information, entertainment, and cultural content on a larger scale, transforming cities into media hubs. However, in the late twentieth century "a radically new configuration of the city has emerged. Its decentering/ disconcerting effects are modifying the human sensorium in new ways" (Andreotti & Lahiji 1). Lahiji termed this new configuration the hyper-mediated city. The concept of the Hyper-Mediated City (HMC) represents more than just an amplification of the technological metropolis that prevailed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Instead, it also signifies an ontologically novel reality, where the culmination of past trends gives rise to unprecedented levels of concentration, disintegration, and dispersal. The HMC encompasses a distinctive form of sensory bombardment, overwhelming individuals with a multitude of mediated stimuli, while concurrently exerting new forms of control over urban spaces and their inhabitants. This new reality challenges conventional notions of urban existence, pushing the boundaries of urban sensory experiences and redefining the dynamics of power within these hyper-mediated cityscapes.

South Asian cities, like any other major cities in the world, underwent a remarkable transformation, shaped by the convergence of rapid urbanization, technological advancements, and the pervasive influence of media, in the late twentieth century. Within this dynamic milieu, Rohinton Mistry's acclaimed novel, *A Fine Balance*, and Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography* serve as a compelling lens to explore Lahiji's concept of hypermediated cityscapes. In this part of the chapter, I delve into the intricate relationship between urban spaces and the proliferation of media technologies in the above-mentioned novels, examining how hyper-mediation intensifies marginalization and existing power

discrepancies and inequalities within South Asian cityscapes. The chapter is divided into two parts:

      i.   Unveiling the Hyper-Mediated Complexity in *A Fine Balance,*

     ii.   Unraveling Urban Portrayals of Karachi in *Kartograhy.*

4.1. Unveiling the Hyper-Mediated Complexity in *A Fine Balance*

Rohinton Mistry is an Indian-Canadian author born on July 3, 1952. "He was born and raised in Bombay which has helped him to present the lifestyle of the Parsees in India and to make a sad portrait of his beloved city being consumed by the termite of corruption during the twentieth century" (Mukherjee 189). He is known for his insightful and poignant novels, which explore themes of social and political issues, family dynamics, and the human condition. Mistry's *AFB* is an overwhelming novel with powerful narration. It explores the interconnected lives of four individuals amidst the social upheaval and political unrest in 1970s India. Through the lives of his characters i.e., Dina Dalal, Omparakash, Ishvar, and Maneck, Mistry adeptly captures the essence of the cityscapes of Mumbai. He portrays bustling markets, crowded streets, and the prevailing socio-economic disparities of the metropolitan. The city is represented as a microcosm of society, where the personal histories intertwine with the urban environment, resulting in shaping the experiences of characters in the city. Mistry's masterful storytelling highlights the city's transformative power, as it becomes a backdrop for both moments of hope and despair, ultimately offering a profound examination of the human condition within the dynamic and ever-changing urban fabric.

4.1.1. The Intersections of Technology, Media, and Society

The late 20th century witnessed significant technological advancements in communication and media technologies. The proliferation of television, radio, print media, and later, the internet, led to the establishment of media infrastructures in South Asian cities. These developments allowed for the broadcasting of information, cultural content, and entertainment on a greater scale, transforming cities into media hubs. Rohinton Mistry's novel, *AFB* deals with the question of how technology, media, and society are

intricately interwoven and, therefore, sheds light on their profound influence on individuals and communities. According to Lahiji, hyper-mediated cityscapes are characterized by the integration of various media technologies into the fabric of the city, resulting in a complex interplay between physical and mediated experiences (Lahiji 8). In *AFB*, Mistry portrays a rapidly changing urban environment where technology infiltrates everyday life, transforming the cityscape and the experiences of its inhabitants. The presence of television sets, radios, and other media devices within households reflects this integration, reshaping social dynamics and individual experiences.

Dina Dalal, a Parsi woman tries to escape the harsh circumstances at her father's house (and afterward her brother's) following the death of her father, by visiting a modern library equipped with the latest technologies. The narrator describes the library as:

> The more modern libraries were equipped with music rooms. They also had fluorescent lights, Formica tables, air-conditioning, and brightly painted walls, and were always crowded. She found them cold and inhospitable, going there only if she wanted to listen to records. She knew very little about music — a few names like Brahms, Mozart, Schumann, and Bach, which her ears had picked up in childhood when her father would turn on the radio or put something on the gramophone, take her in his lap and say, 'It makes you forget the troubles of this world, doesn't it?' and Dina would nod her head seriously. (*AFB* 30)

Dina's interaction with media and technology is not only limited to the physical spaces, it is widespread and powerful enough influence the memories and lived experiences of the past. Dina Dalal's mediated experience in the modern library highlights how modern technology and media intersect the lives of individuals. Media and technology are pervasive in a way that it seeps down into human lived experiences of the past, vividly bringing the old memories of the past. When Dina, in the library, stumbles across a musical piece that she heard in her childhood with her father, she feels as if she has conquered the past even for a brief while. Her intersection with media would make her feel "herself ache with the ecstasy of completion, as though a missing limb had been recovered" (30). In order to cherish her lived experiences time and again, she would read daily newspapers and

magazines to get information about the musical concerts and recitals in the city. She would use her bus fare to go to these places. However, individual experiences with the same media vary in different spaces. The lived experiences that she has in the recitals are different or would impact her in a different way than she has in the solitary rooms of the library.

Though the influence of media in Dina's life brings her ecstasy, Omprakash's interaction with media is different. The social class dynamics that we see in the novel justify Omprakash's reaction when he enters the city for the first time and sees a television through a window for the first time: "Noise from the surrounding buildings did not abate. Radios blared…A flickering glow at one window made Omprakash curious; he rose and peered inside. He beckoned Ishvar to come, and look. 'Doordarshan!' he whispered excitedly" (154). Om, being from a rural area who has never seen a television before, becomes excited by the mere sight of it. Media, having the pervasive power to seep through the lived experiences of the past, also has the power to bring raw emotions out of an individual. This may be seen in Om's excitement when he exclaims to his uncle Ishvar "Doordarshan" (154). Besides, Om's experience of his first sight of television also highlights the social dynamics prevailing in South Asian cities. While Dina's experience with media is a source of her completion of ecstasy, Om's experience with media is like by chance as "after a minute or two, someone inside spotted them gazing at the television and told them to be off" (154). Being a marginalized and outcast, he has been abandoned to have his shared lived experience of the past and he could not feel the ecstasy of completion.

The media also plays a significant role in promoting family planning and population control programs. During the Emergency, the Indian government launched aggressive family planning campaigns, and the media was employed to spread awareness about birth control methods and the benefits of having smaller families. For example, "a mobile Family Planning Clinic was parked outside the hutment colony …the staff were handing out free condoms, distributing leaflets on birth-control procedures, explaining incentives being offered in cash and kind" (193). In the late twentieth century, the media was so widespread that every individual was looking to get access to it by any means. The government, knowing their weakness, exploits their needs for media. They offer radio transistors in

exchange for their fertility. When Ishvar and Om go to a store to get their ration card for food, the Ration Officer asks them to provide a sterilization certificate. When Ishvar refuses to have the operation, the Ration Officer also mentions that "lots of people do it twice. Brings more benefits. Two transistor radios" (177). People juggled between the need to have media (transistor radio) and having fertility due to the government's exploitative media campaigns. This exhibits how the exploitation of one's need for media through family planning is affecting families and individuals. The characters in the story are often torn between adhering to the government's policies and their own personal desires. Some families face pressure and intrusion into their personal lives due to the government's initiatives promoted through the media. This may lead to the breakdown of family units or strained relationships, as the characters grapple with the decisions they have to make regarding family planning.

Urban space acts as a site of social and cultural production in the contemporary city. The integration of digital technologies into urban environments is transforming the ways in which people create and consume culture, as well as the ways in which they navigate and experience their surroundings (Andreotti & Lahiji, *The Architecture of Phantasmagoria: Specters of the City,* 253). This idea is supported by scholars in fields such as urban studies and sociology, including Lefebvre who, in his 1991 book *Production of Space*, famously argues that urban space is not merely a neutral backdrop but is actively produced, shaped, and contested by various social, political, and economic forces. For example, the government uses media such as television, advertisements, pamphlets, and radio, as a tool, to run their family planning campaign by luring people into having access to media in exchange for their fertility, thus media acting as a double sword. The conversation between Om and Ishvar shows the influence of the media on people through these campaigns run by the government. As Om says, "[he] should have the operation" to "get a Bush transistor. And then the ration card would also be possible" (*AFB* 193). When Ishvar asks Om "What's so important about a little radio?" (193), he points towards the hyper-mediation prevailing in the society by saying that "everybody has one nowadays" (193). Om connects his ecstasy with transistor radio by "imagining Shanti at the beach, twilight fading, while his transistor serenaded them" (193). While being previously

abandoned to have the feeling of ecstasy, he now looks at the possibility of completion of ecstasy by having a transistor of his own.

People have awareness about their physical needs and their wish to have a transistor radio, both are the two extreme aspects of their lives, yet they cannot forcefully shun one for another. Media's influence is playing such a vital role that the old man, despite being ineligible for the government sterilization campaign for family planning, insists on going to all extremes to have a radio transistor. It seems that "he badly wanted a transistor radio" (391). Though the sterilization process gives him the benefit of having a radio, it causes his death. The people of the village that Rajaram visited for a promotional campaign are poor and the old man, too old to experience sexual ecstasy, decides to experience ecstasy provided by the media technology.

The emergence of hyper-mediation in South Asian cities brought about a significant shift in media consumption patterns. Traditional media outlets, such as newspapers and radio, were gradually complemented and, in some cases, supplanted by digital platforms. The widespread adoption of television and radio allowed for a more interactive and personalized media experience, enabling individuals to access a variety of content at their convenience. In the novel, people from different walks of life are interconnected by media as they have access to radio and television making a city hyper-mediated. The presence of media everywhere around all characters in the city shows the integration of media in society and how it has become an integral part of the cityscapes. For example, Dina, sitting by the window heard a radio playing somewhere "began blaring the signature tune for 'Choice of the People.' Eight o'clock, thought Dina, as Vijay Correa's voice introduced the first song" (203). The integration of media in the daily routine may be witnessed by Dina's immediate guessing of the time by Vijay Correa's voice as the radio show commences. Similarly, we also see a tailor, Jeevan, listening to "soft sarangi music" (419) on a transistor radio while taking a nap in his shop. In the same way, Dina, while visiting a court to get herself a lawyer for her rented home issue, hears "Music from a soft transistor radio buzzed like a dragonfly through the hot afternoon" (560). Different arenas of the city have the same element, transistor radio, bringing them together to have access to media in abundance and making the cityscapes a hyper-mediated city.

