CHAPTER II
LANDSCAPE AND
MINDSCAPE
This chapter engages with the conflicting meanings of landscape; its complex and nuanced representation in literature; a comparative analysis of the spatial constructions in the chosen novels. The changing conceptions regarding the role of geography in the understanding and formulation of identity, combined with the ‘spatial politics’ of diasporic texts makes it seminal that the spatial constructs within these texts be analyzed with respect to the delineation of stereotypical, radical or normative identity constructs. Mediated and interconnected spaces in these novels are studied as sites of contestation, of complex and often conflicting articulations of identity. In *The Shadow Lines* (*SL*) subjective space is of prime importance; *A Suitable Boy* (*ASB*) situated in a fictional town attempts to represent India through this microcosm; whereas in *Midnight’s Children* (*MC*) the cityscape of Bombay is projected as the ideal and desirable space.

There are antagonistic hypotheses about what characterizes the construction of landscape and its quintessence. Richard Hartshorne, a prominent American geographer who specialized in the philosophy of geography, dismissed landscape as the central organizing principal of geography, and supported instead a geographical science of space in which regions are mental constructions. At the same time landscape has been considered as being substantive (‘real’ rather than ‘apparent’), involving issues of environment, economics, law and culture (Olwig, 630). Literature, especially the novel form, provides the discursive space for the interplay and collation of these multiple meanings. While tracing the ‘shift’ from the primacy of geography to spatial constructs, the role of landscape in locating the literary texts within the current diasporic milieu is examined. Malcolm Bradbury, an English author and academic, observes in his *Atlas of Literature*, “[a] very
large part of our writing is a story of its roots in a place: a landscape, region, village, city, nation or continent (Intro.).” At the same time, literature also creates imaginary spaces that are not bounded by the limitations of experience or reality – figments of the imagination – devoid of any “reference towards geospace at all (Piatti & Hurni, 219).” Then again there are the in-between spaces that one can find having various degrees of transformed settings, spaces and places in fiction, but which are still linked to existing geospatial nodes. In the interstices of these in-between spaces numerous possibilities and meanings can be nuanced.

Mindscapes here imply geographies of the mind – a fluid and constantly shifting perspective of culture, home and belonging – determined more by the individual’s perceptions than by matters of origin, birth and lineage. Thus by imputation its lineaments would be subjective; which poses a problem so far as the cogency of projecting this subjective trajectory onto the general imagination of a group of peoples and cultures are concerned. Proclamations of a ‘borderless’ world or even one of diminishing borders would be premature, even blithesome ignorance in the face of a combination of global economic forces and political, religious and class/caste discrimination and persecution that has brought about migration on an unprecedented scale, from village to city, from one country to another, in fact indicating the unmitigatable significance of geography.
2.1 LANDSCAPE IN THE CONTEXT OF LITERATURE

Landscape is understood as being more perspectival than the objective term land. If land denotes sameness and constancy, landscape would typify inflectedness. The latter term denotes all the visible features of an area of land, often considered in terms of their aesthetic appeal. However, it is not understood to be a given here, rather it is constituted and structured by certain kinds of customs and habits. At the same time landscapes do not serve as ‘neutral’ arenas where social actions take place. It lends itself to a sense of attachment and ownership, thus having a bearing on identity. The Mexican poet, Octavio Paz, wrote:

A landscape is not just the description of what our eyes see but rather the revelation of what lies behind visual appearances. A landscape never refers only to itself, but to something else, something beyond—a metaphysics, a religion, a conception of humanity and the cosmos.

The cultural heritage of human habitation spanning many centuries, combined with the geography of the land creates the landscape, lending it an identity which is unique. The character and definitiveness of landscapes help shape the image of a region, the sense of place differentiates one region from another. It can be said to be the dynamic, rather than still, backdrop to people’s lives. At the same time people too do not just remain anchored in space, they claim it; mark it as their own, for example, in the gendering of spaces. Therefore, landscape is simultaneously created by human culture. The representation of landscape too is “not innocent of politics”. It is “deeply embedded in relations of power and knowledge” (Darby 2000: 9). Edward W. Said warns that “[i]mperialism after all is an act of geographical
violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control.” He notes that for “the native, the history of his or her colonial servitude is inaugurated by the loss to an outsider of the local place, whose concrete geographical identity must thereafter be searched for and somehow restored (Eagleton et al. 1990:77).”

There are irrefutable connections between imperialism, colonization and cartography. While cartographic representations of landscapes, both natural and cultural aided movement, navigation and control; contact with new places and cultures proliferated the cartographic convention albeit European in its point of view. Significantly ‘culture’ has been described as a map by Bourdieu in his analogy of an outsider trying to find his way around a foreign landscape with the help of a map, however at the same time lacking the practical mastery of a ‘native’. He states that:

The gulf between this potential, abstract space, devoid of landmarks or any privileged centre…and the practical space of journeys actually made, or rather of journeys actually being made, can be seen from the difficulty we have in recognising familiar routes on a map or town-plan until we are able to bring together the axes of the field of potentialities and the ‘system of axes linked unalterably to our bodies, and carried about with us wherever we go’, as Poincare puts it, which structures practical space into right and left, up and down, in front and behind. (Bourdieu 1977: 2)

This signals the importance of subjective or experiential space which to some extent subverts the traditional sense of geography and its significance especially in the context of dislocation or relocation. Wendy Joy Darby, author of Landscape and Identity, writes that “operating in a variety of registers, landscape becomes a focus for exploring criteria of inclusion and
exclusion because the social and cultural practices that structure the relationship of individuals with their landscape vary across contexts (9).”

