Chapter IV

History and Politics of Representation

Who has responsibility for what and whom? Who does what? Who takes responsibility for saying things for whom? Who does the saying and the writing?


One of the characteristic aspects of postcolonial studies is that it is simultaneously oppositional and self-critical. This thesis is also marked with this kind of reading. In the previous chapters, we discussed the novels from the perspective of their oppositional, critical attitudes towards dominant discourses of Indian historiography and nation. But it has been pointed out at the very beginning that these novels are not the answers regarding the embattled entity called India. The alternative, critical histories that these writers present are not necessarily the most ideal versions. This chapter attempts to reveal some of the ellipses, blind-spots in their representation of history, and it discusses at length some of the charges and accusations that are often brought against them.

The growing popularity of postcolonial literature and its dazzling marketing success has recently spawned a disquieting trend of self-criticism from the very ranks of postcolonial studies which has tended to examine the causes of this popularity and the material as well as economic conditions under which these new writings from formerly colonized countries are produced and received. Dennis Walder, for instance, in the book Post-colonial Literatures in English: History, Language, Theory (1998) argued that the ambiguities of the term “postcolonial” being many, the writings under its rubric might be best defined in terms of the conditions of their production, reception, and evaluation, that is, who wrote them, where did they originate, who read them, and how they were interpreted and valued.¹

The study of the issues related to the production and reception of literature is relevant here because in the times of globalization, it is the market which dominates the social processes to the utmost degree. The market operates through multiple and sometimes
conflicting agents and they all play an overwhelming role in the process of "making" contemporary writing. The publishing industry is a powerful force and it manipulates the market in creating demands for certain types of cultural products, thereby shaping the content as well as directing the ways literature is valued and interpreted. In this way marketing becomes a form of representation and interpretation which readers knowingly receive and contest.²

Along the global market, the critical enterprise or the role of the academy is also crucial in the popularization, canonization and dissemination of postcolonial literatures. In the ideologically charged context of postcolonial literature, the role of the critics takes on an added significance because it is they who, to a large extent, normalize the representations of the periphery offered by postcolonial authors. If the literatures of the postcolonial nations represent their own ideologies and resistance, the critical enterprise also functions under the particular worldliness of the critics themselves. Therefore, the ultimate meaning, in what is called the "social being of literature" of a particular text emerge in the interstices of the writer/text and the critical interpretation/reception of the same. We must, therefore, deal not only with the text and the author, but also with the critic and the way the postcolonial text is received and marketed for consumption.

The production of a literary text involves a certain regime of power and politics. While the author draws from raw materials of a literary text, so does the critic. The critics play an important role in interpreting a literary text and setting the paradigms and criteria for its reception by the wider reading public. The critics, as Edward Said points out, "create not only the values by which art is judged and understood, but they embody in writing those processes and actual conditions in the present by means of which art and writing bear significance".³ Therefore, all these issues of literary production, marketing, politics of reception and consumption gain urgency when we relate them to the kind of literary texts that we have been discussing in the preceding chapters. The questions of the dissemination of the idea of India and Indian history in literary texts, and the ways they are being received, valued and consumed are crucial.

There has been a consistent tendency, at least in the West, to read most of the texts discussed in this work as being not only novels, but as history and praised for their
"pedagogic capacity to disseminate political information". Rushdie himself claimed that he never intended his novel to be read as history. In *Imaginary Homelands* Rushdie wrote:

[Saleem's] story is not history, but it plays with historical shapes. Ironically, the book's success—its Booker Prize, etc. — initially distorted the way in which it was read. Many readers wanted it to be the history, even the guide-book, which it was never meant to be. 

Other writers also voiced their unease about the tendency of western readership and the publishing market regarding these novels as reflective of authentic history of postcolonial societies. But despite such disavowals by the writers themselves and much opposition from many fronts, the tendency to regard these postcolonial Indian English writers as the most efficient mouthpieces of Indian history and culture has remained and it is one aspect of our engagement with these texts that need closer scrutiny. The popularity of postcolonial writing in the West and the reasons for the same are crucial in engaging with this problem of the authenticity of these texts as historico-cultural documents.

With the spread and dominance of post-colonialism and postcolonial studies, the once-colonized countries and writings from the formerly colonized parts of the world began to infiltrate the Western academic world. Harish Trivedi, while discussing the case of India in this Derridean excess of "post-colonialism" and attention on non-Western writers expresses an anxiety which is most pertinent and disturbing:

For the first time probably in the whole history of the Western academy, the non-West is placed at the centre of its dominant discourse. Even if it is in part a sort of compensation for all the colonial material exploitation, the academic attention now being paid to the post-colonial is so assiduous as to soothe and flatter. Never before, for example, was Indian writing (though crucially, writing only in English) so widely represented in a monumentally canonical metropolitan work as in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English* (1994). It was moreover self-represented, with the
entries on Indian authors and themes being written not by metropolitan critics
but by as many as sixty-seven Indian academics.6

In this “scramble for post-colonialism,” India has proved to be the most covetous
entity.7 So much so that in any discussion on postcolonialism, India or Indian writing in
English is deemed to be essential presence. There is a groundswell of critical work on India
and Indian writing in English, and Indian English writers and certain texts (of which
Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children remains the foremost and most emblematic) as well as
academic figures and critics of Indian origin (of whom Homi K. Bhabha and Gayatri
Chakravorty Spivak are the cult figures) have attained international pre-eminence and
sometimes are co-terminous with postcolonialism and the postcolonial condition. This India-
specificity of postcolonial studies and the extensive work done on India has left Africa and
other formerly-colonized parts of the world in a marginal position.8 Unlike in the real
historical “scramble for Africa”, the scramble for postcolonialism has regarded India a bounty
worthy of constant attention.

The prominence and popularity of Indian English writings among western readers and
in metropolitan academic spaces in the era of globalization have raised questions about the
relation between the diasporic writers writing in English and India-based writers writing in
English as well as those writing in regional languages. While the former has achieved
canonical status in postcolonial cultural studies, the later has comparatively less attention.

This phenomenon has serious consequences in the way literary representation of India
takes place as well as literary discourses are shaped. In other words ever since the
international market, academy and readership have valorized such writers as Salman Rushdie,
Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh, Arundhati Roy, Rohinton Mistry and Bharati Mukherjee, the
representation of India by non-diasporic writers also has come to be influenced by the success
of these writers. The very success of these Indo-Anglian novelists raises some important issues
about the nature of “India” portrayed, and about the reading and study of post-colonial
literatures in the West, issues to do with language and appropriation, for instance.

The achievement of Indian fiction in English is undeniable. Nevertheless, it would be
erroneous to judge the strength of Indian literature on the basis of the work done originally in
English. The truth is that the vast body of literature written in the different regional languages

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of the country is equally rich and, very often, far more nuanced and responsive to the pressing issues of the nation. It is increasingly being argued by many that the high profile of writers in English is partly due to such factors as their easier accessibility, or even to alleged pandering to the expectations of Western readers. The situation is compounded by the fact that few Western critics and commentators on these writers have any knowledge of an Indian language other than English or, perhaps, a desire to explore the increasing body of work available in translation. This chapter, along with the issues related to the global market, metropolitan consumption vis-à-vis these novels, also engages with the linguistic dimension.

The most crucial and sustained charge against these writers and texts is that they present an exotic representation of Indian nation and history which gives them a freeway ticket to international popularity and academic reception in the West. This charge of exoticization or fetishization of cultural products from the so-called Third World by the global market is one issue that has recently been in the forefront of postcolonial debates. In the following sections we shall try to examine the role of the global market and politics of consumption of these historical novels, the charge of exoticism/fetishization against these writers, and the issue of authenticity. The substance of our argument in the next section is that the force of globalization and force of the market exert an indisputable influence in the way representation of the nation, history and culture has been done. Not only the market but the academic critical enterprise, i.e., the critical interpretation and valuation of these texts by the critics play significant role in fuelling consumption and directing the canonization of certain texts and writers according to predictable criteria and paradigms that smack of colonial nostalgia and neo-Orientalist tendencies. The flip side of this argument is that these writers very often fall prey to the demands of the global market, ending up presenting exotic images and ideas regarding Indian history and nation which are then consumed avidly by the West as the most authentic documents of India.

I.

In the era of globalization, the world has become an integrated system of conjunctures and disjunctures. Though such a system existed in earlier times also, today, this has become much more comprehensive and forceful under the impact of an increasing penetration of
capital and improved technologies of communication and travel, among other things. It is now generally agreed by scholars of different orientations that there is a definite and "extraordinary cultural transformation of planetary society" because as Alberto Melucci says, never before have human cultures been exposed to such a massive reciprocal confrontation, and never has the cultural dimension of human action been directly addressed as the core resource for production and consumption.

In such a scenario, commodities have acquired a life of their own, and they circulate as signs within differential sign-system: "the object is no longer referred to in relation to a specific utility, but as a collection of objects in their total meaning". No longer existing in and of themselves, the commodities in question have come to acquire meaning only within a system of differences. The market dominates the ways in which particular commodities are made to circulate as signifiers of prestige and of value so that the consumers are drawn towards them. Ultimately, these products become symbolic tools in the construction of collective and individual identities.

It will be argued that this entire process of production, dissemination, valuation and consumption, in short, the social construction of taste, involves a New Orientalism. What emerges from all this is the fact that these novels, in their engagement with history and culture, do not simply remain as cultural artifacts, but come to embody and signify in the course of their circulation and consumption, a process which is intrinsically political. This chapter deals with this politics of representation which involves not just the literary aspect but the material aspect of literature—its production, dissemination and consumption—or what Arjun Appadurai has described as the "social life of things".

In these times of globalization, nothing lies outside the market. The logic of quick turnover and greater profit uses various persuasive measures to increase and create demands. This profit-driven trend of mass production intensifies commodification and creates a false sense of consumer choice. Jean Baudrillard argues that

..the current indoctrination into systematic and organized consumption is the equivalent and the extension, in the twentieth century, of the great indoctrination of rural populations into industrial labor, which occurred throughout the nineteenth century. The same process of rationalization of
productive forces, which took place in the nineteenth century in the sector of production is accomplished, in the twentieth century, in the sector of consumption [...]. The ideology of consumption would have us believe that we have entered a new era [...] where justice has finally been restored to Man and to his desires. But [...] Production and Consumption are one and the same grand logical process in the expanded reproduction of the productive forces and of their control.14 (italics in original)

Cultural critics like Baudrillard and Roland Barthes among others, have shown how culture can be approached as the system of the production and consumption of signs. Baudrillard discusses consumption as a deeply social activity in which the consumers are implicated in a general system of exchange and in the production of coded values. Approaching culture in the way defined by Baudrillard and Barthes makes it possible for us to examine what commodities are being produced/consumed, what signification they come to embody and who consumes them to what purpose.15

The narrative fiction is the best-selling literary form, and stories of exile, migration, dislocation, nation and nationalism, cultural hybridity and historical re-imaginings figure prominently in the literary markets these days. The novel plays a crucial role in the transmission of stereotypes to a wide reading public that consumes texts in the Barthesian sense. Dominant Western culture employs various strategies in order to benefit from globalism and to maintain its hegemony under the guise of liberalism. Politics and demands of global consumption come in a big way in the ways cultural products are packaged and marketed, and certain authors, who ostensibly fulfill these demands, are being lauded as the most authentic cultural informants and others marginalized both by the global/western marketing apparatus and the First World academy.16

The widespread expectation of the metropolitan/Western readers/consumers has been to look for an allegorical interpretation of the nation or the knotty question of postcolonial nationhood. The global market and the publishing industry have also fuelled and tried to cash in on this expectation. The explanation of the status of these novels in metropolitan postcolonial criticism and syllabi lies in the fact that they, among other things, are available to be read as national allegories. Quite frequently it seems that when it comes to international
mass popularity or studying Indian English writing, precisely those texts, which continue to be privileged, are those that are more available to such allegorizing. This susceptibility to allegorizing is an important reason that explains why some of their novels have occupied prominent places in the postcolonial canon and others have not. The names of certain writers recur so often in course descriptions and in the titles of journal articles, conference papers and book chapters that lay readers might be forgiven for thinking that other writers, if they are available, must not be worth reading. Writers like Rushdie, Ghosh, Chandra, Mistry, Sahgal, Baldwin etc. have been lauded, read and studied by critics and common readers as the most authentic cultural informants who represent the natives to the metropolitan centre.