Svetlana Frolova, in her 2014 research article "The Role of Advertising in Promoting a Product," says that "advertising plays an important role in our everyday life. It mainly determines the image and way of life and it has an impact on our thinking as well as on the attitude towards ourselves and the world around us" (Frolova 2). In a hyper-mediated cityscape, where billboards and advertisements are used for promoting various brands and products, illiterate people who visit big cities for the first time in their life and are unaware of the roads and cityscapes use these billboards and advertisements as signboards and landmarks while they move around the city. This phenomenon relates to my epigraph of the chapter as it highlights how these images and advertisements are not merely visual elements but integral parts of the social fabric, shaping interactions and experiences within the urban environment. Om and Ishvar who come to a metropolitan city like Mumbai to find a livelihood lose their way back home as "the cinema billboards they had hoped to use as landmarks led them astray because all of a sudden there seemed to be so many of them" (*AFB* 156). The advertisements they use as a landmarks have been changed during the daytime when they were away. They were completely dependent on the billboards as they are confused if it was "a right turn or left at the Bobby advertisement? Was it the lane with the poster of Amitabh Bachchan facing a hail of bullets while kicking a machine-gun-wielding villain in the face, or the one with him flashing a hero-type smile at a demure, rustic maiden" (156)? Similarly, when Rajaram, a man well aware of the cityscapes of the city, shows a shortcut route to the Om and Ishvar, the newbies in the city, uses billboards to guide them. He tells them to "Keep walking through that gully, till you see the big advertisements for Amul Butter and Modern Bread. It will save you at least ten minutes when you go to work" (175). This shows how society has become hyper-mediated in a way that people's daily lives and their commute are completely dependent on it and they cannot think clearly without it. They use the media as a reference point to navigate through the city. Even Rajaram, a person well-versed with the cityscape, uses media (billboard and advertisement) to guide his friends. In the next sub-part of this section, I analyze the mediated architecture of the 'city by the sea' as represented in the novel.

4.1.2. Mediated Architecture

In the last few decades of the twentieth century, the pervasive integration of technology and media has significantly transformed people's experiences of the world around them. The sheer volume of data generated by the media and their users has paralleled the emergence of platforms that influence how we physically interact and how cities are portrayed, disseminated, and experienced. In addition to its influence on collective human experiences, media wields significant power in shaping the very "design of the built environment" (Cameron BEnvDes, Abstract). In major global cities like London, Sydney, and Singapore, urban planning efforts increasingly revolve around enhancing the city's competitive advantage (Thornley 2). Ironically, many cities in third world South Asian countries adopt a similar policy formula, incorporating a diverse range of initiatives such as

> […]cutting-edge wireless communications and transport networks, unique architectural designs, preservation of industrial heritage, advancements in science and technology, contemporary museums and arts festivals, grand sporting events, pedestrianized cultural districts, and trendy boutiques and restaurants. (Turok 13)

As when Ishvar and Narayan enter the city for the first time, they "were overwhelmed by the sudden change in their lives. Buildings, electric lights, water that flowed from taps — everything so different from the village, and so amazing. On the first day they sat in awe on the stone steps outside the shop, watching the street and seeing a universe of frightening chaos" (*AFB* 116). The architecture and landscape of the city have been a source of constant fascination as "the city that was filled with big buildings, wide, wonderful roads, beautiful gardens" (151). Similarly, Maneck, when first travels to the city with his mother at the age of six, "he had been fascinated by the towering buildings and palatial cinema houses, the avalanche of cars and buses and lorries, and the brightness of streets as the lights went on when night had fallen" (215). These diverse yet not entirely distinct urban developments aim to draw attention to the hyper-mediation of cityscapes that may distinguish a metropolis city from other cities and confer a sense of "world class" status. In *AFB*, the process of "beautification" in the metropolis highlights efforts made by

governments or urban planners to improve the aesthetic appeal of urban areas. The government's initiatives during the Emergency period, such as slum demolitions and clearance of footpaths from the beggars may be seen as attempts at transforming the cityscape and improving its appearance.

Evans (2005), in her research article "Measure for Measure: Evaluating the Evidence of Culture's Contribution to Regeneration," observes that this formula of urban regeneration is propagated by institutions and cultural intermediaries who hold control over the domain and rhetoric of urban regeneration, often at the expense of local community involvement and their connection to their own "place" (18). The process of beautification in *AFB* shows how the government institutes hold rhetoric of city beautification to hold control over a domain, particularly during the period of the Emergency in India. The government's pursuit of beautification is intertwined with its desire to project a certain image of the city, control the narrative, and consolidate its power over urban spaces and the people living within them. This resonates with Benjamin's reference to Haussmann's transformation of Paris, leading to Parisians alienating from their own city. One of the key aspects of the government's beautification drive is the demolition of slums. The government presents this action as necessary for urban development and improvement of the city's aesthetics as "the new law says the city must be made beautiful" (*AFB* 295). However, behind this rhetoric lies a more insidious motive: the displacement of marginalized communities to create a sanitized image of the city. Om and Ishvar, along with many other people, who live in the slums considering it their "house now and liv[ing] well" (162) become homeless within no time as the people from the government demolished the slums with "bulldozers" and "old jeeps and trucks" (295). The government's control over the urban landscape is evident as it selectively targets and demolishes certain areas while leaving others untouched.

In the late twentieth century, critics have observed trends of modification in architecture. In the seminal essay "The Cultural Logic of late Capitalism," Frederic Jameson expounds that "high modernism is credited with the destruction of the fabric of the traditional city and its older neighborhood culture" (2). He avers that the destruction of old cities and old cultures bells the arrival of new society – the tech society or hyper-

mediated society. The city beautification campaign which was initially started to remove slums and "jeopardies" extends to the renovation of old buildings as well. Dina's flat in which she has been living with her husband and afterward with her paying guests and tailors is very old-fashioned when introduced in the novel. The kitchen is gloomy and dingiest with "its ceiling and plaster blackened by smoke. Rustom's mother had cooked over coal fires all her life" (40). However, the low tenements are converted into luxury apartments when Maneck visits the city after eight years in the Gulf State. He observes that "renovations ha[ve] transformed the place beyond recognition, and for a moment Maneck thought he [is] at the wrong address. Marble stair- ways, a security guard, the foyer walls faced with gleaming granite, air- conditioning in every flat, a roof garden" (600).

The transformation of residential spaces and building world-class buildings in the cities is closely intertwined with the emergence of frequently stylized or 'gourmet' dining establishments, markets, and cafes. Besides the renovation of the old neighborhood, the eateries and food spaces in the novel are also renovated. Bell and Binnie, in a 2005 research article "What's eating Manchester? Gastro–culture and Urban Regeneration" on Manchester's food space have written "food spaces are increasingly central to urban regeneration and place–promotion schemes, woven into the experience economy, and used as markers of metropolitanism and cosmopolitanism" (79). For example, The Vishram Vegetarian Hotel, a hotel where the labor class eats, has no secrets, "everything [is] out in the open: the man chopping vegetables, another frying them in the huge black-bottomed pan, a boy washing up. With only one table in the little shop, Ishvar and Omprakash did not wait for a seat but ate standing with the crowd outside" (77). However, after the beautification process, "[t]he place seemed like a prosperous restaurant now, enlarged by having swallowed the shops on either side, its lights humming and flickering fatuously in the afternoon sun" (*AFB* 608). There is a "shiny glass-topped table. A neat, uniformed waiter …bearing a large, glossy menu" (608). The Vishram hotel which has been a hub for Ishvar, Om, Maneck and many other labor class people who would come and meet them is renovated and now the place is no longer affordable by them and making them more marginalized. In the next sub-part of this section, I analyze how people in power use media to build narratives.

4.1.3. Narrative Building through Media

The fifth generation of warfare commonly engages in combat through strategies of deception and miscommunication, leveraging the opportunities presented by advancing technologies. It is distinct from conventional physical military actions and is often referred to as the "information and perception" war (Abbott 20). *AFB* also explores the influence of the media on power dynamics and social hierarchies. Hypermediation in the late twentieth century introduced new platforms for disseminating information and shaping public opinion. Media, particularly newspapers television, and radio, act as conduits of power, shaping societal narratives and influencing public sentiment. In the novel, media plays a pivotal role in perpetuating social injustice and reinforcing existing power structures. The characters experience firsthand how the media can be manipulated to suppress dissent and marginalize certain groups, highlighting the dangers of media manipulation and propaganda.

In the novel, the government uses radio, television, newspaper, and advisements as basic media platforms to create, establish and disseminate narratives. Ordinary people when they come across these narratives, build their own opinions based on their political knowledge and personal interests. For example, when the novel opens Om and Ishvar are late for work as the train is late because of the emergency. While standing on the station waiting for the train, they heard somebody saying "Prime Minister made a speech on the radio early this morning. Something about country being threatened from inside" (5). The people on the station, based on their political awareness opine that it is a "government tamasha" (5) assuming that the government is spreading misinformation for their personal gains. However, the Prime Minister's speech that Mrs. Gupta has listened to on radio has been a source of contentment for her as despite being proven guilty for cheating in election. She "thank[s] God as the Prime Minister has taken firm steps, as she [Prime Minister] said on the radio. We are lucky to have someone strong at a dangerous time like this" (74). Narratives and subsequent policies are created and disseminated through the media to form a public opinion. Since the general public possess limited information because of their limited access to the media and must navigate choices within temporal and political constraints, this allows the people in power to harmonize intellect and emotion, navigating

between reasoned and instinctual shortcuts. Consequently, by using the media, they possess the ability to define issues, directing the focus of their audience toward specific facts and interpretations of circumstances. Moreover, they also censor the media when they see that the media does not serve the agenda of the institution.