Landscape thus is a valuable and ineluctable paradigm for forging, revising and even rewriting identities. The practice of charting landscapes has also been linked with the art of writing. Similar to the function of mapping is that of literature which etches out, describes or recreates spaces that constitute the orientation of the people associated with those spaces. Also as Robert T. Tally points out,

“Literature helps readers get a sense of the worlds in which others have lived, currently live, or will live in times to come. From a writer’s perspective, maybe literature provides a way of mapping the spaces encountered or imagined in the author’s experience.... stories frequently perform the function of maps. (2)

Just as stories weave a complex intertwining of imaginary relations so also maps purport to draw and depict ‘real’ spaces in their verisimilitude. In this sense writing is also a variant of ‘spatialization’.

2.2 PLACE AND SPACE

Space is understood to be more dynamic than place which is objectively definable and therefore stable. Space is connected with day to day practices and experiences, thereby providing itself as a framework that allows for the study of identity through mobility, intersecting points, displacement and resettlement, as also through understanding hierarchy and order in relations - such as those of subordination, marginalization, and participation within a community or society. In Henri Lefebvre’s words: “[t]he concept of space
links the mental and the cultural, the social and the historical’ (209). Thus, space is the confluence of places and practices to form meaningful relations. It carries social meanings articulated in contexts of continuities, links and conflicts, such as in the interconnections and interactions between home, the public, the city, and the national and transnational spaces to form layers of the spheres of belonging. The home or the city is not only defined in relation to the meanings of identity rather they also play multiple roles in the broader economic and cultural contexts of the local, the national and the transnational matrices.

There are various dimensions of ‘place’ that need to be dealt with in order to fully comprehend its role in identity construction. Firstly, place can be seen as a delimited area which groups of people territorialize, driven by their preconceived notion of self-identity. This is almost always associated with social control and assertion of power. The second aspect is that of attachments to a place that influence the development of self-identity. This is most pertinent in the case of re-location which follows from dislocation either forced or voluntary. Place, here is made up of more than just the geographical element of location because an individual links to it expressions of nostalgia or homesickness for the prior location, and this then influences the self or social character even in the present. In a fast urbanizing and globalizing world of increased communication networks, multiple migrations and porous borders the concept of space in cultural geographical terms has undergone a major shift. This ‘spatial turn’ can be an important episteme in analyzing postcolonial literary texts. It is Henri Lefebvre who is credited for the understanding of space as relativized and historicized. According to Lefebvre space is not something distinctive and
absolute. He proposes a ‘trialectics’ of spatiality that explores the entwining of cultural practices, representations and imaginations. Thereby, conceptualizing space as ‘made up’ through a three-way dialectic between perceived, conceived and lived space. A literary text can then be seen as a medium for exploring such dialectics. As a concept, therefore, space is understood as not just deductive of human existence and action, rather space, as Henri Lefebvre contends, is a metaphor for the very experience of social life. Central to Lefebvre’s theory are “human beings in their corporeality and sensuousness, with their sensitivity and imagination, their thinking and their ideologies; human beings who enter into relationships with each other through their activity and practice.” Thus, Lefebvre sees space as being both a result and a precondition of society. It provides for an essential context in literature. Narratives take place in landscapes, whether urban or rural, real or imagined. However, does the landscape call forth the words or do words give shape and meaning to the landscape? Landscape, as understood here, is definitely more than just scenery; it involves people and their interaction with the place. It is not merely descriptive rather it involves some sort of an ideology; something beyond what the eye beholds. In fact the mapping of landscapes or the lack of it can be connotative too. In Heart of Darkness the ‘blank’ spaces on a colonial map represents the lure for penetration and the resultant glories of exploration.

Gordon and Klein write about ‘Mapping’, a practice primarily that of the cartographer, as having become a key theoretical term in current critical discourse, and used to describe “a particular cognitive mode for understanding the world by synthesizing cultural and geographical information, and successfully navigating both physical and mental space.”
The use of this heuristic, ironically enough, is sometimes stretched to the extent where it ignores or even obliterates the distinction between the metaphorical and the real. Yet “both realms mutually determine each other (Gordon: 3).” A single glance at a map reveals neatly delineated frontiers implying territorial integrity as well as allegiance of the populations inhabiting those territories. However, maps are deceptive in that they show natural and political boundaries but leave unexplained the relationship between territory and the people. Maps enable the exercise of power but ignore its human consequences: “Although maps purport to accurately represent places, they actually produce ideological spaces, and in so doing ignore human experiences of spaces (Middleton and Woods 2000:282).” Even while they show the connections by path, rail, road and river between places, they imply the fixity of those connections, taking no account of the transience of territorial limits, of the porosity of borders. Maps seem to ossify territories bounded and separated by borders, at the same time it would be a sweeping generalization to say that borders are ‘imaginative’ or to call the world ‘borderless’.

Landscapes are giving way to ethnoscapes, mediascapes, ideoscapes, technoscapes, and finanscapes, but territoriality is still a central preoccupation for many people. (Rosenau 1997, 4)

In so far as the notion of a sense of attachment to place shapes identity then that identity is not something made up on our own but inevitably fabricated in dialogue with others. People are forced to remain in a state of flux and are required to constantly adapt themselves to changing landscapes. This is more so due to the transformative quality of cultural locations and geographies of the contemporary world. As a result of globalized economics, the
movements of individuals across socio-political boundaries have become frequent and normative. The dislocations and relocations of individuals in the present era are primarily fueled by prospects of material advancement, and are based on a reasonable element of choice. Yet it must be acknowledged that there are serious limitations that are posed on this ‘choice’. These hindrances engender a lot of ideological debate in the present socio-economic and literary milieu regarding the importance of frontiers—geographical, political, cultural—and whether they need to be crossed or abolished or if they even exist.