Moreover, the multicultural backgrounds, cosmopolitan worldview of these writers and a plethora of assumptions associated with them have enhanced their status as so called native informant. Timothy Brennan has noted this connection between the popularity of these writers and their cosmopolitan lifestyles:

In the interplay of class and race, metropolis and periphery, ‘high’ and ‘low’...cosmopolitans have found a special home, because they are both capturing a new world reality that has a definite social basis in immigration and international communications, and are at the same time fulfilling the paradoxical expectations of a metropolitan public...But more importantly, they are writers for whom the national affiliations that had been previously ‘given’ as part of the common worldview of the Third World Literature have lost their meanings.17

Writers from India are canonized by the West on certain criteria which are regarded as symptomatic of these writers. They have been appropriated by the West on the basis of the national paradigm. Even when we come to the early writers like Anand and Rao, we see that the most recurring line of discussion has been that of the nation. Novels like Midnight's Children, The Shadow Lines, The Great Indian Novel, Such a Long Journey, A Fine Balance and Rich Like Us have all been celebrated and canonized by both the Western market and the academy on the basis of their responsiveness to the “authorized” questions, the foremost of which have been the nation and the historical representation. While discussing the complex
nexus between the popularity/canonization of postcolonial writers and critical reception of the same, Masood Ashraf Raja says:

Similarly, the critic as well as the reading public, located in the metropolitan, also read the writers’ works with a certain horizon of expectations, with a certain set idea of what to expect and what to extrapolate. It is this author-critic nexus—representation and interpretation—that deserves our attention.  

This does not mean that there’s anything wrong in engaging the national question on the part of these authors. Their historiographic revision and re-imagination of the nation in alternative ways other than the dominant colonial, nationalist ones have done a great deal in fulfilling some lacunae and gaps and fissures in Indian historiographies. But the problem is related to the ways these texts have been appropriated by the global market and the western academy. The marketing and consequently the reception of these postcolonial cultural texts have shown a fetishism and tendency of turning them into commodified objects.

One of the strategies employed by the Western marketing media is to present these writers as the most efficient spokesmen, as “native informant” of the postcolonial nation. These writers are presented to the metropolitan consumers as the most helpful and reliable mediators between them and the “exotic” unknown “other”. Salman Rushdie is the most visible and iconic example of Third World Cosmopolitan writers as discussed by Brennan. The most famous example is the case of Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children. The blurb of the 1981 Picador edition screamed: “At last a literary continent has found its voice,” proclaims an undoubtedly enthusiastic, if suspiciously anonymous, reviewer. Graham Huggan writes: “One can imagine the wry amusement with which Rushdie must have greeted this astonishing news—just elide several thousand years of Indian literary history and presto, the ‘representative’ Indian voice! A sleight of hand well worthy of Rushdie’s ‘magic-realist novel’. It has been contested by many critics and commentators that such a eulogization of Rushdie as one who has finally given voice to a silent, mute nation is not only wrong but foolishness.
Rushdie's first novel *Grimus* was a commercial failure and Rushdie himself and critics have offered various explanations regarding this failure: all of which converge on the point that the novel lacked a habitus and the East/West fusion was not adequate as it was in *Midnight's Children*. In Rushdie's own words in the novel, it is because he is still "looking for a suitable voice to speak in". It can be understood that the voice he is speaking about is a voice that would fit the horizon of expectations of metropolitan audience. This expectation is all the more crucial and insistent when it comes to diasporic fictions, a certain ideal type created by the metropolitan critics. Almost all Rushdie critics have underlined this lack of a suitable voice in *Grimus* as the main reason for its failure.

Catherine Cundy considers *Grimus* a "product of a period when Rushdie had not yet achieved the synthesis of diverse cultural strands and narrative forms". Timothy Brennan, on the other hand, thinks that *Grimus* "fails even though it is carried off with professional brilliance simply because it lacks a habitus". James Harrison is of the view that Rushdie in *Grimus* "has not yet found either the theme or the style that will allow him to be the writer that he would in time become". D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke also considers *Grimus* a failure. In his view, *Grimus* "satirizes ideas and social systems—but in abstract. The next stage is to locate this in the real world". All these critics consider *Grimus* a failure, not because it is not well written, or because it does not tell a good story, but simply because it is too abstract. Readers are seeking the attributes found in other diasporic novels.

The same critical approach, albeit with some modifications, can be traced in the scholarship about *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie's second and most successful novel. It seems that for the critics what Rushdie starts in *Grimus*—the fusion of East and West—finally matures into a respectable technique. One reason why most critics find *Midnight's Children* a great work of art is simply because of its varying intertexts and because it has exactly the type of subjects and themes that a postcolonial work is supposed to have: allegory, corrupt rulers, abuses of power, magic, and myth. Since the novel has a habitus in India, borrowing Brennan's term from above, it makes it all the more palatable to the reader. Catherine Cundy considers *Midnight's Children* an improvement over *Grimus* because in *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie finally "achieves a successful fusion of East and West in terms of both form and content". This statement seems to reassert the assumption about the postcolonial novel which has now become the norm in the counter-canon—cultural fusion in order to reach a
wider audience. By perpetuating myths about the East—in this case India—the critics offer the same public an extended image of the East, which through association with the earlier works could lead them to assume anything. The fetishization of the market was extended by the critics and academic world regarding Rushdie’s novel.

The marketing of books is often beyond the control of their authors; nonetheless, dust jackets sometimes offer amusing evidence of the audience that publication houses, if not authors, wish to reach. The market strategies and the blurbs raise important questions about the location of the South Asian literary text in the western(ized) imaginary, academy, and journals. Like Rushdie’s novel the works of Tharoor and Mistry were also packaged and marketed as documents recounting the exotic, myth-laden, corrupt country with ruthless governments and fledgling democracies. Tharoor’s novel *The Great Indian Novel* recounts Indian history through the frame of the epic *Mahabharata*. In it he makes numerous allusions and intertexts to satirize and criticize the failures and abuse of power of the postcolonial political leaders and the weakening of the democratic ethos. But most of the press-reviews of the novel displayed a tendency to emphasize its epic, mythical presentation of India, and tried to turn the complex material of the novel into familiar, form by comparing Tharoor with other Anglo-European writers.

Olivier Bernier found it “utterly fascinating” and hailed it as “a great Indian novel”.26 While John Calvin Batchelor compared Tharoor as a satirist to “Skvorecky, Aksyonov, Voinovich, Fuentes and our own Coover,”27 Earleen Fisher found a lot of parallels between Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* and Tharoor’s novel.28 The propensity for fetishizing is all the more apparent in the remarks of Edward Hower in *The Chicago Tribune*:

> An outrageous feast, spilling over myths, rhymes, tales of ancient treachery and wisdom, and tales of modern foolishness and heroism...An ambitious and often eloquent retelling of India’s wildly original history...[with] modern and ancient drama woven into this wildly original extravaganza.29

For Hower, it is an extravagant entertaining tale of myths, legends and heroism, and assures the Western readers that they can read it for pure fun without any obstacle in matters
of cultural or historical translatability because, as he says, “We need no special knowledge of India” to enjoy this novel.30

The blurb of the American edition of Vikram Chandra’s novel Red Earth and Pouring Rain declared that the novel offers readers the story of “an eighteenth-century warrior poet (now reincarnated as a typewriting monkey) and an Indian student home from college in America...[and] ranging from bloody battles in colonial India to college anomie in California, from Hindu gods to MTV”.31 The Sunday Times of London described Chandra as one with a “visionary” imagination and praised the epic grandeur and desolation. On the other hand, Times Literary Supplement praised its depiction of characters which comprise of gods, monkeys, Indians, and Englishmen.

In a scenario fit to be called “new Orientalism”, these texts are presented as exotic, interesting, fascinating cultural objects by the publishing houses to be consumed by metropolitan/Western readers already immersed in the idea of a stereotyped India. While the writers are writing oppositional narratives, rewriting history and the nation, in an attempt to subvert colonial and nationalist discourse, the publishing houses and the global markets give them the same garbs which they are trying to shed. Graham Huggan points out how the oppositional aesthetics and anti-colonial projects undertaken by postcolonial writers are being subsumed and disempowered by the market and metropolitan publishing industries:

...metropolitan book businesses, always eager for “hot” new writers, merchandise the latest literary products from “exotic” places such as Africa and India, assimilating “marginal” literatures to an ever-voracious mainstream, and plying a moderately lucrative trade—in straightened economic circumstances—by transporting cultural products seen as coming from the peripheries to an audience that sees itself as being located at the center.32

Huggan gives the example of the popular “Heinemann African Writers Series” (Heinemann being the largest publisher and distributor of African literature in English.). He notes the role of Heinemann in bringing African writers to the limelight, but points out that

...the “Africa” that it promotes arguably differs from the one that its writers present; for while these writers mostly see themselves as demystifying African
cultures, Heinemann's marketing policies continue, to some extent, to cater to Euroamerican myths. This mythicized "Africa" remains a profitable source for the marketing of cultural "otherness"—the very "otherness" on which the Western academy is currently fixated.\textsuperscript{33}

The exoticizing tendency of the global market is manifested in various ways, as we have seen above. In the case of Indian novels in English, the Raj nostalgia is invoked and highlighted, sometimes inappropriately. Siddhartha Deb's debut novel \textit{The Point of Return} is a significant contribution in that it memorializes the rarely written about aspect of another face of Partition. But problem occurs when we look at the way the book was presented to the world. The cover of the novel is adorned with the cliché of the wall with peeling paint, a visual tie to the Picador edition of Rushdie's \textit{Midnight's Children}, which is intended to convey something of the faded elegance of the Raj. But the novel is not simply about colonial hangover or simply Raj nostalgia, as evoked by the cover, but goes much beyond these "interesting" subjects, and is, instead, an excellent meditation on the nature of memory and of the elusiveness of home. Moreover, the cover and back cover of \textit{The Point of Return} contain review excerpts from such leading British and American publications like \textit{Times Literary Supplement, Sunday Times, Independent on Sunday,} and \textit{New York Times}, giving the ""metropolitan' stamp of approval to the postcolonial subject, thereby a novel dealing with some urgent issues of a relatively ignored region of India to the same, familiar, appealing postcolonial label".\textsuperscript{34}

The image of a stereotyped India is distributed by the cover of Shauna Singh Baldwin's novel \textit{What the Body Remembers}, a novel dealing with the Partition of India. In the cover of the Heinemann edition, we see a beautiful woman in traditional Indian dress against the background of a map of undivided India, mostly the north-western part. In the chapter on the representation of nation in Indian English writing, we discussed how the nation is often conceived in gendered terms. Especially in times of war and crisis, women are regarded as the bearer of collective honour, and as a symbol of the purity of the nation. Baldwin, in the novel, deals with the horrors of the Partition and its effects on the women, how the bodies of women were tortured, mutilated and destroyed in the name of communal identity and honour. The cover of the book implies the same stereotype—the beautiful woman

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as a mirror-image of the map of the nation which is about to be re-written, marked and cut to pieces like that of the body of the woman.

