Chapter 6
Conclusion

The investigation into "Breaking of the Laws of Love, Land and Language: Meena Alexander's Fault Lines and Nampally Road and Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things" leads to the following conclusions:

Regulatory laws are part of every society civilized or uncivilized. Laws set up borders, which define safe limits from unsafe ones. A border is a dividing line. Borders and boundaries are never static though they are intended to be so, but we always find them in a state of transition. People who inhabit the borderlands are those who are constantly questioning their limits. Laws, they say, are meant to be broken and the protagonists of Meena Alexander and Arundhati Roy belong to this group who refuse to occupy a single territory of geographical or psychic space. These characters are borderland inhabitants and as such can be considered to be law-breakers and transgressors. Some of the characters, especially the female ones, break laws to such an extent so as to transgress those limits that ensure safety, acceptance, and even friendship. They seem to be standing at the interstices of sites that offer transgressional potentials, interrogational possibilities and a capacity to produce a different order.
Generic boundaries have collapsed into blurred or mixed genres—memoirs and autobiographical fiction. The aesthetics of narrative rhetoric is closely bound up with the autobiographical. The autobiographical text becomes a narrative artifice, privileging a presence, an identity that does not exist outside language. It has also been noticed that it is from the point of view of this identity that the narration proceeds. C. Michael Sprinkler’s view in his Essay “Fictions of the Self: The End of Autobiography,” in Autobiography: Essays, Theoretical and Critical, when he says “no autobiography can take place except within the boundaries of a writing where concepts of subject, self, and author collapse into the act of producing a text” (342), has relevance here. In both Alexander and Roy, we have seen how, in the creation of the narration, the narrative structure is in a way determined by the narrative time where the past and future are constantly impinging upon the present from wherein the stories are fabricated out of memory and imagination leaning heavily on fantasy.

Love, sexuality and gender get problematized in the writings of Alexander and Roy. Any discussion of these factors automatically engenders a discussion on the culture of that society and the laws within that culture that governs these aspects. It also brings into focus the power games played by the members of these cultural and social groups. It is generally believed that love is the noblest of all passions when practised within the prescribed limits. But when it crossed the barriers laid down by society it could spell doom to the
lovers and cause innumerable heart-aches and a lot of unpleasantness to all those connected with the lovers and could also set up a chain of disastrous consequences in the body politic. Also interrogated are the accepted notions of love, sexuality and gender, which project these aspects as having rather limited scopes. The Lacanian perception that desire arises from a sense of lack that yearns for completion, only to discover that such longing can never be fulfilled, has application here and in the course of this study it has sometimes been felt as David Lurie feels in Coutzee's *Disgrace*, “That desire is a burden we could well do without (90).” But then it is also well-known that life would be impossible without desire and longing. Another factor that gets highlighted is the almost unbearable tension between a culturally sanctioned femininity and female imaginative power. It has been established that both Alexander and Roy have in their writings moved away from the patriarchal traditions wherein the woman was always self-effacing, submissive and without a mind of her own. Their women are strong characters who not only take their own decisions but also are willing to own the responsibility for their actions. This study also shows how postcolonial texts can avoid being seduced into eurocentric values as they have been located in female experiences in the specific, socio-cultural contexts in which they have been produced and received, and the way in which the positionality of the female postcolonial writer and the authenticity of her awareness of female subalternity, produces a counter hegemonic
discourse that can seek to dismantle the metropolitan canons governing the categories of imperialistic, patriarchal culture. In their texts Alexander and Roy have shown how in such cultures when male power and prestige are at stake, the lives and happiness of women and children (and the lower classes/castes) are immaterial, and femininity is often represented as problematic, disruptive presence within the phallocratic social order.

In both Alexander and Roy 'home' plays a very pivotal role. It has been seen how home beckons the protagonists toward itself. It is the memory of the homes — good or bad ones --- that make up the fabric of these narratives. The word 'home' is packed with connotative and denotative meanings and significance. 'Home' is often connected with self-identity and self-worth and spaces such as homelands, ancestral homes, adopted homelands etc. generate a variety of emotional responses in the people associated with these. Homes could be warm and supportive places radiating love and affection and also places where one receives corrective instruction. 'Homes' could also be the memory of dear and near ones. But they could also become symbolic of physical, psychic and ideological spaces, which serve as potentially subversive and manipulative sites. We also see how 'home' and 'exile' could be juxtaposed, when home can mean safety and comfort while exile may spell alienation and loss, but there is also the possibility as suggested by Said in his essay "Mind of Winter," the two concepts can often be ironically reversed
with home becoming a place of endangerment and loneliness while exile may offer safer alternatives and freedom of thought and action. But whenever a border crossing was involved and when one is settled in a foreign country, like in the cases of Sandhya in *Manhattan Music* or Meena in *Fault Lines* or even Rahel in *The God of Small Things*, married to Larry McCaslin, going to live in America with him as his newly wedded wife — a crossing over into the hitherto unknown geographical and psychic spaces results. This always makes the border crossers feel as though they are situated on the edge. Immigration and the fiction it engenders teach a certain detachment about 'home.' In the primary texts chosen for this study, identity is linked only hypothetically, and through hyphenation, to a specific geographical place on the map. And yet, being at the margins of another culture, does not signify unlimited freedom of movement nor does it guarantee the freedom to recreate at will. Here the association between an adequate self and a place to call home is held up to critical examination and then let go. As postmodern and postcolonial subjects, we surprise ourselves with our detachment to the things we have been brought up to be attached to. One of the chief features of postcolonial writings that figures prominently in the writings of Alexander and Roy is the concern with place and displacement, which is so closely connected to another postcolonial crisis namely the question of identity. The study analyzes how, as stated in *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literature*,
“the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place” (Bill Ashcroft et al. 8) has taken place -- how a valid and active sense of self may have been eroded by dislocation, resulting from a sense of ‘not belonging,’ or migration or uprootedness from a place.