2.3 TEXTUAL GEOGRAPHIES
A disruption of the geography-centric understanding of territorial relationships can be read into Amitav Ghosh’s novel TSL. Through an elaborate and singular use of the trope of maps—‘a secret map of the world of which only I knew the keys and co-ordinates’—he subverts the science of neat cartographic divisions between people to underscore the acknowledgment of subjective space and the more significant connections therein. However, as Meenakshi Mukherjee points out, there is a “simultaneity of precision and illusion” throughout the novel. Thus, where on the one hand physical space is traversed through imagination, on the other the Bartholomew Atlas with its ‘tidy ordering of Euclidian space’ occupies a center space in the story. Tridib, the unnamed narrator’s cousin points out places in the Atlas and tells him stories about these places thus giving wings to the young boy’s cartographic imagination, with the help of which he travels to these far off locales—‘Tridib had given me worlds to travel in and he had given me eyes to see them with (SL, 20).’ Not only does the narrator transcend the time-space constrictions with the use of ‘precise
imagination’ but even vicariously experiences life in those places of Tridib’s stories; thereby adhering to his belief that ‘a place does not merely exist, [...] it has to be invented in one’s imagination (SL, 21).’ In fact space is variously depicted and explored in the novel through various significations such as rooms, houses, road names, airport lounges, and border areas, each acquiring a unique meaning over and above the obvious. As Mukherjee points out, “maps in this novel are not confined to the atlas.” So much so that crude floor plans drawn in the dust by children playing Houses have meaning enough to “provide a clue to past and future reality”; and town maps are memorized to such precision as to enable exact pinpointing of particular houses and streets— “He did not have to tell me where it [Solent Road] was. I knew already, for the map was in my head: down Sumatra Road, fourth turning to the right (SL 56).” Even though on reaching the site of ruin that Tridib had described so vividly to the narrator, and on not ‘seeing’ what he had heard of it from the story, he was hardly disappointed because it still existed in his ‘desire’ where the actual and the imagined co-exist harmoniously. Meenashi Mukherjee attributes this kind of “wishful ending” to a “romanticization of geography or an implicit bid to escape the colonial grid on which Europe mediates the world in the rhetoric of binariness (258).” The desire for and attempt to create idealistic spaces of humanist sentimentalization is replete in literature. The human will to transcend physical delimitations and move on to a realm where differences of all kinds have been extirpated completely is exemplified in the desire “to walk upon such an earth that had no maps,” in Michael Ondaatje’s novel The English Patient, ironically enough by a professional map-maker. Almasy’s dexterity and knowledge of maps become his nemesis. While he is an asset to the Germans, he is considered a threat by the opposing Allies because of
his potent knowledge of the geography of the land. He dies with the utopian dream of being “marked by nature, not just to label ourselves on a map.” The fluidity of space and being becomes poignant in the oneiric quality of his strange wish:

We die containing a richness of lovers and tribes, tastes we have swallowed, bodies we have plunged into and swum up as if rivers of wisdom, characters we have climbed into as if trees, fears we have hidden in as if caves. I wish for all this to be marked on my body when I am dead. (261)

There is the fear of lapsing into some kind of rhetorical rhapsody of humanism and altruism rather than the necessity of straddling cultural differences and dealing with predicaments in such rarefied writing. R. Radhakrishnan, professor of English at the University of California and a leading postcolonial theorist, lays forth in his book *Theory in an Uneven World*, the importance of bearing “the burden of unevenness” even while seeking a way out of it – remaining neither captive to the world as it is, nor naively credulous of visions of the world as it should be, while arguing for an “ethics of persuasion” that is firmly rooted in resistance. What has to be avoided is the situation where one version speaks for all, or where all the versions are “islands unto themselves”. He calls for ‘realities’ to imagine their own “discursive-epistemic space as a form of openness to one another’s persuasion”. With regard to such sensibility he alludes to Ghosh’s idea of ‘imagining with precision’ in *SL*, calling it neither ‘wildly capricious nor non-referential’, while deeming the novel as “theoretical and fictional within and about itself (60-61).” For Ghosh physically secured spaces like roofs and verandas can also take on multiple and fluid meanings. The ‘sloping roof of the Colombo house’, for example, becomes a site for cultural
production by acquiring a semiotic signification beyond its being an obvious architectural detail. It signifies a shift in the way of life for a boy who has never lived under such a roof (Mukherjee, 261). The boy ruminates what such a life would be like—‘no place to fly kites, nowhere to hide when one wanted to sulk, nowhere to shout across to one’s friends.’ These seemingly neutral yet fraught spaces baffle the narrator with ‘the mystery of difference’. Although the child-narrator grew up believing in the reality of spaces, he says:

I believed that distance separates, that it is a corporeal substance; I believed in the reality of nation and borders; I believed that across the border there existed another reality. The only relationship my vocabulary permitted between those separate realities was war or friendship. (SL 219)

As he matures, guided by the vision and tutelage of his cousin-mentor Tridib, the unnamed narrator-protagonist learns the ‘meaning of distance’ and the realization dawns on him that space and time are mere ‘shadows’. In the light of imagination they flee, leaving behind the corporal experience of reality which is continuous and seamless. Despite its careful chronology and topology, SL “happens” in all places at once, ruling out possibilities of ordered and exclusive narratives of space. According to Ghosh, the novel affords the writer infinite freedom to explore people and places with a richness and sense of context. “I think what’s appealing to me is that it doesn’t have any borders, you can really make it what you want” (Chambers 33). Stories in this novel are invented spaces created by an individual in order to be ‘free of other people’s inventions’, and they are granted as much credibility as the recorded meta-narratives of history.
Jurij M. Lotman understands text as a culture-specific code for space, and symbolic space in literature a result of culturally specific uses of signs. Lotman's concept of text allows literary texts to be read as media of cultural self-interpretation and symbolic models of spatial perception. The novel therefore is not only a representational space reflective of social reality but also constructs spatiality. Lotman alludes to this aspect of a literary text when he designates them as “secondary model building systems”. Fictive works of imagination as much as being products of perception also construct ‘a perception’; and as such are useful sources of knowledge. They are the landscape of thoughts as well as observations; and a reification of both the domain of the real and the imaginary.