Sometimes the writers themselves are turned into objects. In an essay on the neo-Orientalist tendency regarding the cultural objects from India, Saadia Toor examines the media hype around Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things* and the ways in which Roy's biography and photographs were used as tools to market the book:

Marketing for the book has been dominated by glossy photographs of a very photogenic Roy, wispy tendrils of hair framing eyesthat stare dreamily out. One publicity poster for the book has a four-foot image of Roy's face, beneath which is the caption 'Set to be the publishing sensation of the year', leaving much ambiguity as to whether the referent is Roy or her book, which is not mentioned even by name. The strategy is clearly one which plays into the Indian beauty myth, recently bolstered by the simultaneous success of two Indian women on the international beautyscene as *Ms World* and *Ms Universe*, 1996, followed by another title in 1997.35

Thus the market shapes and directs postcolonial literature in particular ways to serve its own purpose of fetishization and increasing consumption. Academic institutions and the critics based in First World academia also play a decisive role in this commodification of postcolonial texts by reading them according to certain prescriptive frameworks and narrow aesthetic and theoretical paradigms, as we have seen in the case of the critics' reception of Rushdie's two early novels *Grimus* and *Midnight's Children*. The academic institutions canonize certain particular versions of national and historical representations from formerly colonized countries. The location, background and critical enterprise of postcolonial critics and theorists are issues that become crucial in understanding the politics of canon formation and valuation of postcolonial writings.

It is the western academic structure which dominates the field of postcolonial studies, and it, through the voices of the theorist, also dictates its framework and canons. In fact, Arif Dirlik suggests, "postcoloniality is the condition of the intelligentsia of global capitalism".36 Despite the many loopholes in Dirlik's arguments, he points out several crucial and disturbing characteristics of the dominant strain in postcolonial studies: its presentism, its deliberate

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crafting in the crucible of First World academic needs, and its constitution by what it cannot or often does not directly name: global capitalism. Kwame Anthony Appiah defined postcoloniality in the following terms:

Postcoloniality is the condition of what we might ungenerously call a *comprador* intelligentsia: a relatively small, Western-style, Western-trained group of writers and thinkers, who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery.\(^{37}\) [Italics in original].

Both Dirlik and Appiah actually point out the links between the locational factor and the critical and creative enterprise of postcolonial critics and writers.

The Western academy, critics and theorists based there, more often than not, have from the very emergence of the postcolonial studies, favoured those texts that are characterized by anti-realist, fabulative, postmodern techniques. Such texts are highly sought after by the global market because of their so-called novelty and exceptionalism. Novelty, with its attendant formula of syncretism and hybridity, is also regarded as the dominant measure of value in the academic realms. Deepika Bahri says, “the quintessentially hybrid, the exiled, the dislocated and multilocated” is “the ‘postcolonials’ of metropolitan definition”.\(^{38}\) Critics and theorists glorify and texts displaying “heterogeneous narrative styles” and “extravagant innovation”, whereas more conventional modes of writing, “deemed uncongenial to metropolitan taste are un-translated and largely un-discussed within the academies”.\(^{39}\) If the market is “the First Cause of contemporary thinking,” Salman Rushdie’s soft-quoted phrase is the default formula of this mode: “Mélange, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is how newness enters the world”.\(^{40}\)

According to Martina Michel, the texts being most often canonized as representative of postcoloniality “tend to be texts that satisfy Western (postmodern) criteria of evaluation. They are experimental, make extensive use of irony, resist closure, question traditional boundaries, employ intertextual strategies etc”.\(^{41}\) More conventional mode of writings such as realism are demonized or repressed as realist literature is deemed to be not very distanced from imperial ideology. Realist texts are ignored and implicitly deemed “less” representative of the postcolonial for the supposed lack of subversive potential. Deepika Bahri talks about “a
web of professional practices that include publishing, book reviews, syllabus exchange, conferences” which produces “a pattern of privileging texts more readily responsive to ‘authorized’ questions and pedagogic imperatives”.42

Thus we see an institutionalized act of exclusion, covered up by a ritualized and formulaic radical practice. Only those writers writing about the nation and history and those who write in anti-realist mode make it to the narrow cannon of Indian English writing. In this cannon, Indian English writers Rushdie, Mistry, Tharoor and Ghosh are undoubtedly the most preferred ones.

The valorisation of “national allegories” and anti-realist texts as the most authentic texts of postcoloniality by critics and academicians in the Western academia has been criticized by many. Arun P. Mukherjee writes:

I am worried by the postmodernist tendency to valorize antirealist fiction. When critics like Catherine Belsey and Linda Hutcheon suggest that antirealist fiction ‘denaturalizes’ what we had taken to be real and this warns us against being sucked into the illusionist trap set by realist presentation by constantly drawing attention to its process (...) I feel like telling them that after awhile, the metafictions of postmodernism stop having that effect because of our increasing familiarity with their stylistic manoeuvres. Secondly, for those of us who never experienced realism as a dominant form, the ‘denaturalizing’ of metafiction does not affect us in the same way. Thirdly, I do not believe that there is any necessary link between autoreflexive fiction and right politics.43

In his introduction to his edited anthology, The Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature (2001), the Indian novelist, poet and critic Amit Chaudhuri vehemently contests postcolonial fiction’s alliance with postmodernist modes of narration, in magic realism, in poststructuralist self-referentiality and the Jamesonian national allegory. In the context of Indian English writing, he says that this alliance makes for a privileging of historical discourse over the literary, culminating in the depiction of Indian history as “a fancy dress-party or the Mardi Gras, full of chatter, music, sex, tomfoolery, free drinks and rock and roll”.44

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In another collection of essays *Clearing a Space*, Chaudhuri attempts to chart out a sort of alternative canon and an aesthetic tradition unlike the one proposed by western postcolonialism. He makes it clear that this is the tradition in which to best view his unusual fiction. Distancing himself and his writings from ongoing assumptions about postcolonialism and postmodernism, which has rejected high for popular culture, Chaudhuri claims to continue a tradition of Bengali modernism and high culture traceable to Tagore and earlier, and that this has its own characteristics. The book is addressed to the academic community in the West and in it he offers his claim of a vital Bengali modern culture, thereby clearing the “Space” for an alternative tradition freed from the heavy hand of the western academy. Amit Chaudhury praises poets and writers like Arun Kolatkar, R. K. Narayan and V. S. Naipaul, and in them he seeks other traditions of modern Indian writing than Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* and magic realism; Indian modernism learned how to use the vernacular before the self-conscious fireworks of postmodernism.\(^4^5\)

Aijaz Ahmad points out the common attributes that are being sought by the critics in creating a postcolonial canon of counter-canonical works:

The essential task of a ‘Third world’ novel it is said, is to give appropriate form (preferably allegory, but epic also, or fairy tale, or whatever). The range of questions that may be asked of the texts which are currently in the process of being canonized within this categorical counter-canon must predominantly refer, then, in one way or the other to representation of colonialism, nationhood, postcoloniality, the typology of rulers, their powers, corruptions, and so forth. What is disconcerting, nevertheless, is that a whole range of texts which do not ask those particular questions in any foregrounded manner would then have to be excluded from or pushed to the margins of this emerging counter-canon.\(^4^6\)

The growing self-critical stance within the ranks of postcolonial studies has given rise to what Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks calls a “melancholia” which she relates to a series of problems such as:

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postcolonial scholars’ apprehension that institutionalizing the critique of imperialism may render it conciliatory (…) their criteria for political self-legitimization (i.e., the impossibility of representing the Third world as an anti-imperialist constituency, especially in the face of the retreat of socialism) and their peculiar immobility as an effective oppositional force for curricular change within (American and British) academies.47

The new-found authority, popularity and status of postcolonial studies have paradoxically given rise to a mounting sense among practicing critics that the discipline has become "stereotyped as an acceptable form of academic radicalism".48 She points to an uncritical and undifferentiated construction and reification of postcolonial marginality or Third World multiculturalism or radicality. At a time when postcolonial marginality, multiculturalism and hybridity have received wide acceptance and institutional legitimization, we see fetishization and reification of the margin as the new signpost of radicalism.

The danger of institutionalization haunts the contemporary field of postcolonial studies in the age of global commodification. Corporate houses, institutions—both academic and literary—play their respective roles in canonizing certain kinds of texts and writers by passing judgments on them. In the next section we are going to examine how another institution—that of international literary prizes is implicated in this commodification of postcolonial novels.

II.

In the age of globalization and the spread of consumer culture, cultural objects, in our case novels and writers, often fall victim to fetishization which makes the field of postcolonialism a hotly sought-after commodity. Postcolonial discourse has long been characterized by soul-searching and Indian writers in English, in their project of writing alternative histories are marked with admirable counter-discursive politics. But it must not be
ignored that the postcolonial slides, sometimes invisibly, yet inexorably, into a form of colonial nostalgia. While the publishing industry is one such institution engaged in the circulation of "exotic" cultural commodities, the other insidious institution is related to the prize culture. In this short section, we are going to examine how this prizing culture is related to the issue of putting values to postcolonial novels. Postcolonial novels are celebrated and lauded by the reading public and the academic world after winning international prizes. It is as if these prizes and the multinational companies that patronize these prizes are the ultimate judges as to what is to be read and admired and celebrated.

There is a big contradiction within the field of postcolonialism and it is all the more pronounced in the overlaps between commercial and academic responses to the postcolonial exotic. Graham Huggan reveals this phenomenon in his highly acclaimed book *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (2001), where he explores the compromised history of the Booker Company. The origins of the Booker-McConnell company lies in its colonial operations in Guyana in the nineteenth century. Huggan notes the contradiction inherent in the functioning of the award: on the one hand, the Prize opens the field of literature in English to include writings from the so-called peripheries; on the other, it succeeds in containing any possibility of radical cultural critique in these texts "by endorsing the commodification of a glamorized cultural difference". It propagates the culture of selling exoticism by celebrating cultural difference. Huggan points out the ways the Booker's glamorization of "Raj nostalgia" is itself internally divided. While such nostalgic texts offer a revisioning and critique of past colonial histories, they also recuperate the ambiance of an exotic place/time of imperial splendour.

Huggan exposes the politics of the prize by examining its strategies of replicating older historical forms of cultural imperialism. He suggests, "postcoloniality implies a condition of contradiction between anti-colonial ideologies and neo-colonial market schemes". The crux of his arguments (which have found resonance among postcolonial critics all over the world) seems to be that institutions such as the Booker have led "to the marketing of exotic writings to the Western world, rather than to the development of a body of postcolonial literature". Before Huggan also critics like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Aijaz Ahmad had been concerned with just such facets of metropolitan cultural consumption. Aijaz Ahmad has constructed his attacks on metropolitan practitioners of post-colonial theory.
in a similar vein as Huggan, suggesting that commercial viability inevitably undermines the force of anti-colonial critiques offered by postcolonial fiction and criticism.

From the very beginning of its inception in 1969, the Booker Prize was has been conferred mostly on writers writing about India, Raj nostalgia, and postcolonial nation-state—themes that find wide acceptance among Western readers hungry for exoticism. In 1971, V.S. Naipaul, the Indian Trinidadian writing about displaced ethnic Indians won the Booker for *In a Free State*. In the following seven years, three of the winning novels were about the Anglo-Indian colonial experience (all authored by non-Indians): The *Siege of Krishnapur* by J.G. Farrell (1973), Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's *Heat and Dust* (1975), and Paul Scott’s *Staying On* (1978). Certainly the burgeoning Raj nostalgia, which later reached its peak in Great Britain in the early eighties, can be seen as part and parcel of Booker’s early emphasis on Anglo-Indian life. The revisionist historical perspectives that inform these three novels by non-Indians can certainly be criticized for their hermetic views of Indian history—generally narrated as an internal failure within the culture of the colonizer, and, as such, reiterating the denial of Indian historical agency.