The Prime Minister exercises control over the media landscape, effectively limiting the freedom of expression within India. This strategic maneuver aims to prevent the formation of dissenting political opinions among the populace. However, this calculated manipulation of the media does not escape the discerning eye of Avinash, a politically astute activist who possesses a keen awareness of the media's pivotal role in disseminating political consciousness. As he converses with Maneck, a fellow observer of the shifting socio-political currents, Avinash's demeanor is tinged with weariness. He alludes to the prevailing state of affairs, highlighting that "the press is being censored" (245). Consequently, the once-revered newspapers, which once served as bastions of insight and knowledge, have seemingly lost their potency and relevance within this landscape of information control and thus there is "not much point then in reading newspapers" (245). In this intricate dance of power dynamics, the Prime Minister's calculated move to restrict the media underscores the extent to which the control of information is wielded as a potent tool to shape public sentiment and maintain a semblance of order. Avinash's recognition of this maneuver speaks to his perceptive understanding of the interconnectedness between the media and political agency. His disillusionment with the press not only mirrors the prevailing sentiment of an environment steeped in manipulation but also symbolizes the disheartening erosion of a once-potent source of societal enlightenment.

In addition to the realm of digital media, billboards emerge as a potent instrument harnessed by governmental forces to disseminate carefully curated narratives throughout the populace. This strategic utilization of billboards unfolds within the intricate fabric of a hyper-mediatized urban expanse, wherein, paradoxically, segments of society, specifically the marginalized strata and the labor class, find themselves deprived of access to essential media technologies such as radio and television. Furthermore, these illiterate citizens remain prohibited from engaging with the textual narratives enfolded within newspapers.

For this demographic, the government employs billboards as a multifaceted vehicle of discourse proliferation.

The duality of billboards as both landmarks and informational signposts, utmost navigational aids, assists neophytes like Om and Ishvar who use billboards as landmarks and signboards to navigate across the city sometimes. However, they find themselves lost as the street signs and advertisements have been "obscured by political posters and advertisements" (155). Another similar incident occurs when Om and Ishvar, headed towards their hutments, are lost when the advertisements of "Modern Bread and Amul Butter are replaced by "Prime Minister's picture, proclaiming: 'Iron Will! Hard Work! These will sustain us!'" (180). The insistent exposure of such billboards ingrains them within the collective subconscious, a psychological convergence that not only disseminates but also strengthens the government's power to circulate narratives of their choice.

Furthermore, this pervasive deployment of advertisements and billboards becomes a pivotal instrument within the government's overarching beautification endeavor. When Ishvar and Om were displaced from their huts, they saw a crew of workers pasting advertisements with the Prime Minister's face and accompanying messages "THE CITY BELONGS TO YOU! KEEP IT BEAUTIFUL!" and "THE NATION IS ON THE MOVE!" (303). In this symphony of visual messaging, billboards serve as silent heralds of both power and persuasion, propagating narratives that permeate the urban tapestry and reverberate within the collective psyche, solidifying the government's dominion over perception and discourse. In the next sub-part of the section, I analyze how the presence of media in cityscapes has transformative powers.

4.1.4. Transformative Power of Hyper-mediation

The transition from media cities to hyper-mediated cities had a profound impact on urban spaces and human consciousness. As information technology advances, individuals are progressively becoming more deeply immersed in the realm of mass media. The adoption of mediated technologies influenced the behaviors, aspirations, and consciousness of city dwellers, blurring the boundaries between physical and virtual

spaces. In a 2020 research article, "Impact of Films: Changes in Young People's Attitudes after Watching a Movie" Kubrak avers that "a significant portion of consumed media products is occupied by cinema" (Kubrak Introduction). However, the question of the efficiency of films and their impact on human consciousness remains open in psychology as researchers are still studying in what ways emotion, cognition, and behavior are changed under the influence of mass media.

Libero Andreotti and Nadir Lahiji, in his book, *The Architecture of Phantasmagoria: Specters of the City*, avers that hyper-mediated city spaces, characterized by an abundance of images, sounds, and other sensory stimuli, have a profound impact on the human sensorium. They write:

> […] the quasi-ontological ability of new technologies …open up unprecedented regions of sensory experience, creating new 'realities' that simulate the mode of interaction of the real world, and undermining further the already blurred distinction between the animate and the inanimate, the real and the imagined" (129).

He suggests that this hyper-mediation contributes to a sense of disorientation and detachment from reality, as the boundaries between the real and the simulated become increasingly blurred.

In *AFB*, Om and Maneck see an advertisement for a film "*Revolver Rani"* on the billboard on the roof across the road from Vishram Vegetarian Hotel. They are thrilled to see "enormous bra-clad bosom" (278) of the heroin shown on the advertisement. The advertisement of the movie appears to be a source of ecstasy as Om imagines Shanti and their intimacy. Om and Maneck plan to watch the movie. The movie has a profound impact on their behavior as when the movie finishes, the protestors protest to wait for the national anthem to finish. Maneck and Om converse about using lines from the movie "We could have easily overpowered them. Dhishoom! Dhishoom! Like that fellow in the film," Om said (282). They start repeating some of the more striking lines they remember from Revolver Rani such as "Blood can only be avenged by blood!' growled Maneck, with a

sword-fighting flourish. 'Standing on this consecrated earth, I swear with the sky as my witness that you will not see another dawn!' proclaimed Om" (282). Dina, being aware of the impacts of the films on minds, worries whether after watching the film Om is "able to sew tomorrow, and you [Maneck] can concentrate on your studies" (283). She opines that "these films about fighting and killing can only have a bad effect on the brain" (283-284). Andreotti & Lahiji argues that the hyper-mediation of cityscapes with media such as films and cinema desensitize the human sensorium, making it more difficult to distinguish between the real and the simulated, and contributing to a sense of hyperreality that erodes our ability to engage with the world in meaningful ways.

Besides having a decentering effect on human sensorium, "Film", as Joerg Fingerhut quotes Bazin and Kracauer in his study "Movies and the Mind: on Our Filmic Body," "is often thought to be a media experience that is closer to real-world interaction than, for example, texts or static images" (2). Various scholars try to study how our minds work while watching movies, and experts say that the reason movies may make us feel strong emotions is because, from the beginning, the movies have been designed to not seem like something we are just watching on a screen. Filmmakers have known how our bodies and minds usually work when we see things around us. This is why movies affect us deeply. Fingerhut quotes from Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson 1985's book *The Classical Hollywood Cinema Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* that:

> Adapting the presentational characteristics of film to such perceptual and bodily habits can be useful when it comes to improving film's technical means of involving the moviegoer, and film thus progresses in concealing the differences between film perception and the perceptual routines we apply in the extra filmic world" (2).

In the novel, when Dina receives Rustom's bicycle from the police station, she almost faints. Confused about what to do in such a critical situation, the delivery boy performs certain gestures that he has seen in the movie. For instance, "He fanned her frantically with the delivery roster, waving it at various angles to her face, hoping that one of these airflows might work, might put the breath back into her nostrils. She stirred, and

he fanned harder. Encouraged by the improvement, he took her wrist as though checking for a pulse" (63). In this symphony of reciprocal influence, the narrative acutely exemplifies how cinematic patterns, absorbed through the act of viewing, may subconsciously surface within life's unscripted moments, effectively bridging the divide between the reel and the real. In the next section, I analyze the hyper-mediation of city of Karachi as represented in *Kartography,* and highlight how the elite class, in contrast to the marginalized communities in *AFB*, perceive and conceive themselves in the changing hyper-mediated landscape of the city.

4.2. Unraveling Urban Portrayals of Karachi in *Kartography*

Kamila Shamsie is a British-Pakistani writer and novelist born on August 13' 1973 in Karachi. She is known for her inspiring and eloquent literary work exploring the themes such as history, politics, identity, and human experiences in cities. "Kamila Shamsie, being herself a part of the diaspora community, has depicted Pakistan, her native country, and Karachi, her, native city, in almost all her novels" (Zahoor 14). Shamsie's *Kartography* revolves around the lives of characters living in Karachi – a city with a turbulent history. In the novel, one of the main characters, Karim, endeavors to bring a sense of structure to the city by creating a scientific map. Within the narrative, Shamsie examines the time period of the 1971 Civil War, the resulting formation of East Pakistan, and the persistently challenging law and order situation in Karachi. These historical events significantly influence the lives of the fictional characters in the story. Kamila Shamsie recounts the experiences of Raheen and Karim, two young individuals from Karachi's elite class, who share a close bond much like their parents before them. They navigate their complex relationship while the city undergoes turmoil and transformation. The novel employs three interconnected timelines: 1970-71, 1986-87, and 1990-94. The novel delves into the themes of belonging to a city, identity, and how historical events impact personal lives. The characters struggle to search for their own identity in a city that itself is struggling to define its identity

City space emerges as a complex product woven from economic, political, technical, and strategic pursuits, and it cannot be studied quantitatively. Instead, it is the manifestation of society's intricate social framework encompassing institutions, state

apparatuses, and elements like nature, labor, technology, and knowledge. At its core, space incorporates both tangible structures such as property, and intangible relations. Henry Lefebvre, in his 1991 book *The Production of Space,* says that social space in cities "permits fresh actions to occur while suggesting others and prohibiting yet others" (73). This dynamic social space comprises myriad elements, each blending to produce new possibilities. Our daily life experiences expose us to an array of social spaces and with changing times, spaces evolve because of technology, media, and socio-economic factors. However, it does not suggest that construction of new city spaces abolishes pre-existing spatial constructs, as global dynamics do not eradicate local phenomena. Instead, social spaces evolve, adapting to contemporary circumstances and transforming into new configurations.

These spaces owe their existence to intricate networks of relationships, with one space influencing another. While each space has its distinct features, they intermingle and overlap. Urban space assumes a significant role in this paradigm, illustrating how societal norms, architectural structures, and conformity create a standardized fabric, inadvertently giving rise to spatial inequities in the lives of citizens. Zaidi, Saleem & Waheed, in their research paper "Spatial Injustice in Shamsie's *Kartography,*" argues that:

> Social space shapes different events and the way they happen determining our lives within a social framework. It is something subject to continuous change depending upon the socio-economic and political scenario in which a person lives. Events do not just take place within a social space rather it often instigate and controls different phenomena happening within a society. Different factors such as economic exploitation, military and bureaucratic influence, culture, politicians and the political discourse and determine social space and the way it functions. (344)

This perspective sheds light on the role of city space, particularly through the lens of Nadir Lahiji's concept of hyper-mediated cityscapes. Lahiji, through the concept of 'hyper-mediated cityscapes,' posits that urban spaces are influenced not only by physical structures but also by media that pervades modern life. Hypermediation is the overwhelming influx of different forms of media in the urban cityscapes, resulting in the creation of layers of information, representation, and perspectives that influence the

citizen's perception and their interaction with cityscapes. Just as Lefebvre's social space is a collage shaped by various factors, Lahiji's hyper-mediated cityscape incorporates a blend of physical, digital, and cultural elements.