Vikram Seth situates his novel TSB in the fictional town of Brahmpur located in the invented state of Purva Pradesh, however, the setting is quite easily seen to be an amalgam of the states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar with features typical of certain North Indian cities like that of Delhi, Agra, Kanpur, etc. The unfolding of the main story with all its chief characters and action occur in the city of Brahmpur, which is quite meticulously constructed, contrasted to the narrative that occurs in the scantily etched village of Debaria. The urban space negotiates growth and settlement through the vicissitudes of the political-social turmoil ongoing in a newly independent country, whereas the rural space remains stunted and with little hope for change even in the near future. Seth’s bid to present an all-encompassing panorama of the nation fails in his urban-bourgeois conception of a model that limits itself to only the northern half of the country. Not only does the microcosm over-reach in an attempt to represent the organic whole but even the individual space is shown to inflate into the
macrocosm of the universal. At the beginning of the novel, Lata Mehra, one of the central characters of the novel, is daydreaming during her sister’s wedding, musing on the small pyre in the middle of the ceremony:

…this little fire was indeed the centre of the universe. For here it burned, in the middle of this fragrant garden, itself in the heart of Pasand Bagh, the pleasantest locality of Brahmpur, which was the capital of the state of Purva Pradesh, which lay in the centre of the Gangetic plains, which was itself the heartland of India… and so on through the galaxies to the outer limits of perception and knowledge. (16)

This implausible extension is a result of what has been termed as the ‘level gaze’ of the author (Shukla, p. 43). Anita Desai writes in her review of the novel that Seth’s “intention was clearly to reproduce India on a scale in keeping with its history, its population, its diversity, and abundance of life.”

However, India is not just a geographically marked out neutral entity. It is ‘spatialized’ or constructed through cognitive literary-cultural symbols. The India that Seth etches out is one that is steeped in imbalances of various kinds yet managing only to maintain a semblance of continuing tradition and well-being represented by the primacy and sanctity of the familial space. Set in post-independence, post-partition India the novel covers the time-frame of early 1951 and April 1952; at a time when the country and its inhabitants were searching for a place in the world. The novel follows the story of four families over a period of 18 months as a mother searches for a suitable boy to marry her daughter, as the title of the book suggests. Lata is a 19-year-old college girl, vulnerable, yet determined to have her own way and not be influenced by her strong mother and opinionated brother, Arun. Her story revolves around the choice she is forced to make between her suitors- Kabir
(a Muslim cricketer), Haresh (a shoe businessman), and Amit (a poet-novelist). The novel, however, is not simply based on one (love) story. There are various narrative strands that unveil the diverse issues faced by post-independence India, including Hindu-Muslim strife, abolition of the Zamindari system, land reforms and changing ideas about nationalism in the wake of the country’s partitioning. The polity that Seth idealizes emerges through his exploration of these issues. Vikram Seth hailing from the upper-middle class, North-Indian background situates his novel in a similar (familiar) space. Being born to a middle/upper class family Lata is a member of the elite. She is brainy and her mother ensures that she gets a good education. In the 1950s most Indian girls could not even dream of the prospects Lata had before her. Yet she chooses to go by the book and bow down to the ‘great God Family’. Torn between two worlds – her family’s traditional world on the one hand and a new world of freedom and abandon with friends like Malati on the other – she abides by tradition and marries the boy of her mother’s choice in spite of being in love with another. Her choice is representative of middle class conformism and can be mapped onto the conformist nationalist ideals engrained in the novel.

Pointing out the metaphorical correspondence between land and text in his survey of Romantic Anthology as Environment, Thomas Hothem writes that ‘associations between land and text highlight emergent poetics of place.’ Sometimes the landscape seems impenetrable to understanding as well as language, this can be attributed to the writer’s lack of familiarity with the topos and history of the land. Most stories explore the territories between public and private, between past and future, between real and imagined, but most importantly between space and subjectivity. Connections can be made
between the layers of physical, social and imaginative space. Most importantly postcolonial literatures document and represent “the power politics of cartography and territorial conquest or of the unfolding of multiple histories in a given location” (Spearey 2000: 158). One such paradigmatic location is the port city of Bombay (now Mumbai). In Salman Rushdie’s novel Midnight’s Children infinite possibilities of post-colonial India are embodied in the ‘highly-spiced non-conformity’ of Bombay. Towards the beginning of his story Saleem recalls an old rhyme about Bombay: “Prima in Indis/Gateway to India/Star of the East/With her face to the West” (102). The city is cosmopolitan, multicultural, teeming with contradictions and ever-growing. Attempting to assimilate its outlook towards the ‘outside’/ ‘West’ with its roots securely anchored at home ‘inside’ the nation, the city of Bombay’s location mirrors the aspirations of a host of postcolonial Indian writing in English. Its polarities and ‘mongrel’ multitude provide numerable possibilities for socio-political encounters of varying vicissitudes. As Sudipta Kaviraj writes:

Democracy in the decades after Independence…had a clearly marked space of residence…. The city of Bombay and Calcutta, par excellence had that mysterious quality, liberating and contaminating at the same time. (149)