Big multinationals like the Booker, through its selected panellists (white male, in the words of Huggan) confer legitimacy and value to the literary products from the former colonies. In the words of Huggan these “writers wish to strike back against the center, yet they also write and are marketed for it; they wish to speak from the margins, yet they are assimilated into the mainstream; they wish to undo the opposition between a European Self and its designated Others, yet they are pressed into the service of manufacturing cultural Otherness”.52

In the past twenty-five years the prize has been awarded to four Indians, Rushdie in 1981, Arundhati Roy in 1997 and most in 2006 to Kiran Desai for her novel *The Inheritance of Loss*, and more recently to Arvind Adiga in 2008 for his novel *The White Tiger*. In addition, diasporic Indian authors regularly appear on the short list (of six to seven novels) that comes out several months before the prize is actually awarded, and which leads to rampant speculation and odds-making in the weeks and days before the winner is announced. Anita Desai (three times) and Rohinton Mistry (twice) have appeared on the short-list while, in addition to his 1981 Booker, Rushdie has been short-listed four times. In 1993, Vikram Seth’s *A Suitable Boy* caused a stir by not being nominated for the Booker, despite numerous

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predictions that it would be the odds on favourite to win. Two things worth noting here: first, the prominent place of India as a setting and subject for fictions celebrated by the Booker; second, the number of (primarily diasporic) Indians who have authored works that draw the Prize Committee’s attention.

Probably the most celebrated of all Booker Prize winners is *Midnight’s Children* which has become central to the study of postcoloniality. The novel has proven to be remarkably prescient in anticipating many of the exigencies of postcolonial theoretical and critical thought and remains highly relevant, some twenty-five years later, to the body of literary and cultural criticism whose existence was catalyzed by its appearance. In 1993 *Midnight’s Children* was awarded the “Booker of Bookers”, as the most influential novel to receive the literary prize in the first twenty-five years of its existence.

This is not to accuse the writers of bad faith or of blatant opportunism; it is merely to insist that postcolonial writing be seen in its requisite material context, as part of a wider process in which the writers’ anti-imperial sentiments must contend with imperial market forces. Postcolonial writing beguiles the line between resistance and collusion; the best-known writers are those like Rushdie or, from a different perspective, Naipaul who understand how to manage the realpolitik of metropolitan dominance. It is no surprise to find, then, that both writers are former Booker winners. For Naipaul, the Booker confirmed an already well-established reputation; for Rushdie, it was instrumental in bringing him to the public eye, where he has remained ever since, acquiring the dubious status of a “canonical” postcolonial writer. The Booker helped both writers. Norbert Schurer in his book *Midnight’s Children: A Reader*, gives statistics of how the fortunes of any prize-winning novel soar, by giving *Midnight’s Children’s* example. He claims that before the Prize, only 650 copies of the first print run of 2,500 books were ordered in advance, whereas, after the announcement of the Prize, the sales rocketed to about one thousand copies in one month.53

Though Rohinton Mistry has never won the Booker, he was nominated twice, and the fact that he was shortlisted for the Prize and the fact that his novel was lauded in the “Oprah Winfrey Show” definitely helped his wider popular reception. Arbind Adiga’s *The White Tiger* is a recent example of this phenomenon. In this age of globalization and multiculturalism, the representation of society through texts may not hold as much value as it
used to centuries ago, when texts were primarily the only window to the world. Yet, in the contemporary world, when these representations beget international literary prizes, they invite scrutiny and speculation. Three images of the Indian that are recognizable, acceptable and saleable by the West are of poverty, hopelessness and mystery.

It is deplorable to note that Western imagination still retains the same old image and assumption of the Orient and the Oriental in contemporary world of literature and cinema. The two recent evidences of this credence are—the 2009 Golden Globe award and the Oscar Award for the Best Motion Picture to “Slumdog Millionaire” and the 2008 Booker Prize for Literature to Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger*. Both the works offer a realistic tribute to India by presenting her as a metaphor for the sad, bad and the poor. In both the cases, whoever their creators are, accolades have come from the Western world. These accolades have once again put India on the world cultural map as the site of celebrity squalor. Vikas Swaroop’s novel *Q&A*, the movie’s inspiration and Adiga’s novel had earlier failed to grab much attention from the Indian media but with the stamps of approval from the Western world, they both experience exponential growth in book sales in the national as well as international markets.

III.

Another crucial aspect to this complex issue of market-appropriation and stereotyping of Indian English novels is the adaptation made by the writers themselves to the expectation and demands of metropolitan consumers and markets. The writers, at times, play to the tune of the market and it is evidence enough that Indians themselves are turning the Orientalist gaze back upon themselves. Critics and theorists, including Huggan, reveals the ways in which the “native informants” themselves contribute to the commodification of an “Indian” authenticity. What this implies is that there are traces of elisions, ambivalences, and complicities in the project of the writers themselves, and that there are certain pitfalls and cracks in the texts themselves.
While Western societies commodify the margins as a means of affirming the security of a lost yet longed for authenticity, the writers themselves at times add to the market-fuelled stereotype and Orientalism by producing and propagating stereotyped, saleable images of India and its history. Huggan’s book again sets the standard for exploring this line of analysis. He has explored at length the ways Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy have contributed to their own celebrity status, illustrating the ways many ostensibly postcolonial novels (often read for their representation of a localized cultural other) deconstruct their own postcoloniality. This section briefly analyses some of the texts under study, including Midnight's Children, and illustrates how they have become complicit in the project of packaging India and its history in ways that seek to fulfil the expectations and demands of global consumers.

There is a widespread suspicion against Indian writers writing in English that they become Orientalists to cater to their international audience, that they “capitalize on their ethnic identity in ways that both pander to immigrant nostalgia and offer images of India that are packaged for easy consumption in the West. The exoticized cultural images, the critique claims, are, rather than a presentation of the national condition, in effect details of banal particularities devoid of history and politics”.

The exoticism critique is underpinned by charges of bad faith, and of a certain complicity with colonialist and elitist ideologies. Nor such a critique is without any basis, as can be seen from the ways the writers present Indian history as endless cycle Tharoor, Chandra), and the nation as plural, unchanging, and its continuous regeneration (Rushdie, Sahagal)—some of the tropes familiar to the metropolitan readerly expectations.

In an interview, Salman Rushdie spoke about his personal view of India:

In a country like India, you are basically never alone. The idea of solitude is a luxury which only rich people enjoy. For most Indians the idea of privacy is very remote. When people perform their natural functions in public, you don’t have the same idea of privacy. So it seemed to me that people lived intermingled with each other in a way that perhaps they don’t anymore in the
west, and that it was therefore idiotic to try and consider any life as being
discrete from all other lives.\textsuperscript{55}

In the interview, he goes on to trace the impact of this view on his art, precisely the
making of \textit{Midnight's Children}. This view essentializes India as a static, petrified concept that
has not changed through the centuries. It perpetuates the common image of India among
Westerners: that in India there is no privacy; it's a place of crowd and chaos; people here
perform the "natural functions in public" which could imply anything from people urinating
in public, to copulating on the street.

So it seems that not just the critics but the writers also engage, knowingly or
unknowingly, in exoticization in their writings. Consequently, when these same writers are
lauded by the critics as "native informant" the critics offer the public an extended image of
the East, which through association with the earlier works could lead them to assume anything.
It is in such circumstances that the academic/critical treatment and reception of postcolonial
literatures "run the risk of encouraging a kind of licensed intellectual tourism".\textsuperscript{56}

Moreover, it has been pointed out by critics that in spite of his subversive and ironic
fiction, there is a blatant tendency for exoticization in Rushdie's novels. There is an
abundance of exotic images which, critics, point out, are used by Rushdie playfully to exploit
readerly expectations. Huggan, for example, points out how Rushdie in \textit{Midnight's Children}
"exhibits and hawks the wares of Western literary exoticism".\textsuperscript{57} Apart from the "familiar
semiotic markers of Orientalism"\textsuperscript{58} like snake charmers and stammering sadhus, characters
and descriptions of exoticism, Rushdie employs some less likely but still readily
identifiable totems: the spittoon, for instance. In the words of Huggan,

\begin{quote}
These totems advertise their status as culturally "othered" artifacts. The novel's
narrator, Saleem Sinai, points out their value as commodities; for Rushdie's
master of ceremonies is also a skillful merchant. Swallow me, says Saleem
Sinai, and you swallow the lives of countless others.\textsuperscript{59}
\end{quote}

Saleem/Rushdie represents India as an object for consumption through frequent uses
of the metaphor of eating, swallowing and food. Rushdie's narrative is highly charged with
imageries of food and consumption. Indeed, the “chutnification of history” can be read as a meta-commentary on the production and consumption of postcolonial literature from the subcontinent. In *Midnight's Children*, the basic image is that of food and spice which is used by Rushdie to maximum effect. The exotic pickles that Saleem produce for the market is synonymous with the colourful history of postcolonial India.

Another writer who has enjoyed immense success and fame in the West is Rohinton Mistry. Two of his first novels *Such a Long Journey* and *A Fine Balance* won many accolades and prestigious awards and both were shortlisted for the Booker. All of his works drew rave reviews from the Western media, and Mistry even appeared on the Oprah Winfrey show after the publication of his book *Family Matters*. Considering that Mistry write about a minority community, the Parsis, his popularity in the West has been questioned by many. Robert L. Ross, an admirer of Mistry asks a crucial question in this regard:

...are Western readers just plain curious about the Parsis? After all, they are probably most widely known for a single practice: the way they dispose of their dead by leaving them in a tower for vultures to feast on. This ceremony receives full attention in *Such a Long Journey*, which presents all the gruesome details along with the ritualistic.  

Very frequently Mistry tends to look back nostalgically to the homeland he had left behind, and this nostalgia and insistence of ethnic roots give his narrative a quaint and exotic tint. An instance can be seen in the elaborate Doongervadi scene in *Such a Long Journey*, which immediately follows an episode so poignantly rendered that this description of the Zoroastrian rites of the dead comes as an irrelevant appendage.

Many times, in an attempt to bring across the facts within the framework of a novel, Mistry creates contrived dialogue, such as the extra, “Did I mention in my last letter I am working for Research and Analysis Wing?” (*SALJ* 91) to explain the acronym, “RAW,” or the “RAW is the Indian Secret Service. Jimmy is no scientist, he is a double-o-seven,” on the next page. Mistry seeks to explain to readers concepts which most Indians would surely already know:
“That’s true,” said Gustad. “Pakistan is very important to America, because of Russia”.

“But why?”

Gustad illustrated the geopolitical reality. “Look, this samosa plate is Russia. And next to it, my cup—Afghanistan. Very friendly with Russia, right? Now, put your cup beside it, that’s Pakistan....Nothing south of Pakistan, only the sea. And that’s why America is so afraid. If Pakistan ever becomes Russia’s friend, then Russia’s road to the Indian Ocean is clear”. (SALJ 92)

Such naïve illustrations are clearly intended for the Western readership unfamiliar with the political and social realities of the sub-continent.

It has also been pointed out that Indian writers in English very often tend to stereotype the nation in their attempt to re-present it in perspectives other than the colonial and orientalist ones. The exoticism critique of Indian Anglophone literature foregrounds the fact that in the international market, Anglophone writers from the global South are usually treated as cultural ambassadors. The expatriate Indian writer or the anglicized writer at home, however, is often alienated from the very culture and people he supposedly represents. The writer then compensates for his lack of cultural connectedness by resorting to reductive constructs of the nation—a strategy leading to exoticization of subject.

Meenakshi Mukherjee in her essay “The Anxiety of Indianness” has argued that Indian English novels of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries creak under the heavy burden of the colonial language in the heyday of colonialism. These earlier Indian Anglophone writers used exoticism in their writings which signified their compulsion to provide a veneer of detachment from the indigenous context; whereas, in contemporary writers, exoticism is often the outcome of their anxiety to be viewed as authentic. Writers in the regional languages were writing politically charged fiction which articulated the growing anti-colonial nationalistic sentiments. During the same time, writers in English steered clear of political engagements that might antagonize their potential audience. Using the English language, it was not possible to assert a regional identity, and “any assertion of a broadly Indian identity was undertaken generally to emphasize otherness and exoticity rather than to
make a political statement”. With time, the benign attitude to the colonialism of earlier writers has certainly changed. Now there is an anxiety to assert one’s ethnic identity to a global audience. The charge of exoticism is intertwined with what Mukherjee calls an “anxiety of Indianness”. The desire to prove one’s “Indianness” leads to homogenized national narratives or exotic constructions of the nation. Mukherjee’s analysis is borne out in the works of writers such as Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan, whose works often betray an anxiety to offer a packaged image of the nation.