Kartography portrays the multifaceted influence of city space, aligning with Lefebvre's assertion that social space encapsulates diverse human experiences. In this part of the chapter, I delve into the intricate relationship between characters, Raheen and Karim, and their urban spaces. Moreover, I highlight the proliferation of media technologies such as newspaper (print media), television, and maps in the above-mentioned novel to examine how the fusion of physical and virtual realms shapes the lived experiences of characters within the social, cultural, and political landscapes of Karachi – a South Asian city; and how media in the form of maps plays a crucial role in reflecting and perpetuating social and ethnic dynamics in the society.

In *Kartography*, the intertwining of media in the characters' lives becomes a prism through which the novel explores the multifaceted influence of communication. The intersection of media in the lives of characters may be observed when Karim's mother Maheen mentions that she runs "ad agencies and linen factories and newspaper magazines" (*Karto* 7) while talking about her busy routine. Similarly, Raheen's mother, Yasmin, also works on "newspaper's weekend magazine" (204) and is approached by the newspaper office midweek for some urgent news. Their diverse professional engagements underscore how media permeates different facets of society, from advertising to print. The presence of media in the form of newspapers cannot be overlooked in the novel as it is a part of the daily lives of the characters. Besides Karim's mother working for media – the one who produces media, there are characters like Ali and Zafar who consume media on a regular basis. For instance, Maheen's encounter with her Uncle Ali while he is reading the newspaper in a "silent and orderly" manner reminds her of her father whose, unlike Uncle Ali, newspaper reading is "a noisy affair" (43). This juxtaposition showcases the different ways media is consumed. The presence of media in the lives of characters is not a recent phenomenon. The historical context of the novel is also rich with media references. During the constant flashbacks to the year 1971 in the novel, Zafar is seen with a newspaper during a gathering "fanning Yasmin with his newspaper" (168). This serves to emphasize that the

characters' interactions with media aren't confined to contemporary times; rather, it's a continuous thread woven throughout their experiences.

The shift from cities centered on media to hyper-mediated cities has brought about a significant transformation in both urban landscapes and human cognition. With the continuous evolution of information technology, individuals are increasingly engaging with mass media on a deeper level. The integration of mediated technologies has not only affected the ways people behave and aspire but has also blurred the lines separating physical and virtual realms within urban environments. Libero Andreotti and Nadir Lahiji, in their book, *The Architecture of Phantasmagoria: Specters of the City*, opines that hyper-mediated is characterized by an abundance of images, sounds, and other sensory stimuli, and have a profound impact on the human mind. They write:

> […] the quasi-ontological ability of new technologies …open up unprecedented regions of sensory experience, creating new 'realities' that simulate the mode of interaction of the real world, and undermining further the already blurred distinction between the animate and the inanimate, the real and the imagined. (129)

The excess of media blurs the boundaries between real and virtual. In the novel, the experiences of the young generation are increasingly shaped by their interaction with digital media, resulting in their inability to distinguish between real and virtual. Raheen's first experience in trains reminds her of the Hollywood movies she has been watching. As she observes:

> Buses, planes, cars, boats—TI was blasé about all of them before I even knew what blasé meant. But that evening when the train pulled out of the station, I leaned out of the window like someone in a film and waved madly to anyone who cared to look. And I sang! I wanted a song appropriate to the moment but only 'Feed the World' came to mind, so I sang that and didn't care that the coolies laughed at me and a beggar flung a handful of peanuts in my direction. Maybe I'd been watching too many movies. (*Karto* 13)

Her imaginary world soon vanishes when Karim "fling[s] himself on the lower bunk and roll[s] up the blinds" and reminds her that "It's not Hollywood association that sets your heart racing. It's the sound of the train. Dhug-dhug. Dhug-dhug." (13). This incident shows how hyper-mediation has transformative powers and shapes the experiences and perceptions of individuals. Raheen's momentary blurring of reality and imagination driven by media exemplifies Andreotti and Lahiji's blurred distinction between "the real and the imagined" (129).

In the novel, Shamsie highlights how the phenomena of hyper-mediation in Karachi cityscapes intensify the complexities of the challenges it is already facing. The already existing social, cultural, and visual narratives become intertwined with the digital interfaces and global influence. Newspapers and media give a full-time coverage to the violence going on in the city and not only provide information to the locals but also to the people living abroad. In the novel, Raheen and Karim, while living in different countries, connect themselves with their native city Karachi through media. They read about the city and violence going on through a famous newspaper "*Newsline.*" Karim refers to the newspaper saying "more people have been killed in Karachi this month than in Bosnia. Bosnia!" (132) while talking to Raheen on the phone. The news, besides informing the people about haphazard going on in the city, also creates a sense of fear among them. Karim, living abroad for the past seven years, has been "trying for the last few years to come to grips with Karachi's nature, to face all these things that are so hard to face" (132); but all his efforts go in vain when he reads about the massive killings going on in his home city. Similarly, Raheen feels grateful that Karim lands in Karachi after a weekend of severe violence, or she would have "to hear his breast-beating about the grief he felt for his city every time he saw a newspaper headline" (180). Shamsie underscores how media, in this case the newspaper, is not only a source of information. It is also a force that shapes perceptions, emotional responses, and one's connection with the city. The characters' interaction with media becomes a reflection of interwoven relationships between personal experiences and the broader urban environment.

Resisting the urge to consume negative news in such a hyper-mediated society may pose a challenge. Cecille Ahrens, clinical director of Transcend Therapy in San Diego,

California, in his online article says, "we are evolutionarily wired to screen for and anticipate danger, which is why keeping our fingers on the pulse of bad news may trick us into feeling more prepared," (Cecille qtd by Blades, n.p). This natural inclination might lead us to constantly engage with distressing news in an attempt to feel better prepared. While staying informed, particularly in times of crisis, is important as Ahrens points out that continuously exposing ourselves to negative headlines can create a pattern of constant monitoring. This may result in heightened feelings of fear, sadness, and anger, ultimately leading to a worsened mood and increased anxiety scrolling/reading. The same situation is observed in Karim's case and his interaction with daily newspaper headlines. The "stifling newspaper headlines" (*Karto* 243) that he reads daily triggers him not to "… go back to Karachi." He worries that "it's starting again. The same kind of stuff that went on in '71" (266). He foresees "the desperation, the craziness" and "stench from the newspapers" (266). He wants to escape from the hyper-mediated cityscapes to a middle of nowhere where he "never read(s) a newspaper" (267). These headlines trigger his concerns about the violence going on in the city and the city's descent into chaos, instigating him to crave an escape to a place where he may disconnect from the relentless news cycle.

In the changing landscape of modern cities, Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography* portrays how the cityscapes of Karachi have been decaying. They appear to be in constant change since the creation of Pakistan in 1947. This city has been greatly influenced by social, economic, and political forces, unlike any other city in Pakistan. The troubles increased after Bangladesh became independent, and many people moved to Karachi, making it a city of immigrants facing numerous challenges. These challenges include ethnic conflicts, powerful land developers taking control, violence like targeted killings, and political disputes between different groups. The city's social fabric and cityscapes has been severely affected by all these issues. During the Civil war of 1971, the government and other institutions used digital media and print media to propagate narratives of their benefit. As the physical city undergoes decay and transformation, media platforms such as newspapers are shown to make people aware of their surroundings, consequently shaping people's experiences and perceptions.

In *Kartography*, the narrator flashbacks to the era of 1971 where the characters are seen sharing their views about media. Despite the lack of internet and digital media, they are well-informed of the situations going on in the city through newspapers. The narrator flashbacks to the conversation between Ali, Yasmin, Maheen, Zafar, and Asif in 1971 where they have a talk about the political crisis going on in the country. They time and again refer to the newspaper as their source of information. For instance, Asif tells his mates that "just today Yahya told newsmen that his talks with Mujib were satisfactory, and that Mujib will be the next Prime Minister of Pakistan" (167). The conversation also highlights how government media is used to propagate narratives. The prevailing narrative of turmoil and political unrest being propagated by East Pakistan or Bengali people during the Civil War within the country, particularly in Karachi—a city celebrated for its diverse immigrant population—is pervasive. The consequence of this narrative is locals have a biased attitude towards the Bengalis. The bias is seen in Asif's words when he addresses Maheen during his conversation and continues to say, "They've reached a compromise, Maheen; I'm sorry, but your soul will have to do with being a little less stirred" (167). Another similar incident right during this conversation unfolds when a Bengali waiter accidentally spills on Laila's clothes, one of the friends of Yasmin and Maheen, and her husband slaps him and calls him "halfwit Bingo!" (167). These incidents show how biased narratives not only shape attitudes but also actions and underscore how such perspectives are manifested in everyday interactions, perpetuating a cycle of discrimination and injustice. In the sub-part of this section, I analyze how cartography is represented as media in the novel.

4.2.1. Cartography as Media

Map is usually perceived as an objective entity that depicts the world without any bias. It is a means of communication and defines not only spatial boundaries and limitations but also class segregation and ethnic boundaries. Maps influence the way characters' view and understand their cityscapes, and just like any other form of media, they appear to be a social construction with a political agenda. In *Kartography*, Karim aims to become a Karachi map-maker so that he may add to the already existing map of the city. For him, the map is not a proper map as he asks whether his friends have "ever seen a proper map

of this city? Not just one of those two-page things that you see in tourist books, but a real, proper map of the whole city" (61)? Karim's ambition to become a cartographer highlights the idea that maps are not fixed realities, but malleable entities that may be revised and interpreted in different ways. His quest to make a "real, proper map" of his home city shows his urge to mark all the identical, non-identical, near and distant places. For example, when he was looking for Zia in different police stations after the car incident, he realized such important places should be marked on maps for the citizens to have quick access. He wishes "If only there was a map with police thaanaas marked on it, so we could do this efficiently" (83).