Taking into consideration its sizeable population of the marginalized and minority communities, Bombay provides its writers a tangential vision with regard to exploring questions of nation and Indianness. The city, called by any name— ‘Mumbadevi, Mumbabai, Mumbai’— is home to Rushdie and he claims that “before I even knew the idea of the story, I had the idea of wanting to write about Bombay (Reder, 18).” Even “the whole of reality” that the novel is trying to portray is understood in terms of the city of
Bombay—the over-crowded, bursting-at-the-seams city of Bombay (75).” According to Stuti Khanna, “This is what constitutes the artist’s paradox: the city’s teeming realities are a vital artistic resource, at the same time as they threaten to crush the artist underfoot.” The artist’s anxiety and urgency surrounding the telling of his story is compared to the hustle and bustle of the crowded city. The “multitudes [of stories] jostling and shoving” inside Saleem are comparable to the multitudinous city crowds, the “people people” that make up the “rainbow riot of the city” (9, 297). Thus, Khanna writes, “It is as if the book is the loose baggy monster it is because it is a book about the city of Bombay (25).” In an interview with Alistair Niven, Rushdie said:

One strategy that was deliberately adopted in [MC] was deliberately to tell, as it were, too many stories, so that there was a jostle of stories in the novel and that your main narration . . . had to kind of force its way through the crowd, as if you were outside Churchgate station trying to catch a train . . . There are simply so many stories going on that it would be absurd, I thought, to tell just one. (54)

Clearly the experience of the city goes a great length in actually defining the narrative strategy of the novel.

The symbolic significance that spatial constructs take on in the novel is revealed in the facial profile of Saleem Sinai, the novel’s protagonist, resembling the map of India. He is inextricably linked to the nation in every which way, right from the hour of birth to his ultimate destiny; they are chained together by virtue of their temporal-historical existence together in this space. The Prime Minister Nehru himself sends Saleem a congratulatory message of recognition:
Dear Baby Saleem, my belated congratulations on the happy accident of your moment of birth! You are the newest bearer of that ancient face of India which is also eternally young. We shall be watching over your life with the closest attention; it will be, in a sense, the mirror of our own. (167)

As he begins school, Saleem is teased by his teachers with regards his face resembling the map of India: ‘Thees is human geography! In the face of this ugly ape don’t you see the whole map of India?’ Places perform an important function in MC in that they do not merely serve as backgrounds for the unfolding of the narrative. As exemplified by the role that the heterogeneous city of Bombay plays in mapping the pullulating diversity of the nation, other places too acquire significant roles in assisting the author’s strategy of narrativizing the nation in its multiplicity and by drawing up certain striking contrasts. The state of Kashmir, Pakistan and the Sundarbans are important locations within the novel that are both politicized and contextualized.

The story of Saleem begins in Kashmir, thirty two years before his birth when his grandfather Adam Aziz treats Naseem who becomes Saleem’s grandmother. Therefore, the contentious politics of the place lays the seeds of Saleem’s troubles by his ancestral linkages and his inheritance (he even had his grandfather’s nose). No wonder then that the novel expresses a degree of wariness with respect to genealogy. Ahmad Sinai, Saleem’s father, becomes the victim of his own invented linkage to Mughal dynasty (MC 110). As Anna Guttman points out, “In demonizing this fascination with origins, the novel implicitly celebrates miscegenation and points to the dangers of any obsession with purity” (65). Thus
too in Pakistan, the land of the pure, Saleem loses his power of telepathy (by inverse logic, India as a happy contrast must be hybrid-impure). Pakistan is the place of Saleem’s exile that cuts him off from the Midnight Children’s conference because of losing his telepathic powers, endowing him in lieu of it, a newfound strength of the enhanced sense of smell. But all he ever smells there are the rancid economic imbalances and the staleness of religious fanaticism. The third country revisited by the novel briefly is Bangladesh. The swamp of Sunderbans is portrayed as a phantasmagoric forest of horrors, thereby allowing the author to ‘perform a descent into hell’ (Reder, 37). Although Saleem’s family history stems from Kashmir, he remains disconnected from Kashmir: “in our house, we were infected with the alienness of Kashmiri blood” (Rushdie 101). When Saleem’s family moves to Karachi, Pakistan, Saleem describes how he “never forgave Karachi for not being Bombay,” and how he sought the “highly-spiced nonconformity of Bombay” (352). In Karachi, as his family wanted to “become new people” because, “in the land of the pure [Pakistan], purity became our ideal”. Yet Saleem resists and remains “forever tainted with Bombayness” (Rushdie 355). He associates this “Bombayness” with “nonconformity,” believing that the essence of Bombay remains in the city’s resistance to becoming a uniform mass of people, but instead, combining various cultural groups and peoples together into one area, allowing their interactions to become the mainstay of his narrative. However, the fact remains that all cities, no matter their location, combine a smorgasbord of peoples and cultures together and attempt to ‘fit’ them into the urban-multicultural location-identity. This “authenticity” which Saleem craves to deem as “Bombayness,” the diversity and multiplicity of the city, consists of the same qualities which make up most city-cultures. Yet Saleem
clings to this idea that all Bombay citizens share this “Bombayness,” seeking authenticity and ironically enough, uniformity in a singularly hybrid identity of location.

2.4 BORDERS AND BOUNDARIES

The impulse for imaginative reconstruction of the cityscape is rooted in the relationship between historical memory and the search for identity. More than revealing the geo-political reality of the landscape these narratives reveals the creators’ aesthetic and ideological preoccupation. The impetus to destabilize the reified boundaries of nationalist discourse and the misguided conception of identity and cultures as fixed and homogenous systems is a recurrent theme in both Rushdie’s and Ghosh’s works. According to Sharmani Patricia Gabriel, in her article *The Heteroglossia of Home*, it is the espousal of heteroglossia and its corollary of “routes”, the practices of crossing, exchange, and interaction that enable the conception of natural and cultural systems as being in a dynamic state of change, mobility and movement (42). The construction and consolidation of difference and hybridity is central to the idea of the borderline in nationalist discourse. The very idea of ‘border’ entails separating entities and the notion of binary opposition. *SL* rejects as separatist, inimical, alienating and ultimately self-defeating the binary logic of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ espoused in the nationalist construction of boundaries. The novel critiques the very idea of boundaries. Tha’mma, who puts all her faith in real borders that they have ‘drawn in blood’ and in the singular exclusive identity of the entity thus created, is perplexed to see that there is no border line between India and East Pakistan.
Where’s the difference then?” she asks, “and if there is no difference both sides will be the same; it will be just like it used to be before . . . What was it all for then—Partition and all the killing and everything—if there isn’t something in between? (SL 15)