Vikram Chandra’s novel Red Earth and Pouring Rain employs elements from Indian mythology in ways that betrays a desire to feed the western appetite for exotic images of India. In the novel Chandra contests Eurocentric narrative of objectivity, scientific clarity and linear progression by imposing the age-old Indian narrative of epic digression and circularity. In spite of the political implication of this resistant anti-European discourse, there is a palpable exoticization in Chandra’s representation of the nation and Indian history. He emphasizes that Indian history is essentially mythical and follows a circular pattern—ideas most familiar to the Western psyche, courtesy the Orientalist construction of the nation. There is an abundance of playful intermingling of the mythic and the historical, where gods, monkeys and human beings play various roles in the narrative. In short, Chandra seems to have ratified the Eurocentric, Orientalist construction of a mythical, spiritual India that he intended to contest.

Reductive constructions of India are evident in the works of contemporary expatriate writers such as Bharati Mukherjee and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, in which images of their lost homeland rely heavily on easy and available constructs of India. Anis Shivani points to the emergence of a neo-orientalism in some recent novels such as Manil Suri’s The Death of Vishnu and Amit Chaudhuri’s Brave New World. He observes the complicity of Western critical culture in the production and popularity of such novels. Nibedita Majumdar sums up the trends of charges by critics against Anglophone writers:

Critics exhibit a twin tendency, first, to be very suspicious of anything political in the literary realm and, second, to glorify any display of cultural difference as deeply meaningful. It is not surprising that the novels, filled with paralyzed
characters untouched by the political sphere, basically dwell on inane cultural particularities like food, Bollywood movies, and spirituality.\(^{64}\)

Perpetuation of old stereotypes and myths are sometimes rehearsed and reiterated by many self-declared feminist novels. Intending to speak for women, a novel like Shauna Singh Baldwin’s *What the Body Remembers* paradoxically becomes implicated in perpetuating the status of women as oppressed. The common fact that Indian women are always abused and exploited at the hands of the males is given full expression in this novel. Girls are always unwanted, neglected and cast aside in favour of sons; even as she dies, the mother-in-law “pays” her son-in-law for having lived in married daughter’s home; daughters are perceived as “guests” in their natal households, and that their marital families are their real families; education for girls is undermined. On many occasions, Baldwin’s women lack souls as they are made to conform to the writer’s idea of subservience and obedience. Basically, all females seem to exist in an irredeemably miserable condition, with too much bitterness and too little joy.

Yet, such myths about Indian females are now taken to be so self-evident that they are now enshrined as truth, rather than being received as ideas in need of sustained interrogation. It is true that discrimination exists and violence towards women is very common. What is not quite right with Baldwin’s depiction of these women is that she seems to be suggesting that the situation described in the book uniformly describe the experience of all Indian women. At one point, Satya utters these lines: “Surely there will come another time when just being can bring izzat in return, when a woman will be allowed to choose her owner, when a woman will not be owned, when love will be enough payment for marriage, children or no children, just because her shakti takes shape and walks the world again” (*WBR* 345). But Satya’s vision is not some utopia belonging to the future; there were women, even during her own time, who took part in the independence movement, women who fought for access to education, women who never succumbed to male dictates—in short, they lived the alternatives. *What the Body Remembers* reiterates prevalent sexist stereotypes. Despite her recuperation of the rarely-told story of the Sikh women during the Partition, she uses the stock images of oppressed women—perhaps because they are easily marketable and hold an undeniably anthropological appeal.

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The novel repeats the well-rehearsed equation between Indian cultural patriarchy and female subordination. Like many feminist novels, it inadvertently closes the possibilities and reinscribes Indian women’s subjugation, instead of creating new ways of being. One should not always need to write about this always-already-written script of gender in India to prove one’s feminist credentials. Besides, merely exposing the deeply entrenched problems of sexism in India—which are by now widely known and also widely contested—other interventions and representations are crucial, if we want to arrive at a truly feminist literature. On the other hand, Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Ice-Candy Man*, Anita Desai’s *Clear Light of Day* and Mukul Kesavan’s *Looking Through Glass* privilege female will, choice and conviction through some female activists who transcend this always-already-written script of gender in India, subvert the discourse of patriarchy by their courageous activism in times of crisis.

Nayantara Sahgal’s *Rich Like Us* is also marked by some debilitating ellipses regarding the women question. Even though praised by critics like Jasbir Jain, Ramesh Chadha for its exploration of feminist concerns and social commitment, Sahgal’s novel about the dark period of Emergency and its effects on women, at times, shows her alignment with prevailing nationalist paradigms and frequently subscribes to the trope of essential victimhood of women and the male characters as saviors. There is a disquieting generalization regarding the victimization of women, and she resorts to myth, especially the mythic figure of Sita to comment on the national question.

Another key motif used by Sahgal to depict the victimization of women is that of *sati*. The *Ramayana* legend of Sita and her mistreatment by Rama is invoked by Sahgal to comment of patriarchal structure of oppression. Sonali’s great-grandmother commits suttee to ensure her son’s welfare at the hands of her brothers-in-law; Mona, Ram Surya's senior wife, in despair over his infidelity with Marcella, attempts to set herself ablaze; women laborers are kidnapped for sexual slavery by corrupt businessmen and policemen; and Rose, Ram’s English junior wife, is murdered because she possesses too much knowledge about her stepson Dev’s illegal undertakings. Thus, we see an enumeration of excesses against women which suggests Sahgal’s urge to show female agency in its most helpless and victimized state. Of course, she intends to honestly portray the problems of women of India; but the way she does it raises questions. Sahgal herself lapses into a nation-based patriarchal language, as seen in her appropriation of Sita.
Collapsing women’s issues into the larger realm of “politics”, Sahgal noted in an interview that “it is very difficult to separate [politics] from real life in India as the reality of life is so political here where women are roasted alive on their husbands’ funeral pyre[s] and are burnt to death for dowry”. She thus discloses that, for her, women’s experiences in general, and sati and dowry murders in particular, are merely the grounds upon which she bases her criticism of national politics.

Even though the novel is a powerful critique of the corrupt nation-state and the decaying democracy in India, Sahgal’s politics sometimes show signs of the same nationalistic ideals which she seeks to dismantle in the first place. This weakness is most obvious in her handling of the Sita myth. For instance, the first reference to the Sita myth emerges in the context of a discussion on nationalist allegiances and is, significantly, voiced by a man. Relating his schizophrenia about being Indian and/or British to his dubiety regarding Hindu tradition, Keshav cites as an example of the debasement of the latter Rama’s reprehensible treatment of Sita: “How am I supposed to know what’s right for me to do—whose ‘side’ I’m on ...—if even what we worship needs second thoughts,” he exclaims (RLU 60).

In another nation-based context years later, Rose wonders whether the wrongs of the Emergency can be explained away as acts of fate but concludes, “even if that’s what it was—the powers who were supposed to know better sometimes being as vicious as they were, e.g. their barbarous treatment of Sita—of course it had to be fought” (RLU 219). Sita’s tragedy is here reduced to a parenthetical remark to emphasize the corruption of a nation and a political system steeped in an oppressive religious tradition, thereby underlining once more Sahgal’s appropriation of the legend for larger political ends.

This elliptic feminism and nationalism on the part of Sahgal is diagnosed by Harveen Sachdeva Mann to be “very much a product of her particular privileged heritage”. According to Mann:

Born into modern India’s premier political family, the Nehrus, and brought up in a household in which female children did not feel the pressures of being female, Sahgal subordinates the woman question to the national question in the narrative. Ironically, but not surprisingly, her nationalist fealty is, in turn, complicated by her Western-style upbringing and education as well as her
location within an international rather than a local literary arena, resulting in multiple thematic antinomies in her novel.66

This charge of class elitism has always been put to Indian English writing. It has been pointed out that almost all the writers writing in English, especially those that won international recognition and status—Rushdie, Mistry, Tharoor, Sealy, Kesavan, Chandra—belong to privileged social and economic background, have been educated in the best schools and colleges in India and the West, and most of them are located in the metropolises of the West. It is often argued that the representation of India—the nation and its history that these writers do are far from authentic because they themselves are cut off from the reality of India by due to their location and class. They are the social elites and the history in their hands is often that of the elite section only.

The charge of class elitism is also brought against these writers. Critics also point out Rushdie’s complicity with liberal capitalism via the socio-economic concerns of Saleem. More pointedly, M. Keith Booker, has argued that while Rushdean stylistics may undermine notions of rationalist linear historiography, in practice, novels like Midnight's Children serve to support Western liberal ideology while mocking or undermining adiscourse that would be truly radical or emancipatory, name that of Marxism. Neil ten Kortenaar likewise notes that while Rushdie’s formal elements may seem radical, in this case the destabilization of hegemonic historiography gives way to an ideology of liberal humanism that can hardly be considered radical. In fact, Rushdie’s work tends to promote the same basic values asthose of the classic nineteenth century realistic novel, despite its stylistic departure.67

Eric Barlatsky points out a crucial aspect in the novel which reveal Rushdie’s class politics. According to Barlatsky, “Saleem’s story is precisely, it seems the story of the elite middle class that has always been told, even as it is a deconstruction of it. The exclusion of Shiva in this reading presents itself as yet another iteration of class hegemony”.68 In this context, it is worth noting that the protagonist of Midnight’s Childrenis not the poor and downtrodden Shiva who sees the world in stark terms of class difference and is willing to use violence to rectify that difference, but is rather the bourgeois Saleem whose dreams of equality are balanced by his repulsion for Shiva and his attempts to exclude Shiva from the story of which he is a central part.

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Some Indian critics suspect that attendance at the Doon School, St. Stephen’s College in Delhi, and then either Oxford or Cambridge, has produced the most prominent Indo-Anglian writers, and that they might therefore be reasonably described (whether they literally attended these schools or not) as a “Stephanian” school of Indian literature. It is also implied that this elite upbringing and class background of the writers as well as their consequent location in Western metropolis play a crucial role in forming shaping their elite attitudes. Leela Gandhi acknowledges that such a simplistic pigeonholing must be taken with a large grain of salt, but very interestingly argues that

...a variety of historical and literary circumstances have made it possible—even imperative—for the postcolonial novel to narrate the nation through a distinctively Stephanian idiom...[M]ost ‘Stephanian’ novels are boringly—if skilfully—‘indicative’ of the sensibility through which the newly elite Indian middle-classes recognise their community in the nation. Very few challenge the limits of this sensibility, fewer still refuse the postcolonial middle-classes the narcissistic pleasures of self-recognition.

Shashi Tharoor is among those who contend with that legacy, pro and con. In an article written for The New York Times he contends that “I write for anyone who will read me, but first of all for Indians like myself” (confirming Leela Gandhi’s assertion of the pleasures of self-recognition). He writes in English because it expresses Indian diversity “better than any Indian language precisely because it is not rooted in any one region of my vast country...[and] because writers really live inside their heads and on the page, and geography is merely a circumstance”. In an article for The Stephanian he defended his schooling against implied charges of elitism, and concluded that “what is being described as ‘Stephanian’ writing is in fact characteristic of an entire generation of Indian writers in English, who grew up without the shadow of the Englishman judging their prose, who used it unself-consciously in their daily lives in independent India, and who eventually wrote fiction in it as naturally as they would have written their university exams, their letters home, or the notes they slipped to each other in their classrooms.” Shashi Tharoor’s novel The Great
Indian Novel is, nevertheless, can be analyzed as a text that reveal elitist tendencies in its representation of Indian history.