Moreover, Karim's desire to make a map of and name each and every street parallels the cartographers of the city of Zytrow[5] who join in the task of making directions easy for the travelers, and this task of mapping leads them to name an unnamed street in the city. Similarly, Raheen writes to Karim about an unnamed street in Karachi:

Karim, there's a street in Karachi that follows the moon. Near an Imam Baragh, there's a line of houses, with back and front doors and no boundary walls. When the lunar calendar enters the month of Muhurram, Shia women make their way to the Imam Baragh daily. There is a back door to the Imam Baragh for them, for the ones in purdah, and to reach that back door without being gazed upon by strangers in the open streets they walk through the neighbourhood houses. Back and front doors are flung open, and the women walk through from the hallway of one house to the hallway of another until that alley within houses takes them all the way to the door of the Imam Baragh. It is an alley without name, it is an alley that ceases to exist when the moon disappears, but it is an alley all the same and one that says more about Karachi than anything you'll find on a street map. (296)

This letter gives Karim an idea of making a map on internet, showing how digital media may serve as a platform to capture and share complex narratives of urban life that cannot be represented by traditional maps. He wants to have an "interactive map" starting with a basic street map "but everywhere there are links. Click here, you get sound files of

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[5] The city of Zytrow is an imaginary city mentioned in Italo Calvino's book *Invisible Cities*.

Karachiites telling stories of what it's like to live in different parts of town. Click there, you get a visual of any particular street. Click again, the camera zooms in and you see a rock or a leaf or a billboard that means something to that street. Click, you see streets that exist seasonally, like your lunar street …." (300). The idea of a digital map showcases the hyper-mediation of cityscapes through the internet and digital communication and how it may expand the dimensions of representations, therefore, allowing the more nuanced understanding of the cityscapes.

In the light of the foregoing discussion, *AFB* and *Kartography* illustrates characters' interactions with cityscapes, infiltration of media, technological advancements, and architectural changes. Hyper-mediation and technological advancements in these South Asian cities mirror the complexities of urban spaces as the characters grapple with their aspirations, struggles, and evolving perceptions of self. These cities become not only a backdrop but an active participant in their journey of identity formation. These novels are medium where the narratives within cities intersect with the media, and therefore, offer subtleties to explore the challenges and constant transformation of Karachi in the hyper-mediated world. In the next chapter, my study explores the hyper-mediated phantasmagoria of Mumbai and Karachi and resultant change in mythic consciousness of the characters living in these rapidly changing cityscapes.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE SPECTACLE OF THE CITY: HYPERMEDIATED PHANTASMAGORIA AND MYTHIC CONSCIOUSNESS IN ROHINTON MISTRY'S *A FINE BALANCE* AND KAMILA SHAMSIE'S *KARTOGRAPHY*

It hits you in unexpected moments, this city's romance; everywhere, air pockets of loveliness just when your lungs can't take any more congestion or pollution or stifling newspaper headlines.

— *Kamila Shamsie, Kartography,* 253

In this chapter, I critically examine Rohinton Mistry's A *Fine Balance* and Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography* from the concepts of phantasmagoria, and mythic consciousness. I propose that the phantasmagoria and mythic consciousness of the South Asian cities in *A Fine Balance*, and Kartography are different from previous historical eras because marginalization, alienation, class formation, domination, and exploitation of resources and power are intensified by media technologies. I have highlighted how phantasmagoria and collective consciousness of contemporary cityscapes have been reshaped because of the ever-presence of media technology, commodities and uncanny architecture. The chapter is divided into two parts:

  i. Phantasmagoria of Hyper-Mediated Cityscapes of South Asia
  ii. Mythic Consciousness and the Construction of Self in *A Fine Balance* and *Kartography*

5.1. Phantasmagoria of Hyper-Mediated Cityscapes of South Asia

Phantasmagoria is defined as "an exhibition of optical effects and illusions" or "a constantly shifting complex succession of things seen or imagined" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). Terry Castle defines phantasmagoria as "a shifting series or succession of phantasm or imaginary figures, as seen in a dream or fevered condition, as called up by the imagination, or as created by literary description" (27). In City Literature, Duarte, Jose Fermino, and Crestani, in their 2014 research article "Urban Phantasmagorias: Cinema and the Immanent Future of Cities" define urban phantasmagoria:

> This ever-present collective urban imagery, intrinsically rooted in concrete aspects of a changing reality, and supported by existent and fictional technological systems, forms what we call urban phantasmagorias. Neither a fantastic, impossible world nor a completely materialized reality, a phantasmagoria lies somewhere in between, a potential existence, a virtual realization—in the sense that the virtual is not the opposite of the real but, on the contrary, the expression of a reality to come, as a potential and plausible existence (Lévy, 1995), a reality constantly in the making, but never completely satisfied as imagined, permanently haunting the present. An urban phantasmagoria is therefore essentially a virtual representation of a possible urban reality that is still uncertain, and not desired with any certainty: something that is imagined in a socio-technological framework in the imminence of existing. (2)

Urban phantasmagorias represent a realm between tangible reality and imaginative potential, arising from the interplay of collective urban imagery, technological systems, and the evolving urban landscape, constantly evoking an unsettled yet imminent virtual reality. Maria Kaika and Erik Swyngedouw, in their 2000 research article "Fetishising the Modern City: The Phantasmagoria of Urban Technological Networks" delves into the phantasmagorical essence of the city "in terms of its basic technologies, which appear and disappear, leaving the traces of its past (dams, towers, sanitation projects, railways, underground constructions)" (Sandten 128). Similarly, for Graeme Gilloch, urban phantasmagoria revolves around the commodification of fundamental human needs like

sustenance, energy, and water. It's further intertwined with the delimitation of its (perceived) physical boundaries and the notion of progress that cleaves the urban from the rural or the village. Various critics, in the field of urban studies, define urban phantasmagoria through a Eurocentric lens. They altogether ignore the fact that the historical background of the third-world cities in South Asia, like Mumbai, Karachi, Dhaka, Delhi, etc. is different from that of European cities and therefore, results in a different phantasmagoria. Phantasmagoria of South Asian cities is "a complex juxtaposition of physical space and social strata, abundance and scarcity of resources, over-consumption and under-consumption, class formation, alienation, exploitation, and domination" (Sandten 128).

While studying the phantasmagoria of South Asian cities, the colonial and imperial Eurocentric perspective remains a significant backdrop. Cities, like London, Paris, and Moscow, are historically perceived as centers of power across political, economic, and cultural dimensions, reflecting a perception deeply rooted in the colonial narrative. This outlook persists, even though, with intriguing nuances, as newer metropolises like New York City and cities across South Asia, such as Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, and Karachi assert their presence on the global stage. These "Tiger Cities" have projected onto the international stage, compacting three centuries of European urban evolution within a single generation (Sandten 127).

Much like the "Tiger Cities" that swiftly attained world prominence, South Asian urban centers have undergone rapid transformation due to hyper-mediation. In the late twentieth century, the cityscapes of South Asian cities have been bombarded with new media technologies due to which the phantasmagoria of these cities has significantly altered from the previous historical makeup. The visual culture, advertisements, billboards, and digital screens infuse a surreal quality into the cityscape, akin to the shifting array of images in a phantasmagoria. The juxtaposition of technological prowess with social strata, the coexistence of information abundance and scarcity, and the contrast between representation and reality contribute to this urban phantasmagoria. The portrayal of these cities as centers of both fascination and bewilderment aligns with the concept of urban phantasmagoria as an array of images and events, some imagined, that collectively shape

perception. In these hyper-mediated cityscapes, the fusion of media and urban life forms a complex tapestry where technology, imagery, and culture intertwine to create an experience that simultaneously captivates and mystifies.

5.1.1. Urban Phantasmagoria of the 'City by the Sea'

Unlike the phantasmagoria of the Western world where industrialization and technological development are defining features of cityscapes, the phantasmagoria of South Asian cityscapes is centered on the sheer population or influx and bewildering intricacies. The population density of metropolises is increasing exponentially as people from rural backgrounds are moving to the city in search of better job opportunities and living standards. This results in people living in close quarters with slums and squatter settlements commonplace. They struggle in multi-tiered spheres of living, dining, working, and commuting.

The phantasmagoria of the metropolis "city by the sea" where Om and Ishvar come to be prosperous and make their future is seen in "big buildings, wide, wonderful roads, beautiful gardens, and millions and millions of people working hard and accumulating wealth" (*AFB* 151). The day before leaving for the city, "they sat up past midnight, making plans, imagining the new future in the city by the sea" assuming that it is easy to make money in the big cities because of the opportunities it provides. However, the illusion of the big city that they have in their mind because of the media representation of the city does not withhold their actual experience in reality. When they come to the metropolis, despite having plenty of resources and opportunities they struggle to find a job. Similarly, in a city known for big buildings and plenty of houses to reside in, they have to live in the slums and afterward on pavements because of the lack of dwellings in the city.

The concept of phantasmagoria within the hyper-mediated cityscapes of the "city by the sea" in *AFB* is interwoven with the idea of "mediation" (Andreotti & Lahiji, *The Architecture of Phantasmagoria: Specters of the City,* 79). It refers to the role of media and technology in shaping the perceptions and experiences of the people living in cities. Media technologies such as television and radio serve as mediators between people and their urban

environment, resulting in new layers of meanings. Set in India, in the late twentieth century during the social and political upheaval, the novel explores how technology, media, and urban environment intersect to show an intricate relationship between reality and perception. Throughout the narrative, the media and technologies in the form of radio, billboards, and advertisements are omnipresent, resulting in the blurring of illusion and reality.

Om and Ishvar use sign boards when they navigate inside the city; however, the street signs are missing sometimes, or obscured by political posters and advertisements. They had to stop frequently to ask storekeepers and hawkers for directions" (*AFB* 155). Afterwards, they start using the billboards and advertisements as landmarks but that too leads them astray as "The cinema billboards they ha[ve] hoped to use as landmarks lead them astray as:

> All of a sudden there seemed to be so many of them. Was it a right turn or left at the Bobby advertisement? Was it the lane with the poster of Amitabh Bachchan facing a hail of bullets while kicking a machine-gun-wielding villain in the face, or the one with him flashing a hero-type smile at a demure, rustic maiden? (156)

Moreover, besides being used as false landmarks, the billboards and advertisements are also used to create a phantasmagoria (illusion) through which Om and Maneck try to fulfill their desires of ecstasy. The movie advertisement of *Revolver Rani* that they see from Vishram hostel is giving birth to their sexual desires in the form of Om's daydreaming of Shanti's "breasts" (278) and Maneck's interaction with a girl at the railway station. The cityscape becomes a canvas where these media elements intermingle with the daily lives of the characters, blurring the lines between reality and illusion.