Her idea of the nation’s identity and its recognition springs from its ‘imagined’ hostility to those across the border. No wonder then that this revelatory loss of her “special enchantment in lines” (SL 233) gradually leads her to self-doubt, even instability. Her grandson, however, discovers that borderlines are culturally contingent. This fuels his imaginative understanding of (trans)nationalism. He perchance engages in a sort fantasmatic cartographical exercise with an atlas and an old rusty compass, embarking on a sojourn across countries only to discover that Chiang Mai in Thailand is spatially closer to Calcutta than New Delhi, Chengdu in China is nearer than Srinagar is. He was baffled by his discovery of the ‘special enchantment of lines’ as he tried to ‘learn the meaning of distance’. The revelations do not stop at mere enchantment, rather he begins an exploration of the utter provisionality of space that weaves almost seamlessly in the story along with the struggle to give life and lend veracity to his memory within the constraints posed by the precepts of received history. The mapping of memory therefore operates in relation to history in much the same way as the imagination of place operates in relation to the borders of nations. The novel describes the rioting that broke out in Calcutta and Dhaka, in response to the disappearance of the holy relic of the Prophet’s hair in Hazratbal in Kashmir. Tridib’s death at the hands of this rioting mob only reiterates the existence of identical realities across territorial borders which were meant to mark out and separate communities that were
supposedly different, but what turn out to be ‘looking-glass borders’ that serve to create mere mirages of otherness; and that the segregationist politics at play behind the formation of the nation-state does not entail cultural separatism. There will always be some ‘other thing’ that will connect these cultures one way or the other. Ironically, the state-sanctioned violence at the borders—‘defensive’ wars—that putatively ensure safety and sovereignty of the people residing within these demarcations, becomes a mockery in the face of internecine riots; subverting the very logic behind the establishment of borders.

Rioting mobs and the disorder they ensue have to be understood as instruments that challenge the spatial and political boundaries of power. Bell & Porter argue that “in the imaginative space of a literary text, the historically situated nature of the events that are mediated there is transposed into an ahistorical discourse of ‘the riot’.” Further, they insist on the importance of investigating any attempts on the part of the text to strategize a “containment whereby the real conditions of disempowerment and disorder are restricted to an imagined and controlled world (vii-viii).” Something of such a strategy can be detected in Seth’s uncanny portrayal of a Hindu-Muslim riot resonant with the real incident that took place at Ayodhya in 1992. Ayodhya is actually referred to by name in the novel. Where a mosque stood in this town, it was contended was the birthplace of Ram and from time to time disputes would flare up over the contentious site. The outcome of the clash portrayed in Seth’s story is quite different from the actual incidence of rioting that culminated in the demolition of the mosque. When Seth was asked about his prescience in describing an incident very similar to the Ayodhya affair he answered,
It was a most unhappy prefiguration of events. The mosque and the temple theme was not so big when I wrote it a few years ago. That it should have come to this is unimaginable. (Woodward)

In the valorization of the role played by the Muslim constable in fighting off the frenzied mob, Seth has tried to glorify the situation and countermine its effects, as also dispense with the need to deal with underlying causes by representing it as easily tameable within the controlled ordering of the mimetic world. Where references to religious prejudices have been made in the novel, they remain unresolved and entrenched without further discussion or engagement. For example, in the portrayal of the unease that some Muslims and Hindus still felt for each other, a long time post-independence. Although the nation-state prided itself in being a secular state, honouring all religions and all types of people, it was difficult for the millions who were displaced and had witnessed violence and brutality to forget and forgive. The wounds were still raw:

She [Mrs. Veena Tandon] had been willing to tolerate talking to the Nawab Sahib though he was a Muslim, but when he mentioned comings and goings from Pakistan, it was too much for her imagination. She felt ill. The pleasant chatter of the garden in Brahmpur was amplified into the cries of the blood-mad mobs on the streets of Lahore, the lights into fire. (21)