Despite his sincere concern to present an alternative version of India and Indian history, Tharoor cannot claim to have found the “correct” formula for liberating the so-called working people. Tharoor’s version ignores the plight of the vast underclass for whom independence merely suggested a ceremonial shift in power. In a sense, Tharoor's project of writing back to the centre sadly enacts the erasure of the subaltern or the underclass. Jenny Sharpe, in a perceptive analysis of figures of colonial resistance, points out the inherent contradictions of a middle-class “liberating” discourse such as Tharoor’s:

To think of the relation between the discourse centering on the production of the colonial subject and what it occludes as an eclipse is to see that the subaltern classes are not situated outside the civilizing project but are caught in the path of its trajectory... For the colonized subject who can answer the colonizers back is the product of the same vast ideological machinery that silences the subaltern.73

Tharoor’s effort to answer the colonizer is dependent upon the material and discursive tools that are provided by the colonizer. The same ideological apparatus that provides him with a voice is inevitably caught up in silencing those who are less fortunate than Tharoor.

Despite the fact that the novel is a notable act of cultural recovery, Tharoor’s epic historical narrative is exclusive in nature and it drains out the liberatory potential of the text. His narrative is not the testimony of a whole people. The historical version he offers concerns great men and is fashioned by a grand moral and ethical design: “In my epic I shall tell of past, present and future, of existence and passing, of efflorescence and decay, of death and rebirth; of what is and of what was, of what should have been” (TGIN 18). Such declarations are made in order to capture the mood of the epic, and it reduces counter-hegemonic possibilities of the text to a large extent.

But perhaps it is Tharoor’s historical selection which makes any attempt to recover the struggles of the subaltern finally irrelevant. The banality of everyday life does not interest Tharoor or his narrator. Their India is the India of great men, of Gandhis and Nehrus. The all-
pervasive figure of Gandhi/Gangaji, the so-called enigmatic individual genius, is a diversion from the collective social forces that shape any age. His omnipresence is also juxtaposed, somewhat contradictorily, against mass spontaneous revolution. In this instance Tharoor presents a falsified notion of a spontaneous movement detached from a conscious leadership. Such beliefs only perpetuate historical myths and give the “masses a ‘theoretical’ consciousness of being creators of historical and institutional values, of being founders of a state”.

Tharoor’s revisionist history furthers the “great men” myth of history and erases the politics of the people. As in the Mahabharata, where we learn nothing about the slaughtered soldiers on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, so in Tharoor’s India we learn very little about the underprivileged foot soldier. Throo seeks to underplay this weakness by philosophizing about the unreliability of his historical knowledge: “There is no story and too many stories; there are no heroes and too many heroes. What is left out matters almost as much as what is said” (TGIN 411). But it is not enough to legitimize exclusion by claiming that the “political and governmental process in our country has always been distant from the vast mass of the people [and that] this has been sanctified by tradition and reinforced by colonialism” (TGIN 370). These words diffuse the nature of the problem within a vortex of “traditions” and sustain oppression. T. N. Dhar also comments that “... Tharoor’s account is dominated by the leading lights of the day and is elitist in approach... Given what we have, all that we can say is that Tharoor’s account is no more than an alternative version of the ectant elitist versions” that he seeks to contest.

Ultimately, Tharoor is bound by his ideological position in modern India. Tharoor’s nostalgia for the past, for “traditions” is evident in the novel, and this nostalgia can be related to the habitual preoccupations of the westernized, Hindu middle-class to which he belongs. He speaks of a past a past when India was the “land of Rama...the land where truth and honour and valour and dharma were worshipper as the cardinal principles of existence” (TGIN 411). This nostalgia is juxtaposed against his distaste for post independence failures.

This charge of elitism severely undermines the West’s appropriation of these writers as the most authentic spokespersons of Indian history and nation. This charge of elitism is, very often, directed at the Subaltern Studies enterprise. We have already discussed the common lineages and point of convergences between these writers and these new breed of
historians. Since from the very beginning of this study relied heavily on the philosophical and theoretical ideas of the Subaltern School of historians, it is necessary to look at some of the loopholes, gaps and biases of this historical enterprise also. Like the postcolonial literary field, the Subaltern historical project is also marked with self-scrutiny—as some of the important figures associated with it turned into its most vociferous critics. In the next section, we look at the origin and development of the Subaltern historical project. It starts by underlying the revisionary nature of the project and its opposition to colonial and neo-colonial historiography which injected fresh insights into historical enterprise across the globe, and opened up new vistas to scholars and writers engaged in the representation of history. Later in the section, however, we point put to some of the weaknesses and gaps in the project.

IV.

The term Subaltern was taken from Gramsci's euphemism for the proletariat in his *Prison Notebooks*. However the Subaltern Studies collective used it as a catch-all term for all groups they viewed as oppressed—the proletariat, the peasantry, women, tribal people. The collective focussed on peasant and tribal struggles, little work being done on urban movements with the exception of Dipesh Chakrabarty's "Rethinking Working Class History" on the jute mill workers of Calcutta. But what was distinctive about their approach was the argument that these struggles, far from being creations of what they termed "elite nationalism", were independent of it and much more radical. Gyan Pandy, for example, in the first issue of the journal demonstrated convincingly, in a study of the 1921-22 peasant struggle in Awadh, how Congress, far from initiating the struggle, had attempted to undermine it because the peasants were targeting Indian landlords who Congress wished to incorporate in their pan-Indian alliance against the British.

However the Subalterns weren't simply interested in illustrating the "bourgeois" nature of India nationalism. They argued that movements from below had been hijacked by elite nationalism and subordinated to the nationalist project. When they wrote of combating grand narratives, it was the "grand narrative" of anti-colonial nationalism they were targeting.
Undoubtedly there was a very important core to their argument—essentially the "nationalist leadership" had attempted to use "highly controlled" struggles of the Indian masses in order to confront and then replace the colonial masters. But the collective's project had an even more ambitious aim: they wished to reconstruct peasant consciousness itself, and to demonstrate its autonomy from elite nationalist thought. In order to do so, they sought out both new sources and attempted to reread the traditional archives "against the grain", all with the aim of recreating the mental world of the peasant insurgent.

From the very beginning, the Subalternist projects was inspired by an oppositional discourse which envisioned a discursive resistance to colonial and neo-colonial silencing of the subaltern voice and agency. Their objective was to recover the lost, suppressed, neglected histories of the community, people or groups which do not generally figure in the grand histories of the colonial and nationalist kinds. R. John Williams outlines a three part trajectory of the overall objectives and methodology of Subaltern Studies: 1) There is an imposition of silence by a colonial or neocolonial state through mechanisms such as official historiography and middle-class discursive hegemony—a process fueled by domination and greed. This forced silence is largely the domain of the colonial elite, and is manifested in the entire field of discursive power in venues of official historiography, literature, journalism, documentation, etc. 2) an insurrectionary act of drawing attention to that silence, calling it out, mapping its genealogy, and identifying the hypocrisy of its boundaries—a process fueled by resentment. 3) a revisionary act of speak-ing from that silence, giving it a voice, an identity, and eliminating its absence—a process motivated by optimism (however naive). These last two trajectories are the domain of the postcolonial/subaltern scholar, writer, citizen, or intellectual. The processes and strategies invoked here take on similar shapes, mainly in revisionary historiography, literature, theatre etc. 76

In a later, more reflective essay entitled "The Small Voice of History," Guha talks about the need for the Subaltern to develop an extra sensitive "ear" for certain "small voices" that he says are "drowned in the noise of statist commands". 77 For Guha, statism is the sinister vehicle for inflicting silence, and Subaltern Studies is the means to overcome that silence: it is up to us to make that extra effort, develop the special skills and above all cultivate the disposition to hear these voices and interact with them. For they have many stories to tell—
stories which for their complexity are unequalled by statist discourse and indeed opposed to its abstract and oversimplifying modes.

Although the descriptive language of the Subalterns is often quite different, the underlying revisionary impulse, and its implicit move along the postcolonial trajectory of silence, is more or less the same. Partha Chatterjee, for example, argues that the task of the Subaltern involves a “filling up” where there is “emptiness”. 78 Rosalind O’Hanlon expands Chatterjee’s metaphor, explaining that the Subaltern’s objective is one of “making an absence into presences, of populating a vacant space with figures”. 79 Gyan Prakash talks of the Subaltern’s attempt to “disclose [sometimes he uses the word “recover” (240)] that which is concealed”. 80 Sumit Sarkar assigns the Subaltern the job of “widening horizons” in historical research. 81 Said talks of the Subaltern’s penchant for restoring “missing narratives”. 82 But whether one speaks of learning to hear “small” voices, letting hidden flowers bloom, filling up emptinesses, disclosing what has been concealed, widening horizons, restoring missing narratives, countercrafting officially imposed ignorance, restoring autonomy, or simply giving a voice to the heretofore voice-less, one is essentially articulating the same revisionary impulse to write history “from below”.

Sustained by an extraordinary sense of commitment, members of the Subaltern Studies Collective revitalized the writing of Indian history as perhaps no such movement had done before. Moreover, since most of their case studies unearthed new historical materials, early contributors made enormous contributions to our knowledge of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Indian history even while radically challenging earlier models of that history.

Over time however, the Subalterns began to shift their ground. The original project of the Subaltern Studies group was grounded in a Marxist perspective. Ranajit Guha spoke about the objective of this project: “It is the study of this historic failure of the nation to come to its own, a failure due to the inadequacy of the bourgeoisie as well as of the working class to lead it into a decisive victory over colonialism and a bourgeois-democratic revolution of the classic nineteenth-century type...it is the study of his failure which constitutes the central problematic of the historiography of colonial India”. 83

Subsequently, Subaltern Studies historians distanced themselves from Marxism, and moved towards a markedly post-foundationalist approach, in the tradition of Nietzsche, Derrida and Foucault. The influence of post-modernism and its offspring “post-colonial
studies" began to take its toll. In point of theoretical orientations, the subalternist and postmodernist intellectual traditions differed profoundly. While the former centered agency and voice on a very specific group—the marginalized, subaltern classes—the other diffused and decentered agency and relativized knowledge in such a way as to question the possibility of any stable voice or collective consciousness among any social class. And while early subalternist historians viewed history in terms of the liberation and self-realization of subaltern classes, postmodernists challenged the linear and teleological structures that underlay all the meta-narratives of modern Indian history. The colonial narrative, from their perspective, was self-evidently teleological and Eurocentric, while the nationalist narrative, though assigning important roles to some Indian elites, had used European tropes of reason and progress to explain the transition from British to Indian rule and hence could not be embraced as authentically Indian. And Marxism deployed a universalist mode-of-production narrative that was dismissed as both teleological and Europe-derived.

In view of these profound differences in intellectual orientation, one might never have predicted that postmodernist perspectives would have made inroads in the Subaltern Studies Collective. By the mid-1980s, however, members of that group had begun rereading already known materials with a view to capturing their discursive modes and structures. This strategy had the effect of shifting the group from a positivist and empiricist orientation to one grounded more squarely in a literary criticism that draped itself in the banner of an amorphous, obscurantist phrasing: cultural studies. Disdaining the old tasks of literary criticism (which were after all honest and straightforward, and never claimed to be speaking for global cultures or transnational discourse), self-styled “cultural critics” became the trendy mint-masters of ambiguity and diversity. Bernard Cohn’s essay in the 1985 volume of Subaltern Studies, “The Command of Language and the Language of Command,” was, as the author acknowledged, “obviously influenced by the work of Michel Foucault.”84 And in the same volume Gayatri Spivak criticized subalternist historians for having adopted positivist methodologies and for treating the objects of their research—the subaltern classes—as enduring, essentialized categories, suggesting that the quest for a subaltern consciousness by these scholars had been misplaced and perhaps even futile. Nonetheless Spivak, herself a literary critic, urged historians to continue their efforts to recover subaltern consciousness even while knowing this was impossible, and to do so by deploying “a strategic use of
positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest." Articles in subsequent volumes of Subaltern Studies reflected the new discursive approaches pioneered in the 1985 volume, while an increasing number of historians of India—both in Indian and Euro-American circles, and both inside and outside the Subaltern Studies Collective—began incorporating postmodernist perspectives into their scholarship.  