Language becomes a feminist as well as a postcolonial issue and speech and silence turns into powerful metaphors in the discourses of Alexander and Roy. Here a kind of acute consciousness is at work. This acute consciousness is needed to transform the English language, in order to use it in a different way in its new context of postcolonial writing by third world writers, so as to “make it bear the burden” of their experience. (James Baldwin as quoted in Achebe 1975: 62)

Both Alexander and Roy, in order to escape from the implicit body of assumptions to which English is attached, its aesthetic and social values, the formal and historically limited constraints of genre and the oppressive political and cultural assertion of metropolitan dominance of centre over margin, have changed the English language by proper appropriative usage of its forms and methods into a distinct and unique form of English. In doing so, they have been able to interrogate and subvert the imperial cultural formations. That is, they have both seized the language of the centre and replaced it in their writings as a language fully adapted to their lands, their cultures and their experiences as women from the third world. The
language variance in these texts become profoundly metonymic of cultural differences and the result of this is like what Bill Ashcroft et al claim:

The variance itself becomes the metonym, the part which stands for the whole. That ‘overlap’ of language which occurs when texture, sound rhythm, and words are carried over from the mother tongue to the adopted literary form, or when the appropriated English is adapted to a new situation, is something which the writer may take as evidence of his ethnographic or differentiating function – an insertion of the truth of culture.

Such language use seems to be keeping faith with the local culture and transporting it into the new medium. Thus the untranslated words, the sounds and the textures of the language can be held to have the power and presence of the culture they signify – to be metaphoric in their ‘influence of identity and totality.’

(The Empire Writes Back 52-53)

One particular fact that is noticed is that this discarding of glossing in the postcolonial texts of Alexander and Roy has in a way released language from the myth of cultural authenticity and has brought out the relevance of the situating context to help the reader construct and negotiate meaning. The untranslated words remain
metonymic, revealing all the experiential gaps which are central to any cross-cultural text, and the choice of leaving words untranslated in postcolonial texts becomes a political act as it posits as much if not a higher significance and social status to the language and culture of the writers. Both Alexander and Roy use a language that can effectively convey the responses of women and recount the tales and experiences of the shadows, fears, anguish, the dark and little known corners of women’s lives besides their various joys, elations and fulfillments.

Thus the analysis reveals that the texts chosen for this study enact ethnographic descriptions of the ways a gendered body is addressed intimately by history, culture, age and class. They also show how silence becomes a marker of women’s agency. Another aspect that has been considered is the ways in which the identities of the self are related to the mechanics of memory, and the relevance of the past. The edgy use of irony which can leave the readers nervous about how to fix meanings securely and how to determine motivation effectively, brings out the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of the transgressive trajectory of the works of the two writers taken for this study.

Foucault has considered transgression to be the interrogation of boundaries, as “a realm, no doubt, where what is in question is the limit rather than the identity of a culture” (Foucault 1977, 33). But we know that cultural identity has always been inseparable from limits. It has always been a boundary phenomenon and its order has
always been built around the figures of its territorial peripheries, which have constantly kept pushing the limits of the threshold, the borderlines, the boundaries etc. as far out as possible. This has led to, as claimed by Peter Stallybrass and Allon White in *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression:*

an interrogation of the 'liminal positions' of the protagonists by bringing into play the 'political unconscious' and by revealing the repressions and social rejections, which formed it. Transgression becomes a kind of reverse or counter-sublimation, undoing the discursive hierarchies and stratifications of bodies and cultures which bourgeois society has produced as the mechanism of its symbolic dominance. (Peter Stallybrass and Allon White 1986, 195)

Therefore, law-breaking can be a transgression of set boundaries and limits resulting in serious dislocations, but it can also be a crossing over into new territories opening up new vistas of experience and knowledge. Laws of narration are broken so as to accommodate a blurring of the borders between memoir and autobiographical fiction. Here land is taken as a mark of one's identity and crossing of borders results in alienation and dislocation, and the exilic feelings it brings about invokes memory of one's native land and multiple notions of identity of the self in those who inhabit the borderlands of geographical and psychic spaces.
The English language is re-invented in Alexander and Roy so as to make the very form of the sentence fit their writings as women writers from a postcolonial, postmodern India, in order to use the ordinary and the usual type of sentence by altering and adapting it in such a way so that it assumes the natural shape of their thoughts without destroying or distorting the flow of communication even while enabling them in their attempt at linguistic decolonization. The study brings out the development of an alternate vision of how law-breaking is not only a transgressive, violative and infringing activity, but also a liberating, explorative and mature crossing over into the hitherto unknown territories of geographical, psychic, intellectual, gender, ideological and linguistic spaces in the writings of Alexander and Roy.

This brings us to an understanding that there is something creative as well as destructive — something potentially damaging as well as enabling about the breaking of laws, crossing of borders, transgressing boundaries in its various existential, psychological, spatial, temporal and linguistic dimensions. Law breaking can be a productive and an exultant condition. Such transgressive practices can become an occasion for self-expression; it can also be a compulsory and liberating condition that questions and subverts the existing political, cultural, religious and gender laws. But it can also be a very disturbing and fearful exercise fraught with grave consequences to those who dare to make such a bidding. Each breaking of a law presents possibilities of radical opposition to, or
reconciliation with the existing norms and practices of society. Life for the protagonists of Alexander and Roy has been represented as a constant tension between the observance and the breaking of laws — specially the laws of love, land and language.