Borders and boundaries are a persistent reality both within and without the delimited territory of the nation-state, in spite of the claims of the state and notwithstanding expanding cross-cultural interactions and networking. Ansi Passi, in his paper on border studies, points out that “the state is still a
crucial organizer of territorial spaces and creator of meaning for them, even though these spaces are becoming increasingly porous,” adding that “borders should not be seen solely as phenomena located at the ‘edges’ of territories but rather ‘all over’ territories, in innumerable societal practices and discourses.” The dissolution of boundaries is virtual and far removed from ground realities such as those of cross-border tensions and violence. The enclosure of a territory inhabited by people with similar ‘racial, historical and linguistic connections’ within political and cultural boundaries creates the nation. These boundaries act as demarcations to determine the belonging or non-belonging of people who reside both within and outside the nation state. However, the territory that divides the citizen and the outsider is messy. As a leading political geographer, Peter Taylor suggested, ‘A world of sovereign states is a world divided by boundaries’ (164), and he traced the rise of this situation to the beginning of the twentieth century. Though imperative for the politics of statehood these divisions create hierarchy and distinctions. They have even been regarded as “regressive and, in a way, as ‘optical illusions’ associated with the power relations embedded in the cartographic legacy of measuring location on the basis of geographical distance and territorial jurisdiction (Amin, 103).” In order to understand the phenomenology behind the persistence of boundaries and borders it is important to foreground the movement and displacement of individuals and/or groups, its causes and repercussions. Borders invent, divide, or redefine socio-political unity and individual identity; they sometimes contain and at others reject linguistic, ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity within geographical and political boundaries. They function to delimit, contain and separate, to exclude and include. Yet the very phenomenon of borders lends itself to questions of traversing these borders. Assumptions of deterioration
of the borders and boundaries of the nation-state are problematic since it challenges the very legitimacy of representation across transnational communities and subverts the importance of difference in cultural identities. Moreover, decline of national distinctions may also lead to strengthening of ethnic, religious or other differences. This results in increase and consolidation of different types of distinctions and boundaries, and by creating the ‘us’ and the ‘Other’ become the basis of socio-spatial identities. Scholars like Gupta and Ferguson reject understanding a border in terms of “a fixed topographical site between two other fixed locales (nations, societies, cultures),” and instead view it as an “interstitial zone of displacement and deterritorialization that shapes the identity of the hybridized subject,” going to the extent of calling borders as “the normal locale of the postmodern subject.” Borders are everywhere, even within the boundaries of a nation-state, and it is becoming increasingly essential to map their proliferation and dissemination throughout social, political and economic spaces in order to reckon with the changing conditions of lived space. Physical location is not the only grid on which cultural difference can be mapped. Within a contiguous physical location there are multiple grid points of differentiation such as religion, class, gender, race, etc. which become important markers of distinctions that far from being disregarded are essential tenets of everyday existence; and which lead to the creation of what Arjun Appadurai calls “disjunctive landscapes” which are radically different from “state-centered territorializations of power and identity.” In her book *Cartographies of Diaspora*, Avtar Brah defines ‘borders’ as “arbitrary dividing lines that are simultaneously social, cultural and psychic” (1996: 198). The conception of a borderless world is only wishful thinking that poses as quite elusive because as A.N.Kaul writes, it “ends up attributing
value and a higher reality to a sort of amorphous romantic subjectivity.”
Thamma’s life of displacement and dislocation posits itself as a problem with regards to this purportedly smooth movement across ‘looking-glass-borders’ and their easy transformation into shadow lines. Thus, Kaul’s accusation of SL having “no sense of negotiating—much less of having to cross —barriers” follows from its failure to recognize or value separate cultural or national realities, believing in the uniform humanity of all peoples. Kaul here posits a scathing rejoinder in response to Ghosh’s idealistic humanist stance:

…it will seem a bitter, mocking truth to that mass of mankind whose lives are riven everywhere by the operation of such divisive forces as racism, imperialism, and class exploitation. (301)

This comes as a caveat against the pitfalls of an escapist route that is disregardful of a sizeable yet discounted population.

MC on the other hand flags off with Aadam Aziz’s progression from Kashmiri to Kashmiri Indian, in keeping with its championing of an inclusive Indian nation. His experiences and injuries at the Amritsar Massacre in 1919 produce an allegiance to the multiplicitous but united Indian nation attempting to resist British rule. He says, “I started off as a Kashmiri and not much of a Muslim. Then I got a bruise on the chest that turned me into an Indian.” He perceives ‘the narrowness, the proximity of the horizon,’ (MC, 47, 5) and taking after a Nehruvian vision, valorizes a multiple, hybrid community that comprises diverse regions, including Kashmir. However, political events such as the language riots in late 1950s Bombay sabotage the Nehruvian dream from being fulfilled. Instead a
compromise has to be made in order to deal with subnational forms of identity. In the light of the partition of the State of Bombay into Maharashtra and Gujarat in 1960, Bombay’s earlier representation as an exemplary site of the diversity and cultural hybridity cherished by the author who once wrote that ‘[t]he selfhood of India is so capacious, so elastic, that it manages to accommodate one billion kinds of difference,’ is completely shattered. Saleem calls Bombay ‘a mouth, always open, always hungry, swallowing food and talent from everywhere else in India’ (MC, p.172), and his descriptions of the city of his childhood are filled with exhilaration at the vividness and diversity of life and sensations to be found there, but (as Rushdie’s later novels powerfully remind us) the city is also a site for communal rivalries. A good portion of Saleem’s childhood is set against a backdrop of ‘language riots’ (MC, 265) between Marathi and Gujarati speakers, each demanding a state of their own. He is even at the center of one in which ‘fifteen [were] killed, [and] over three hundred wounded’ (MC, 265). These riots present a challenge to Nehruvian political pluralism and the ideals of a sanctimonious nation. If even the State of Bombay, at the centre of which stands the nation’s most diverse city, cannot maintain its spatial political form, then what hope is there for the nation as a whole, which contains an even greater plethora of racial and religious affinities? Despite an early sympathy with the idea of ‘keeping Bombay out of the control of a single language group’, the riots coerced Nehru, and he saw that compromising on the issue of Bombay State would benefit its people in the long run. Rushdie juxtaposes the language riots with the flowering of Saleem’s telepathy:
In 1956, then, languages marched militantly through the daytime streets; by night, they rioted in my head. [...] The voices babbled in everything from Malayalam to Naga dialects, from the purity of Lucknow Urdu to the Southern slurrings of Tamil. (MC, 231-2)

Eventually, he learns to communicate on a mental rather than verbal plane:

Only later, when I began to probe, did I learn that below the surface transmissions [...] language faded away, and was replaced by universally intelligible thought-forms which far transcended words. (MC, 233)

Rushdie’s celebration of diversity and multiplicity of the nation in the novel is undermined by the failure of the MCC to cohere, suggesting an acknowledgement that this exhilarated conception of the nation is at odds with the reality of what happens when people of such diverse creeds and backgrounds are imagined to exist in harmony.