Typically, the method was to read historical records “against the grain,” with a view to turning up new interpretations of elite projects, new evidence of smothered subaltern voices, or of counter-identities elaborated by marginalized intellectuals. But the effort to harmonize postmodernist methods of textual and literary analysis with the radical politics that had informed the early subalternist movement nonetheless proved difficult. At the second meeting of the Subaltern Studies Collective, held in Calcutta in January 1986, the split erupted in the open. On the one hand was the desire to discover and celebrate the radical politics of non-elites understood as autonomous actors in their own right; on the other, the desire to expose the discursive formulations—“colonial discourse,” as it came to be known—through which British rule actually operated.

In 1992 Rosalind O’Hanlon and David Washbrook drew attention to this tension, remarking metaphorically that one could not simultaneously ride two horses— one a belief in fundamental rights embracing the possibility of human emancipation, and the other a postmodernist relativism that rejected any “foundational” ground on which such rights could rest. But Gyan Prakash responded to this challenge by insisting that for his own part, he would “hang on to two horses, inconstantly." But was it really possible to straddle two opposing intellectual positions? This tension never disappeared; indeed, it surfaced repeatedly, for instance, at a conference on colonialism and culture held in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Recalled Nicholas Dirks, the conference organizer, “We kept trying to find new ways to rescue subaltern voices among the colonized, only to find that colonialism was about the history by which categories such as the colonizer as well as the colonized, elite as well as subaltern, became established and deployed.” In marked contrast to the efforts of the early Subaltern Studies Collective, Dirks then added, “And while not wishing to align our scholarship with power itself, many of us feared that the glorification of resistance trivialized the all-pervasive character of power, particularly in colonial regimes."
For many conference participants, in other words, an all-pervasive colonial power had smothered the very subaltern classes whose voices and agency the founders of the Subaltern Studies Collective had so earnestly sought to recover. In both America and India, the study of such marginalized classes as constituted the original "subalterns" was thus gradually replaced by the study of the discourses of the elite groups that dominated them, as in Gauri Viswanathan’s argument that British colonial hegemony in India rested ultimately on the teaching of English literature, and not on the exercise of direct force.90 As Ramachandra Guha sardonically observed, Subaltern Studies had become “bhadralok studies”—that is, the study of elites.91 Moreover, a majority of the case studies undertaken by these historians were based on Bengal. As such, with time, it was felt that the Subalternist project tilted heavily towards a Bengal-centric study which left out myriad of stories from other parts of the country. The Subaltern Studies Collective, a movement originally launched in an attempt to recover India’s history from colonial, nationalist, and Marxist metanarratives, was ultimately taken over by an intellectual movement that, referring to the ways in which power and discourse were mutually implicated, ended up reaffirming the overwhelming centrality of the British intrusion in India.50 Still more ironic was that, in academe’s current spirit of political correctness and anti-imperialist rhetoric, people who seem to have thought they were exposing the wicked ends and means of British domination were instead placing the entire explanatory weight of India’s long history and complex socio-cultural institutions on a European discursive formulation that deprived Indians themselves of agency or the ability to make their own history.

Now the central theme of the group’s work became not the hijacking of popular struggles in the interests of an aspiring Indian bourgeoisie nationalism, but the argument that the whole “nationalist” project was fundamentally flawed. In the name of “progress” and “modernity”, the nationalists, after 1947, had imposed an oppressive centralising state on the “fragments” that comprise Indian society. So Partha Chatterjee, a key figure in the group, argues in The Nation and its Fragments that secularism and enlightenment rationalism are simply weapons in the armoury of the post-colonial state. Similarly Dipesh Chakrabarty insists that the very notion of a good society or of universal progress are “monomanias” that need to be junked in the name of the “episodic” and the “fragment”. It is in this context that “community” began to replace “subaltern” as the focus of the collective’s work.
“Community” was now privileged as the key source of resistance to the new hegemonic power. This has led to a celebration of local traditions for their own sake. But of course, in reality communities are not simply centres of resistance to an intrusive and oppressive state, but also source of oppression themselves—of class, gender and caste.

Such a perspective tread very dangerous ground. The BJP-led coalition government in the later part of the 1990s trumpeted an exclusivist “Hindu” nationalism and targeted all liberal, democratic and socialist thought as alien imports. Clearly the members of the collective loathe this new majoritarianism, and many of them have spoken out and campaigned against the Hindu right. Nonetheless their own championing of indigenous discourse, irrelevant of its content, and their attacks on Enlightenment thought as fundamentally oppressive, plays into the hands of those bigots that now govern India and who wish to create an authoritarian state based on “authentic Indian tradition”.

V.

It is argued that Indian English writers have always worked under the burden of representing “Indianness” in their desire to attain authenticity and cater to the expectations the English speaking audience of the West. This search for authenticity in a linguistic medium that is spoken by only five percent of the population of India gives rise to a lot of complexities.

The very concept of an authentic, fixed “Indianness” or Indian identity is problematic, as we have discussed in the preceding chapters. The problem becomes more critical when the linguistic aspect enters this embattled territory. The vital question of authenticity—these cultural texts as reliable information to be consumed by the West comes in via the linguistic paradigm and this linguistic issue is closely related to the charge of elitism in Indian writing in English. Indian novels in English, although a distinctive and notable force in world fiction, constitute an obviously paradoxical genre in that creative expression of a nation is being sought in an alien medium even as the nation possesses a rich literary heritage of its own, both
oral and written, as also a plenitude of regional languages. One major reason for this is that the vernacular literatures are unable to attract a worldwide or even a nation-wide readership for lack of translations. Moreover, several Indian writers have been able to assimilate the social scenario of modern India in the throes of change and the complex dilemmas confronting it in its efforts to find solutions to the problems bedeviling it. They resort to a suitable medium to make their newly-found voice heard all over the world. In the following section we shall examine some of the linguistic issues related to the debate.

The adoption of English as an instrument of creative communication has ramifications beyond convenience. The debate over English is rooted in the legitimate concerns about the place of English in social and cultural reproduction. The fact that English-speaking people in India cut through class, caste, ethnic, religious, geographical and vernacular barriers illustrates that this unique literature has far outreached the scope conceived and foreseen by its pioneers.

The controversy over Indian writing in English was fuelled in recent times by writer/literary critic Salman Rushdie’s declaration that work by Indian writers in English was “the most valuable contribution India has made to the world of books”. To validate this extravagant claim, Rushdie included only one writer of vernacular language in the anthology of Indian writing co-edited by Rushdie. In his introduction to this anthology, Rushdie asserts that “the prose writing—both fiction and non-fiction—created in this period by Indian writers writing in English is proving to be a stronger and more important body of work than most of what has been produced in the sixteen “official languages” of India; the so-called “vernacular languages,” during the same time”.

Rushdie’s remarks regarding the contemporary literature produced in the other officially recognized languages read by the millions of other Indians were definitely offensive. His view was justifiably countered vehemently by critics and intellectuals. “Salman playing literary Salieri to the vernacular Mozart?” asks S. Prasannarajan in The Indian Express. Nandi Bhatia characterizes Rushdie’s article as “problematic,” and explains why it should be characterized this way:

...what made it really unpalatable was the irony that the success of contemporary Indian writing in English itself can, in large part, be attributed to the incorporation of the vernacular. It is precisely Rushdie’s own interaction
with the vernacular that gives, in part, his writing its unique ability to capture and comprehend snapshots of cultural and political realities in what he calls “CinemaScope and glorious Technicolour”... [H]is own writing and most of contemporary Indian writing itself functions as a reminder of—or, for that matter, the ignoring of—the significance of the vernaculars. 96

It is ironic that he resorts to so many regional vernacular phrase in his writings, and at the same time he is also, according to Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, among those few South Asian writers in the West who do not display an anxious need to explain the unfamiliar to his western readers. 97

Rushdie’s claim was a preposterous one which completely elided the depth and range of Indian writing. The kind of Indian experience he talks about is the experience of urban, middle and upper-middle class India, united by its cosmopolitanism and its familiarity with English. This elite provenance of the English language in popularizing the postcolonial condition or representation of postcolonial history and nation has been naturalized by the wide circulation and consumption of Indian English writing by the minuscule English speaking class in India and the predominantly English speaking audience in the West.

There is only a tiny minority of the population well versed in English, yet English writings in India have attained wider recognition. The elite character of the English language in the Indian context was recognized by Mahatma Gandhi who spoke of the “gulf [that the English language] created between the educated classes and the uneducated masses”. 98 Gandhi’s characterization of English remains accurate in contemporary India where only about 5% of its massive population is conversant in English. It is the urban elite class which comprises of the majority of English speaking population. They learned English as if it were their native language, often at the expense of learning their native language. Felicity with English connotes an immediate social distance from the rest of India, even its literate vernacular sections. In a deeply hierarchical society with a strong colonial hangover, social attributes of the ruling class, such as language, acquire iconic stature. English is arguably the most sought after, the most desirable of all the languages in the country.

The Indian ruling class has established a defining role for English in key areas of public life, such as employment, education and media. The political issue of the desirability of
a language inaccessible to the overwhelming majority has been successfully shelved. Consequently, the test of a good education is considered to be a sound knowledge of English; similarly, competence in English is a necessity for a white collar job. Those who have little or no access to the language are perhaps the ones who best appreciate its power—they feel it in job interviews, in their children’s schools, in court rooms, in hospitals, in community forums—they know they are powerless and socially marked. English is not merely a signifier of class in India; it is a facilitator of class rule. It is not surprising that Indian Anglophone literature is subjected to severe scrutiny given the extraordinary association of the language with class privilege. If the charge of exoticism is grounded in the distance between author and subject, it is to be expected that Anglophone writers are especially targeted on this issue.

In a sense, English is the only pan-Indian language because, while it is not associated with any particular region, the language maintains a presence all over the country. The pan-Indian aspect of the language, however, rarely translates into a sensibility that meaningfully engages with the national culture. Russian literature of the nineteenth century, Pankaj Mishra observes, offers a poignant contrast with Indian Anglophone literature. In a land marked by a colonial culture, much like India, uneven development, brutal class hierarchies, and people caught in the vortex of unmanageable forces, the Russian writers performed an indispensable function. They made their lived world their raw material and created a literature that the people could recognize to be their own. This, Mishra observes, is the “truest function of a national literature: it holds a mirror in whose unfamiliar reflections a nation slowly learns to recognize itself.” In contrast, the Indian Anglophone elite writer, even while writing about the social conditions, are not fully immersed in it. It is argued by many critics that Indian English writers inhabit a colonial class culture, and that their writings often show signs of evasiveness about these conditions.

This debate is a long one and has been there for a long time. Critical interest in the literary product has always been framed by the issue of the viability of an Indian literature in the language of its colonizers. The debate came to the forefront recently when two famous Indian English writers—Amit Chaudhuri and Vikram Chandra took the critics head-on in spirited defense of Indian English writings. Chaudhuri’s essay “The East as a Career” (2006) and Chandra’s “The Cult of Authenticity” (2000) ridicules all criticisms which speak of the anxieties of the use of English in Indian writing, and point to the exotic and elite strains in
such writings. Amit Chaudhuri calls such criticism a recent one and without much critical content, with “no persuasive and intelligent debate ... on the nature of Indian writing in English”. Chandra rejects such criticism by calling it “nativist”.