The advertisement of the film *Revolver Rani* highlights another key feature of hyper-mediation i.e., "hyper-reality[6]" or "simulation." The advertisement shows "an

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[6] Hyper-reality is the concept presented by Jean Baudrillard in his 1994 book *Simulacra and Simulation*. According to him, hyper-reality is "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality" (1). A hyper-reality or hyper-real situation occurs when a reality of an object or the real object is replaced by its representation i.e., a fake or artificial representation. See work cited for a complete reference.

enormous bra-clad bosom" (278) which makes Om and Maneck wonder about the real size of women's breasts. By presenting an attention-grabbing image, the advertisement aptly captures the essence of hyper-mediation, where media accumulation blurs the lines between reality and its representations. Lahiji uses Baudrillard's concept of simulacrum to highlight the "digital capitalism" of a hyper-mediated society (Lahiji 146). In this context, the advertisement becomes a bitter example of how attention, engagement, and the pursuit of economic gains initiate the creation and propagation of media content. This intersection of capitalism and media underscores the intricate relationship between economic incentives and the construction of a mediated reality.

The media representation in hyper-mediated cityscapes creates an illusion to influence the characters' perceptions and interactions. For example, the characters, when they move through the urban environment, encounter media representations that reflect consumerist ideals, and societal norms. These representations often overshadow the authenticity of their lived experiences, shaping their perspectives and decisions. In the native town of Maneck Kohla, Maneck's father owns a shop with their original product "Cola." The people from the surrounding, satisfied with the authenticity and taste of the Cola, prefer it over any other drink from other companies. However, with technological developments, the big companies from the cities open their franchises and start selling their products. They advertise their products on billboards that attract consumers and make them buy the products "out of curiosity" (220). The Kohla's Cola which is "number one" in the town gradually loses its demand and consumption when Mr. Kohla refuses to advertise his product, ultimately leading to the downfall of the company. This shows how despite being number one in the town, people are drawn towards the advertised products, highlighting the role of advertisements (media) in shaping the perception and decision of people by overshadowing the authenticity of their own lived experience.

The phantasmagoria of contemporary South Asian society finds "its utmost palpable expression in the architecture of the city" (Andreotti & Lahiji 16). The architecture of the hyper-mediated city, as described in section 4.1.2, is "valorized by a digital capitalism bent on extracting an extra surplus-value through the institutions of high culture" (17). The vivid and dynamic nature of the cityscapes finds its expression in the

architecture of the city which is transformed by digital capitalism and hyper-mediation. The architectural site becomes a lens to study media, technology, and cultural influences in the city. Digital capitalism capitalizes on the potential of architectural spaces, particularly those associated with high culture, to generate economic surplus value by enhancing their cultural and experiential appeal.

The process of beautification in the novel is an attempt to make the city beautiful through mediated high-tech buildings. These buildings promote commodity culture and digital capitalism by appealing to the investors from big companies and conferring on the city the status of "world class." The process of beautification is an attempt of the government to create a sense of illusion by leading the citizens into an optical unconsciousness that distracts them from the social and economic realities of their environment. This dynamic interplay illustrates how societal trends, economic forces, and architectural aesthetics converge in shaping the urban environment. Moreover, in *AFB*, the coexistence of large buildings, shopping malls with latest infrastructure and technology along with the slums is a source of architectural phantasmagoria, indicating a breakdown of traditional boundaries and clear distinctions between different aspects of the city. It also pinpoints the stark inequality and the struggles faced by different segments of society. The magnificent architecture represents progress and prosperity, while the slums symbolize marginalization and lack of access to basic necessities. In the next section, I study the phantasmagoria of Karachi's space and interior and how hyper-mediation results in uncanny/ghostly cityscapes.

5.1.2. Phantasmagoria of Karachi's Space and Interior

In order to study the way Karachi's residents perceive and encounter their urban environment, it is essential to acknowledge that the city's intricate and diverse façades amalgamate into an urban imaginary that holds real consequences. Roger Caillois, in his 1937 essay "Paris, mythe modern," observes that "there exists a phantasmagorical representation of Paris (and, more generally, of the big city) with such power over the imagination that the question of its accuracy would never be posed in practice" (439). Thus, he points out the compelling phantasmagorical representation of Paris that captivates the

imagination regardless of its factual accuracy. This concept is echoed by scholars Bender and Çinar in their 2009 book *Urban Imaginaries: Locating the Modern City*. They propose that cities just like "nations as imagined communities[7]" may be conceived as an "imagined environment" or imagined places (xii), shaped by orienting acts of imagination rooted in material space and social practices. The outcome of these imaginative processes within an urban context is the emergence of a shared mental image of the city—an urban imaginary. James Sanders, in his book *Celluloid Skylines: New York and the Movies,* expands upon this idea, portraying the urban imaginary as an immaterial counterpart to the physical city, one that possesses a fictive yet profoundly influential existence. He writes:

> From the earthly city there arises an immaterial counterpart, a city of the imagination. This other "place" lives what is an admittedly fictive existence, but one complete and so compelling that it may come to rival the real city in its breadth and power. When this happens, the city can no longer by defined entirely be its earthly coordinates; it has given rise to a place of mind and spirit – a mythic city…a mythic city embodies the idea of a city, a powerful thing indeed. (15)

Sander highlights how the parallel existence of the fictional city and the real city gives rise to an ethereal, mythic city that lives within the collective consciousness. Whether labeled as phantasmagoria, imaginary, or mythic, this conceptualization of "the idea of a city" retains its potency, reinforcing the profound impact of the mental constructs people hold about their urban environment. In *Kartography*, Shamsie, through media, tries to retain this phantasmagoria of Karachi, "an imaginary urbanity that sustains itself in relation to a real, material space in which violent acts occur with undue frequency" (Yousaf 21). Newspaper and Television create a phantasmagoria or shared "mental image" of the violent city. Though the term phantasmagoria refers to illusionary or something that is "imagined" (Duarte et al. 2), it does not imply that Karachi's violence is only imagined and does not exist in reality. I argue that the city's violence shown in the media has a profound impact on its citizens and shapes how they perceive, conceive, and inhabit Karachi. For example,

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[7] Benedict Anderson's concept of "Imagined Communities" from the book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. See the complete reference in Work Cited at the end.

in the novel, the Newsline presents an image of a city with the headline "KARACHI: DEATH CITY" (139) on the cover page. Raheen reads an excerpt block:

> Roaming the dark, death-haunted streets of Saddar where even the street lights were off, one would be confronted with the surreal glow of a flower shop not more than a thousand meters away from the troubled area of Jacob Lines. Asked why his shop was open late into the night when all others were closed, a flower-seller explained: 'This is the season not of marriage but of death. People come to buy floral wreaths for those who die in the riots.' (139)

The above excerpt from the newspaper magazine illustrates how the media constructs an image of the city that Raheen encounters. The phantasmagoria of the darkness of the death-haunted streets of Saddar reveals a harsh reality – real violence going on in the city. Similarly, the media's role in crafting a shared perception of the city may also be seen in the excerpts from the *Dawn* newspaper that the narrator mentions in the novel. They are as follows:

> From *Dawn* newspaper:

> June 23: Twenty-four people were killed and several others wounded in targeted attacks, sniping, and gunbattles between rangers, police, and armed youths on Friday, raising the month's death toll to 204.

> June 24: Twenty people were killed and many others wounded as widespread violence paralyzed the city on Saturday. Two policemen, two MQM workers, two truck drivers, a PPP activist, and a police informer were among those who fell victim to the shooting spree.

> June 25: At least 32 people lost their lives and many others were wounded as the city witnessed one of the worst days of violence on Sunday, marked by several rocket and grenade attacks.

June 26: 23 people were killed and many others wounded in the city, which remained in the grip of armed youths. June 27: Fourteen people were killed on Tuesday as the city tried to limp back to normality. (283)

The news reports are mainly from parts of the city like "Orangi, Korangi, Liaquatabad, New Town, Golimar, Machar Colony, Azizabad, Sher Shah" (288). These parts of the city are the victims of violence and observe it closely. Raheen, though, feels blessed not to belong to these parts of the city, still appears to connect with them through daily consumption of news, as mentioned in the epigraph of the chapter. The newspaper portrays the phantasmagoria of violent Karachi through the "images of bullets and bodies, the wounded weeping for the dead, crushed and broken sugar cane kicked aside by fleeing feet" (288). This representation captures the media's ability to transmit a haunting, shared mental image of the city's turmoil.

In the context of Western architecture, a living room, often referred to as a lounge, sitting room, or drawing room, serves as a space within a residential house or apartment dedicated to relaxation and social interaction. Walter Benjamin, in his 1937 expose, "Paris the Capital of the 19th Century," traces the historical evolution of living rooms in the eighteenth century. He writes that:

For the private citizen, for the first time the living-space became distinguished from the place of work. The former constituted itself as the interior. The counting-house was its complement. The private citizen who in the counting-house took reality into account, required of the interior that it should maintain him in his illusions. This necessity was all the more pressing since he had no intention of adding social preoccupations to his business ones. In the creation of his private environment, he suppressed them both. From this sprang the phantasmagorias of the interior. This represented the universe for the private citizen. In it he assembled the distant in space and in time. His drawing-room was a box in the world-theatre. (83)

However, in the late twentieth century, the living rooms underwent transformation as they became imbued with the presence of media, particularly television, and were

renamed as TV rooms. In the *Kartography*, hyper-mediation is also observed through the presence of TV rooms in almost every house that would serve as a hub where day-to-day conversations, gossip, and political talk would happen. A TV room serves as an interior space where they spend their free time. For example, when Raheen returns to her home after picking up Karim from the airport, she observes that her parents are drinking tea and "watching BBC World in the TV room" (176). The integration of media technologies such as TV illustrates a significant shift in how characters interact with media and each other. The phantasmagoria of the interior that Benjamin talks about in his essay is mediated by the presence of TV in their living rooms. Constructing their self/identity in the violent cityscapes of Karachi is a tough call for characters. In the next part, I analyze how characters Om, Ishvar, Dina, Maneck, and Raheen construct their identity/self in the violent cityscapes of Karachi.