2.5 MINDSCAPE

Homi Bhabha’s trenchant assertion that, “The globe is shrinking for those who own it; for the displaced or the dispossessed, the migrant or the refugee; no distance is more awesome than the few feet across borders or frontiers (1996: 321),” though nihilistic may not be far from reality. Yet boundaries have to be understood, as Ansi Passi states, in terms of being both ‘institutions’ and ‘symbols’. Globalization has at most only altered the selective (privileged) demography in which states operate within the persisting limits of territoriality. Whilst debunking the myth of globalization having brought about any iconoclastic changes in the power politics operating across borders, it would be useful to recall what Hirst and
Thompson remind that the bulk of the world’s population still live in “closed worlds” and are “trapped by the lottery of their birth”. Furthermore, in a country like India that has a history of migrations of indentured labourers; mass migrations during the post-partition period and continues to deal with internal migrations such as the influx of people into its burgeoning cities from the villages; the switchover from the primacy of geography cannot be an easy one. Privileging the mindscape must be at the cost of sweeping generalizations that are disregardful of multifarious subject positions.

The colonial espousal of divisionary politics followed by the birth-pangs of the new nation during the post-independence period was accompanied by the angst of the new order taking over the old, and the ensuing tensions which were already borne out in the ghastly massacre that took place across borders. There were diverse reactionary outbursts ranging from condemnation and lament to disillusionment and disapproval towards the seat of power. These feelings found their way to a lot of literature of those times. This lengthy exposition is duly in place in order to come to grips with the ‘nativist’ approach of some writers’ assertions like Ayyappa Paniker stating that, “to be Indian, [the writer] has to be rooted somewhere in India, geographically, historically, socially or psychologically” (11). On the other hand, as Edward Said contends, “If there is anything that radically distinguishes the imagination of anti-imperialism, it is the primacy of the geographical in it (1990: 77).” Therefore a rejection of this primacy over the importance of an altruistic humanity is the mainstay of any counter-imperialistic agendas. Nevertheless, the significance of spatial politics cannot but be ignored, especially in the context of identity formation, and has to be dialectically delineated since as Michel Foucault states:
The present epoch will be perhaps above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and the far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein. One could perhaps say that certain ideological conflicts animating present-day polemics oppose the pious descendants of time and the determined inhabitants of space. (2008: 14)

The chequered history of colonialism engendered a postcolonial re-vision of ‘space’ in the writing being produced in India being bisected into the two belligerent groups— regional and English— calling into question issues of representation. The social mobility of the post-Independence population accompanied by the fast pace of technology in the various spheres of life has envisioned ‘space’ as being beyond physical or geographical boundaries. Straddling the interface between the past and the present is the generation of writers who attempt to re-look the social-political system from a different perspective, in the face of issues of authenticity.

Amitav Ghosh attempts to engage, even if at the surface, with the limits of essentialist nationalism and barriers to an empathetic approach across territorial borders. However, the novel’s engagement does not eventuate at a fruitful or viable solution as much as a strategy for surviving through the issues at hand. TSL’s unwillingness to engage with separate subjectivities is due only to its longing for an ethical inter-subjective space. In that sense it cannot be said to be reinforcing the Western notion of an individual subject.
or consciousness through which the world is realized. As Meenakshi Mukherjee has observed, although the narrator appears to be a "lucid reflector", he also functions as an "agentive site" for other lives (and for other spatial versions, for that matter):

The transparency of the unnamed and undescribed narrator lets different persons, events, places luminously enter his story, and find new configuration there; or, altering the metaphor, it is possible to see the narrator’s consciousness as a porous space that absorbs other lives and other experiences until they leak into each other to reveal a pattern. (Mukherjee 2000, 140)

The ‘yoking by violence’ together of a disparate group of peoples is questioned in the face of violent outbreaks and riots. At the same time Ghosh’s cultural creativity stemming from a syncretic approach, compelling as it is in its tolerant and humanist articulation, has been problematized by several critics. Gauri Viswanathan points out that Ghosh’s stance on broad humanity or inter-community solidarity effaces the particularities of competing groups in that “the formative energy of identity and community gradually dissipates and is replaced by frozen icons of communal solidarity.” In a cogent observation, Viswanathan argues:

If I have been proposing that the syncretism of Ghosh’s narrative voice is analogous to Matthew Arnold’s culture, I have done so to suggest that the only way both culture and syncretism have been able to deal with difference is by amalgamating difference to a totalizing, homogeneous whole. As Arnold’s ideal culture effaces class differences, so Ghosh’s syncretism denies the historical reality of religious difference. That is why no matter how moving Ghosh’s book might be, and no matter how appealing his humanist call for
dissolving barriers between nations, peoples, and communities on the grounds that world civilizations were syncretic long before the divisions introduced by the territorial boundaries of nation-states, the work cannot get beyond nostalgia to offer ways of dealing with what is, after all, an intractable political problem.

The sentimental resolution of the novel earns it a lot of flak for being banal. *MC* and *ASB* have been pitted against each other in terms of structure, use of language, translatability, treatment of historicity to mention a few, to end in a repudiation of both, in some cases, for being on the obverse sides of the same registers. While Seth has been criticized for his “minute realistic details”, Rushdie was picked apart for his “delights in fantasy”. In spite of his “uneventful” and “unextraordinary” (Narasimhaiah, 246) portrayal of India, Seth has also been lauded for a “strong sense of state” and “a responsible and located cosmopolitanism”. Similarly, Rushdie too has been debated from being the torchbearer of a hybridized notion of Western subjectivity, to his rootedness in the landscape of a radically secular Bombay and the experiences emerging therein (Srivastava, 168).

Whether by choice or by compulsion, geographic dislocation necessitates major readjustments and transformations in the spatial poetics of an individual’s identity. The mapping of these spatial nodes can reveal a pattern of representation and channelize a nuanced understanding of these novels with respect to the coercive forces at work behind the constructs.