5.2. Mythic Consciousness and the Construction of Self in *A Fine Balance* and *Kartography*

Cities indeed serve as dynamic spaces where various elements of human consciousness and adaptability come into play. They are a physical manifestation of the collective aspirations, beliefs, and values of the people who inhabit them. The architecture, infrastructure, cultural spaces, and urban planning choices collectively represent the mindset and consciousness of the city's residents. Within the urban environment, individuals and communities contemplate the nature of consciousness itself. Cities are often centers of intellectual and philosophical discourse, where people explore questions about identity, existence, and purpose, thus contributing to a richer collective consciousness i.e., mythic consciousness. Cities create a unique blend of consciousness that individuals both shape and become a part of. As citizens engage in the life of the city, they contribute to the shared narrative of its consciousness while simultaneously being influenced by the urban environment. Graeme Gilloch, in his 1996 book *Myth and Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City*, writes that:

> The city is a monad, a fragment within which the totality of modern life may be discerned. While the phantasmagoria of modernity finds its utmost palpable

expression in the architecture of the city, the individual and collective experiences of the metropolis are also imbued with mythic forms. The experience of the urban environment, which for Benjamin constitutes the definitive modern experience, is characterized by particular mythic consciousness and activity. (171)

John Eric Bellquist, in his 1987 research article on "Mythic Consciousness: Cassirer's Theories and Strindberg's Practice" quotes Cassirer to define mythic consciousness. He writes "mythic consciousness is mode of thinking, synthetically conceiving and perceiving the self in relationship to the world – a mode of thinking that does not admit of "certain distinctions … necessary to empirical scientific thinking." (Cassirer qtd in Bellquist 78). Myths have long been tools for conditioning people, shaping their identities, beliefs, and roles within society. By influencing the collective psyche, myths have historically served to condition individuals into certain modes of thought and behavior. In my analysis, I bridge this gap by examining how mythic consciousness has been used to create and maintain specific subjectivities, particularly in the context of modern technological myths. This exploration reveals how myths continue to function as powerful agents in the formation of subjecthood, guiding both collective and individual identities in subtle yet profound ways.

The concept of mythic consciousness may be understood with the structuralist argument that "proper study of meaning – and therefore reality – is an investigation of the system behind these practices, not the individual practices themselves" (Bresseler 100). Generally, structuralists suggest that nothing can be understood in isolation – they have to be seen in the context of larger structures that they are part of. Just like that, a city cannot be conceived, perceived, and experienced in isolation. The concept of mythic consciousness, when analyzed through structuralist lens, highlights the interconnectedness and interdependence of elements within a larger system, such as a cityscape. The city cannot be understood in isolation; it is rather intricately connected to the social, cultural, economic, and historical frameworks that shape it. Just as individual practices gain meaning within the context of larger structures, the experience and perception of a city are shaped by the complex network of relationships between its various components – its architecture, infrastructure, inhabitants, and socio-political dynamics.

The individual perception and experiences of the city are shaped by the collective experiences. Myths have long been tools for conditioning people, shaping their identities, beliefs, and roles within society. By influencing the collective psyche, myths have historically served to condition individuals into certain modes of thought and behavior. In my analysis, I bridge this gap by examining how mythic consciousness has been used to create and maintain specific subjectivities, particularly in the context of modern technological myths. This exploration reveals how myths continue to function as powerful agents in the formation of subjecthood, guiding both collective and individual identities in subtle yet profound ways. Much as mythic consciousness encompasses the interplay of various symbols and narratives, a city involves a multitude of elements that shapes one's identity and impacts inhabitants' consciousness. Viewing a city holistically enables us to perceive how its physical, social, and cultural facets contribute to the mythic consciousness experienced by its residents and how it helps construct the self or subjecthood of individuals living in the city.

Cities also demonstrate human's ability to transcend limitations and adapt to ever-evolving environments. Urban areas often undergo transformation over time, showing how humans can adapt their consciousness to new circumstances, challenges, and opportunities. In the late twentieth century, cities underwent a rapid technological transformation and media infiltrated the city in such a way that it altered the city structure. Since the cityscapes have become hyper-mediated, the human sensorium has changed significantly and therefore, it has a profound impact on the mythic consciousness. The way citizens perceive themselves and the way they construct their 'self' in the hyper-mediated cityscapes is different from the previous historical era, and it, therefore, needs special attention from the researchers.

In *AFB*, the interplay between the characters' experiences and the cityscapes of the metropolis emphasizes the intricate connection between mythic consciousness and identity construction. The city serves as a microcosm where the characters' individual mythic narratives merge with the collective urban mythos. As they navigate the rapidly changing urban environment, their interactions with signs, symbols, and architectural elements mirror the larger societal shifts. Set in India, during Indira Gandhi's infamous State of

Emergency (1975-77), the novel centers on this varied "cast list of marginalized and dispossessed" (Morey 95) in the wider Indian community trying to construct their 'self' in the technologically advanced hyper-mediated urban space. The lives of the characters Om, Ishvar, Dina, and Maneck are not isolated. They are part of larger socio-political structures such as hyper-mediation and architectural development present in the cityscapes. The choices and decisions of characters are tightly tied to the social and political climate of the city and these choices, consequently, parallel the process of self-reckoning and self-construction.

The infiltration of media in the metropolis adds layers of complexity to Om and Ishvar's experiences in the city. The mythic consciousness they encounter through hyper-mediation mirrors their internal struggles and aspirations. Om, when entering the city, observes how people living in the cities have easy access to media such as radio transistors and television. He desires to get one for himself; however, due to the economic instability of society, it is impossible for him to get one. Om's desire to get a radio transistor for himself makes him avail the offer of the Family Planning Program. The cityscape becomes a tangible representation of Om's journey of self-discovery.

As Om witnesses the hyper-mediation of physical spaces, he also undergoes parallel processes of self-construction and self-reckoning. The hyper-mediation of spaces represents the convergence of external influences and personal desires. As he navigates the city's complexities, he undergoes a process of self-reckoning, confronting his aspirations and limitations within the urban environment. The hyper-mediation of the cityscape is not just a backdrop; it's an active participant in Om's growth. Just as the city transforms through technological advancements, so does Om. His pursuit of the radio transistor and his involvement in the Family Planning Program parallels the city's transformation, reflecting the interconnected nature of personal and societal change. Om's experience exemplifies how the infiltration of media transforms the urban environment into a space of aspirations, challenges, and self-discovery. His desires and choices reflect the complex interplay between internal yearnings and external influences, all taking place within the context of a hyper-mediated cityscape. This dynamic relationship underscores the intricate ways in

which media and urban environments shape Om's mythic consciousness and journey of self-construction.

Similarly, Dina Dalal's interaction with the media shapes her personality. She tries to escape the harsh circumstances at her brother's home by visiting the library and engaging herself with the media. The music she listens to on the radio becomes her source of "ecstasy of completion" (*AFB* 30). Moreover, her interaction with the media also highlights her negotiation with the media-driven narratives about gender. The reinforcement of societal gender norms and roles through media affects Dina's self-image. The depiction of idealized women in media impacts her self-perception and contributes to her struggle against traditional gender expectations. Her resistance to these norms becomes a part of her self-construction. When Nusswan, Dina's elder brother denies her to pay for a haircut, she goes against him and takes help from her friend (23). Media-driven mythic narratives shape Dina's mythic consciousness and identity formation. The stories and ideals propagated by the media influence her understanding of success and happiness. Her negotiation with these narratives and her efforts to define her own path contribute to her self-construction.

Like Om and Dina, Maneck's interaction with the media shapes his journey of self-reckoning and self-construction. The novel highlights the urban-rural dichotomy. The "Mountains" in the novel is Maneck's native town. The unnamed rural place is considered as a place of "backwardness, ignorance, and limitation" (Williams 9). Maneck, like other inhabitants of the mountains, is influenced by "demons of progress" (*AFB* 215) such as the rapid technological developments taking place in the society. When he observes that the big companies are advertising their products through media, he sees the potential to promote his product. Similarly, Maneck's move from his rural home to the bustling "city by the sea" for higher education exposes him to a new world of media, technology, and urban lifestyle that he does not experience in his native town. He is fascinated by the media and technological development. However, he never dreams of establishing himself in the hyper-mediated city. He always wants to go back to the mountains and live there and he only recognizes this when he encounters the hyper-mediation in the cityscapes. This cultural shift becomes a catalyst for his construction of self, as he navigates the intersection of his traditional upbringing with the media-driven urban environment.

Cities are vibrant spaces where human thoughts and adaptability flourish. They embody the collective dreams, beliefs, and values of their residents, reflecting these in their architecture, infrastructure, cultural havens, and urban designs. Within the city, individuals and communities ponder the nature of consciousness itself. Cities often serve as hubs of intellectual and philosophical exploration, where people delve into profound questions about identity, existence, and purpose. This notion of the city's consciousness is much like a puzzle. Each part of the city, including its physical aspects and its people, contributes to a larger picture. The city doesn't make sense when you look at just one piece; it comes to life when you see the whole mosaic. A city isn't merely about its buildings and streets; it's a complex blend of everything happening within it. While living in a metropolis city means having different communities and people from different ethnicities living together "it is impossible for the city to be experienced in its totality. Any one person's experience of a city is bound to remain limited and partial to a fragment of the city and to their unique perspective of that fragment. Hence, as King puts it, the city "exists only in our heads" (Bender & Cinar xii). It is a construct that forms and evolves within the collective consciousness of its inhabitants, shaped by their unique perspectives and experiences within its diverse fragments.

Since the infiltration of media and technologies in the cityscapes, the way citizens perceive and experience have become significantly different. Now, cities are changing rapidly due to technology. They're becoming hyper-connected and filled with media like TV and the internet. This transformation is significant because it's altering how people feel and think in cities. They use media as signs and symbols and therefore, it's crucial to comprehend how this impacts individuals in the ever-evolving urban landscape. In *Kartography*, characters directly witness violence, targeted killings, and ethnic crises within the city of Karachi. However, the way these incidents are portrayed in the media leads to the shaping of specific narratives that, in turn, influence how individuals construct their own identities. Thus, media serves as a platform where the collective urban narratives result in the character's individual mythic narrative, therefore, shaping how they perceive themselves in the larger structures of the city.

Raheen, the central character in the novels, appears to be greatly impacted by the hyper-mediation in the city as she is constantly seen interacting with various media platforms. Belonging to the elite class and living in the posh area, Raheen does not experience violence directly. However, she appears to be quite sensitive towards them. It is through interaction with these newspaper headlines that serve as symbols for Raheen to form her own understanding and her own perception of the city. She rolls around in private cars, studies in one of the best schools in the city, and does not face issues regarding pocket money as "… after school and after parties, scrounging through one another's purses and wallets to spend money on meals [. . .]" (*Karto* 79). She goes to a foreign country for her higher education and therefore appears to be living a comfortable life. For Raheen, unlike the general public, Karachi, despite being death city, is life. Raheen experiences the city in her own cars, through high-end parties, gossiping, and reading newspapers, thus mapping it as she views it. In the book, *Urban Imaginaries: Locating the Modern City*, Cinar and Bender argue that "urban dwellers and users orient themselves by constructing an imagined city—what they call a cognitive map, which deviates in meaningful ways from the cartographer's map, with its solidity and boundedness" (Introduction xii). Raheen develops her own individual cognitive map of the city, which serves as a lens through which she perceives and interacts with her environment. This cognitive map is shaped by her social status as an elite, her upbringing, her interactions with others, and her experiences within the cityscape. It includes not only tangible landmarks and locations but also intangible elements such as social hierarchies, power dynamics, and cultural symbols. Furthermore, Raheen's cognitive map may also incorporate mythic narratives or symbols that resonate with broader cultural or historical themes, such as notions of power, prestige, or aspiration. These mythical elements contribute to the construction of her identity within the larger framework of mythic consciousness, shaping her understanding of herself and her relationship to the city. Thus, Raheen's self-consciousness in one way or another related to the mythic consciousness that she experiences through newspapers and maps:

> Streets leading to other streets, streets named, areas defined, places of interest
> clearly marked out. This map was Karachi's opposite. It could only exist through

its disdain for the reality of the city: the jumble, the illogic, the self-definition, the quicksilver of the place. As usual, the map did nothing but irritate me. (79)

Printed maps offer Raheen no comfort. The multitude of street names they display only serves to unsettle her. To Raheen, the Karachi she cherishes is the one she has experienced personally. Names hold no meaning for her; instead, it's the images and memories linked to specific locations that matter most. When she has to direct someone, she does not use maps but word of mouth as "[G]o straight straight straight straight straight and turn right [. . .]" (99). Similarly, Raheen is well aware of the crisis in her home city through newspapers even when she is not in Pakistan. An important scene in the novel is when Raheen reads a newspaper headline "KARACHI: DEATH CITY." The headline captures the pervasive violence instilled in the collective consciousness of the citizens. It shows how the general public, in the time of crisis, experiences the city. However, the mental image of the city that Raheen has in her mind is different from the collective image of the city. Her encounter with the disturbing newspaper headline about Karachi highlights the contrast between the city's collective image fashioned by the media and the personal and cherished image she holds in her mind. This contrast pinpoints citizens' perception of and relationship with their cities are influenced by a mythic consciousness presented by media that overrides their individual experiences and desires.

As it transpires through discussion and analysis in this chapter, Mistry's representation of Mumbai and Shamsie's portrayal of Karachi's decaying cityscapes in *AFB* and *Kartography*, respectively, echoes Benjamin's concept of 'phantasmagoria' and Cassirer's mythic consciousness by highlighting the intricate interplay between uncanny urban spaces and the multifaceted layers of media that shape our understanding of the city. Character's mythic consciousness embedded in urban experiences have a profound impact on the construction of self-identities. In the next chapter, I have concluded my study and given recommendations for the future study.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

I started off with the premise that the representations of contemporary South Asian cities in the selected texts exhibit features of hyper-mediation. In this chapter, I have made a concluding discussion of my research project. I have explored Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* and Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography* through three different but interconnected theoretical perspectives, Nadir Lahiji's notion of 'hyper-mediated cityscapes,' Benjamin's concept of 'phantasmagoria' and Cassirer's idea of 'mythic consciousness' along with John Eric Bellquist's explanation and expansion of Cassirer's notion of 'mythic consciousness.' As all these concepts deal with city spaces, I have employed them as theoretical positions to explore the cityscapes of South Asian cities. Since I conclude my research in this chapter, it would be instructive to review why I have chosen the particular theoretical framework and analytical approach to analyze my selected texts. By using Lahiji's concept of "hyper-mediated cityscapes," I have highlighted the prominent features of hyper-mediation in the cityscapes of Mumbai and Karachi. I postulated that hyper-mediation has decentering/disconcerting effects on human consciousness as media technologies have reshaped the collective consciousness of people living in urban spaces. I triangulated my theoretical framework with Benjamin's concept of "phantasmagoria," Cassirer's notion of "mythic consciousness," and Bellquist theorization of Cassirer's definition of 'mythic consciousness' to study the phantasmagoria of hyper-mediated cityscapes and how characters in my selected novels construct their identities in the cityscapes infiltrated by media.

My research is interpretive and exploratory in nature. I have used Catherine Belsey's textual analysis as a research method to analyze my selected novels. My research has been non-generalizable and subjective in approach, and therefore, there are no fixed findings. As in preceding chapters, I have critically analyzed my selected novels, I will now try to explain whether the research questions have been answered and if my findings vindicate my thesis statement.

The theoretical framework deployed for this research has sufficiently supported the reading of texts in line with the initial research claims, and my textual analysis upholds the validity of my controlling questions. After my textual analysis, my research questions have almost become affirmative statements, though these statements are nongeneralisable. My first research question about prominent features of hyper-mediation in the selected texts now changes to an affirmative statement that *AFB and Kartography exhibit features of hyper-mediation in how characters experience the cityscapes through their interaction with media*. Similarly, after textual analysis, my second research question about evidence for phantasmagoria in the selected texts may be read as a declarative statement that *in contemporary South Asian cities, phantasmagoria is mediated by media and technology, and therefore it is significantly different from previous historical period*. Similarly, textual analysis answers and validates my third research question on how the mythic consciousness of characters is related to their construction of the self in the selected texts. Now this question has graduated to an affirmative position that *citizens' perception of and relationship with their cities are influenced by a mythic consciousness altered by media that overrides their individual experiences and desires*.

Through a textual analysis of my selected texts, I have come to some important findings. *AFB* and *Kartography* strongly exhibit features of hyper-mediation. My findings show that even the novels are set in the late twentieth century, when there is little or no access to media and the internet, the characters find themselves influenced by media. In *AFB*, the transformative powers of media can be seen in how the films and digital media shape the day-to-day activities of the characters. The influence of media is also observed in the architecture of the city. Through the process of beautification, the city undergoes a transformation. New building with highly equipped high-tech technologies and media. In addition, the government uses radio, television, and billboards to propagate narratives of their interest. In the same way, the characters in *Kartography* are constantly engaged in reading a newspaper. The media is their source of information during the critical time of violence and target killing in Karachi. Thus, the cityscapes represented in *AFB* and *Kartography* exhibit prominent features of hyper-mediation despite having the backdrop of the late twentieth century.

Similarly, while studying the hyper-mediated cityscapes of Mumbai and Karachi, my second finding shows that the phantasmagoria of South Asian cities is significantly different from that of European cities and previous centuries. By using Benjamin's concept of "phantasmagoria", I have analyzed that the phantasmagoria of Mumbai, as represented in the novel, is centered on sheer population and the coexistence of luxury buildings and people living in slums. The media representations such as advertisements on the billboards aid in the phantasmagoria of the city as it creates a hyper-real situation (see pp. 69, 70), one of the key features of phantasmagoria. The phantasmagoria of the city of Mumbai is also observed in its architecture as the newly constructed high-tech luxury building promotes commodity culture and digital capitalism. Similarly, in *Kartography*, the media presents the phantasmagoria of Karachi as a violent city through stifling headlines and images in newspapers. Also, the phantasmagoria of the interior space in the novel is also observed to be infused with media as the characters are relentlessly found in the living room with television and newspaper.

The use of Cassirer's concept of "mythic consciousness" and Bellquist explanation of Cassirer's concept of mythic consciousness alongside to study one's perceptions and experiences in the cityscapes is shaped by collective experiences proved to be very effective. I proposed, in my thesis statement, that hyper-mediation has significantly altered the mythic consciousness. My third finding shows that the way the citizens perceive and experience the cityscapes has altered considerably. In *AFB,* the physical, social, and cultural facets of Mumbai contribute to the mythic consciousness that the characters have in the hyper-mediated city and the mythic consciousness, in return, helps them in the construction of selves and identities. My analysis highlights how the characters conceive their identities in the hyper-mediated urban spaces. Similarly, in *Kartography*, characters' engagement with newspapers and maps shows how they collectively experience the violent cityscapes of Karachi and these experiences shape their identities.

In terms of the finding of this study, it is revealed that the cityscapes of South Asian cities are hyper-mediated. I have tried to substantiate my claim through the argument that the abundance of media in the cityscapes has a decentering effect on the characters' consciousness and the phantasmagoria (mental image) of the city. Therefore, their

construction of identities is highly mediated by media. The working definition of the hyper-mediated South Asian cityscapes I proposed in the theoretical framework stands vindicated through my analysis of the selected texts. That is how I have been able to intervene in the existing scholarship on urban literary studies. My focus on South Asian cities has offered me a vantage point to see how the concept of hyper-mediated cityscapes perpetuates the class divide that already exists there. Furthermore, Cassirer's definition of 'mythic consciousness' and Bellquist's useful insights have also helped me analyze characters' construction and reconstruction of self and create my interventionary space. By examining how characters engage with hyper-mediation in the cityscapes, and how their decisions, thoughts, and perceptions of the city are influenced, the analysis explores these experiences as contributing factors to the construction or reconstruction of their identities. Moreover, the ways in which characters view themselves within the larger structures of society are also highlighted in the analysis. I bring an end to my investigation hoping that it attracts further tangential research in the same domain.

Recommendations for Further Research

My research may pave the way for other literary works that deal with metropolitan cities and the experience of people living in these cities. There is not much of critical scholarships available on South Asian City fiction. City fiction has become an important component of contemporary literature as it deals with the experiences of individuals in the ever-changing cityscapes. The theoretical positions deployed in this study may be triangulated with some other lenses to study contemporary works dealing with the cityscapes of South Asia such as *Karachi, You're Killing me*! (2014) by Saba Imtiaz, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) by Arundhati Roy, *The Shadow Lines* (1988) by Amitav Ghosh, *The Romantics* (1999) by Pankaj Mishra. My intervention in the production of knowledge regarding this research project is that I have pointed out how South Asian cities in the late twentieth-century display features of hyper-mediation. This research may be a useful resource for critiques that aim to study mediated cityscapes of postcolonial South Asian cities and how media influences the characters' construction of identities. Moreover, a future researcher may also conduct a study in the context of emerging urban trends such as artificial intelligence and smart cities in novels such as Rana Dasgupta's

Solo (2009) and Krishna Udayasankar's *The Beast* by Amanda Hale to study how contemporary literature imagines the cities of tomorrow. In all humility, I state that my research project is likely to serve as a starting point for future research in the domain of city literature from South Asia and beyond.

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