Chaudhuri offers an ambitious defense of Indian Anglophone writing. He begins by conceding what he believes is the central assumption behind the exoticism critique: because English is an elite language, there is a distance between the Indian English writer and her audience. This distance between writer and audience, he holds, is what critics believe to be the condition for the production of the exotic. However, the Indian audience, he argues, can never be a homogenous entity. It is a deeply stratified society where even the Anglophone minority is rife with political, intellectual, and other divisions. Thus the distance between writer and audience is inevitable, regardless of the language of literary practice. The idea of an “Indian audience” is a utopian fiction based on an “Arcadian vision of Indian history”. If the idealistic desire for unity between writer and audience is misguided then Indian Anglophone writers, the argument goes, are no more responsible for the production of the exotic than are regional writers. Chaudhuri’s line of argument, however, does not do justice to the exoticism critique.

Like Chaudhuri’s article, Vikram Chandra’s essay “The Cult of Authenticity” (2000) is also a defense of Indian English writing. The essay published in Boston Review is mostly a counter argument of Meenakshi Mukherjee’s criticism of Indian English writing on the ground that it often caters to an elite audience and in doing so it loses its touch with the reality. Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan also make such criticism in her essay published in two parts in The Hindu in February of 2001 (“Writing in English in India, Again,” and “Dealing with Anxieties”, both of which was targeted by Vikram Chandra in two essays “Arty Goodness” and “Arty Goodness II”). She notes that theories of “language-as-identity” should not be universalized, “still less [be] establish[ed] as a critical standard of ‘authenticity’.” Like Mukherjee, Sunder Rajan contends that Indian writers in English “sometimes do fail between explaining too much and explaining too little”. She concludes: “…the question of readership, then, becomes the crucial one”. She blames Rushdie’s valorization of Indian-writers-in-English for “(re)cast[ing] the English ‘vernaculars’ linguistic-literary situation in India as an opposition between a cosmopolitan against a parochial world view.”
The specific accusation that both Chaudhuri and Chandra contest is that Indian Anglophone writers tend to become orientalists to cater to their international audience. In their articles, Chaudhuri and Chandra highlight some of the central critical assumptions against Indian Anglophone literature. They foreground the critical contention that Indian English writers capitalize on their ethnic identity in ways that both pander to immigrant nostalgia and offer images of India that are packaged for easy consumption in the West. The exoticized cultural images, the critique claims, are, rather than a presentation of the national condition, in effect details of banal particularities devoid of history and politics. On this, Indian Anglophone literature is contrasted with its vernacular counterpart, which, critics assert, largely escapes the pressures and lures of a global market. Adding to the critics' ire is the fact that the rich corpus of Indian regional literatures, even in translation, rarely captures global attention. Chaudhuri and Chandra succinctly grasp the underlying assumption of the critique: the international popularity of Indian Anglophone literature is riding high on the preferences of a global market rather than on the intrinsic literary qualities of the text.

After identifying the widespread suspicion against Indian Anglophone writers, both Chaudhuri and Chandra proceed to deny any validity to such criticism. The critics, Chandra asserts, have created a "cult of authenticity" and cry out against all perceived distortions and misrepresentations of what they believe to be the "real" India. Both writers decry what they view as the ingrained parochialism of Indian Anglophone criticism and hold that there is no material basis for its assumptions. For Chandra, the cosmopolitanism of urban India, and, for Chaudhuri, the complex conglomeration of social classes belies any homogenized notion of the nation. Their critics are thus reproached for subscribing to a utopian idea of Indian history based on a denial of its manifold social complexities.

Both writers highlight in passing the possibility that the charge of exoticism is related to several factors specific to Anglophone writers: the use of an elite language, the often-deracinated social position of the writers, the catering to an audience largely untutored in Indian realities, and the lure of a lucrative Western market. But instead of engaging these issues, they ridicule them. They deny that there are any meaningful differences between the conditions of production—with regard to access to intellectual and material resources facilitated by publishers, media and the academy—of Indian Anglophone and vernacular literatures. Such differences, even when present, the writers hold, should not be read into the
literatures. With the denial that social conditions have a role in literary production, the writers come perilously close to advocating that art exists for its own sake. The critics, they contend, with their new-fangled views, are obsessed with market conditions and audience reception rather than with questions of aesthetics.  

According to Chandra, Indian critics are as obsessed with questions of authenticity at the expense of art as some of the most repressive regimes of the recent past. Chaudhuri shares this aversion of the political and laments that in our post-Saidian era, the analysis of a text's conditions of production has taken clear precedence over the examination of its meaning. The more interesting question is why Chaudhuri and Chandra, established Indian English writers, consider the charge to be a non-issue. Chaudhuri barely addresses the question of the class character of English and its possible implications for artistic practice. Chandra makes the novel claim that precisely because English is the lingua franca of power and privilege and the underprivileged aspire to the knowledge of English, it is not an alien and a foreign language. But Chandra misses the point. The exoticism charge is not based on the idea of English as an alien language, as he suggests; instead, it focuses on the alienating effect that the language generates in a fiercely stratified society.

The decades of the 50s, 60s, and 70s were marked by ongoing, lively, and often acrimonious discussions by both supporters and opponents of an indigenous literature in English. And questions of artistic practice and representation remained intertwined as critics addressed multiple dimensions of these issues: the desirability of Indians choosing English as a literary medium, the practicability of doing so, the literary dilemmas of the Indian Anglophone writer, the changing character of the literature. Though Choudhury speaks of Indian criticism as a post-Saidian phenomenon it has been there since 1960s as in critics like Balachandran Rajan and P. Lal.

Despite the presence of moral posturing among some Indian critics, the objections against Indian Anglophone literature have very little to do with the kind of empty moralism caricatured by Chaudhuri and Chandra. The critics are accused of adopting a very high moral ground from where they attack writers for choosing an elitist language. Similarly they are charged with erecting artificial and moralistic divisions between Indian writers in English and those writing in the vernacular. None of this, however, survives close scrutiny. It is widely acknowledged, for instance, that writers “choose” English not because it offers all the perks of
a global language but because it is usually the only language in which they have literary competence. And while Anglophone literature is sometimes contrasted with its vernacular counterpart, the critics’ aim is not to erect non-existent binaries but to highlight the influence of varying social conditions on cultural production.

It is not that who write in Indian languages are automatically better or worse than those who write in English. But the question of readership and whether it affects a writer at all is something that can be discussed without being judgmental. Thus, the question does not seem to focus on the more “authentically Indian” choice of a language in which to write, but rather on the results of that choice: for whom is one writing, and with what consequences (aesthetic, financial, social, etc.). In her book, The Perishable Empire, Meenakshi Mukherjee explains this in greater detail. She favorably cites Harish Trivedi’s conclusion that Vikram Seth’s A Suitable Boy translates into Hindi far more successfully than Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children. Anyone who has read Rushdie would immediately object that his writing, more than almost any contemporary author’s, is in every sense “polyphonic,” but the point that Mukherjee is making is more localized: “The rustic Urdu spoken at Debaria is made to sound different from the courtly grace of Saeeda Bai’s conversation, and Haresh Khanna’s studied English is evidently worlds apart from the casual doggerel-spouting wit of the Chatterjee family in Calcutta. In an unobtrusive way Seth manages to capture the linguistic diversity of Indian life even though he is writing in English”. The language is in one sense irrelevant, therefore; the difference between Seth and Rushdie, from Mukherjee’s point of view, is in their immersion in the context of their characters. Thus, one assumes that Mukherjee is implying here that Seth, more so than Rushdie, has an eye for an audience in India—and in a particular section of India, at that.

Mukherjee insists that of the many novels written by “Third World Cosmopolitans” and now incorporated into postcolonial literature courses in the West, it seems a prerequisite that Indians on the list must write originally in English; “Implicit here,” she concludes, “is an erasure of the diversity of India”. Graham Huggan criticizes “the tailoring of an independent India to metropolitan market tastes” because such a move risks “collapsing cultural politics into a kind of ‘ethnic’ spectacle, reclaiming culture as a site not of conflict but of pleasurable diversion”. 

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G. J. V. Prasad pits himself against those in the West who are the delineators of “postcolonialism”:

...when we talk of Indian writings and post colonialism we only talk of English writings by Indians. This is the specifically, peculiarly post-colonial literature in India. It is almost as if writers in other languages in India escaped this historical experience. It is also as if Indian English writers do not have access to other Indian traditions, as if they exist in a vacuum, or a space created solely by British colonialism untouched by earlier or even contemporary lateral continuums and concerns. 115

This latter point of Prasad is taken up by Rushdie, as well, who builds on earlier, similar arguments from Mulk Raj Anand and from Raja Rao’s introduction to Kanthapura in suggesting that Indians use English in new ways, and thereby make the colonizer’s language something that the formerly-colonized now own and manipulate. “One of the rules, one of the ideas on which the edifice rests,” continues Rushdie,

is that literature is an expression of nationality...Books which mix traditions, or which seek consciously to break with tradition, are often treated as highly suspect.... ‘Authenticity’ is the respectable child of old-fashioned exoticism. It demands that sources, forms, style, language and symbol all derive from a supposedly homogeneous and unbroken tradition.... [whereas] the rest of us understand that the very essence of Indian culture is that we possess a mixed tradition, a melange of elements as disparate as ancient Mughal and contemporary Coca-Cola American. 116

Rushdie’s argument might be heard more effectively had he not made the infamous statement that “the true Indian literature of the first postcolonial half of the century has been made in the language the British left behind”. 117

When one involves oneself in this kind of arguments regarding the taste of metropolitan audience, and the Indian English writers’ pandering to their expectations, one
must be aware that this might be a insult to the taste of Indian readers (English or otherwise). Vikram Chandra himself acknowledges the eclectic taste of Indian readers when discussing the inspiration for Red Earth and Pouring Rain’s story-within-stories. Noting that commercial Indian films shaped his writing of the novel, he admits that he loves the form: “you can have...a war movie, which will stop the doomed trek of the lost platoon for a musical interlude. Now, this makes no sense to the Western eye, which is trained to read musical comedies but finds a hard-hitting war musical incomprehensible”.118 And, as Graham Huggan has noted, “it should not be forgotten that [Midnight’s Children] enjoyed, as Rushdie’s other novels have enjoyed, a large readership in India, nor should it be imagined that responses to his novels are culturally and/or geographically determined in any simple way”.119 As Rajeswari Sunder Rajan suggests, “a good, vibrant translation industry, supported by publishers, academic bodies and the state, is a crying need, one that would bring regional writers the visibility they deserve”.120

VI.

What we have examined in this chapter is the politics of literary production and consumption in the field of postcolonial literature. The chapter has been an attempt at tracing the “social life of things”, as theorized by Appadurai. Cultural commodities, novels in our case, come to signify and embody meanings in the intersection of their popular and critical reception as well as the machinations of the market in the globalized world. The global reach and privileged metropolitan locations of cosmopolitan writers like Rushdie, Mistry, Tharoor, Chandra, Baldwin etc point to the unavoidable fact that there is a disjuncture between the anti-colonial aesthetic of these writers and the appropriation of this very aesthetic by the global market. The market and its desire to sell these cultural products to the metropolitan readers as exotic artifacts have been examined at some length. At the same time, we have seen the linguistic dimension as well the elitist bias in some of the writers. The charge that some of these writers themselves utilize the exotic paradigm to gain benefit of the market has also been discussed. We have seen how the writers consciously work within the commercial apparatus in which they fuel the metropolitan industry of strategically exoticized products.
What becomes clear from the above discussion is that we cannot ignore the material condition of production and consumption/reception of these cultural texts. Seeing these texts as cultural products, authentic enough to speak about the postcolonial history and nation of Third World countries, the politics of reception and consumption must be taken into account. This line of argument, as exemplified by critics like Graham Huggan and others, emphasizes that on the one hand, the market and the metropolitan readers and academy appropriate and consume these texts as exotica and as authentic national documents of the Third World, and on the other hand, the writers flag exotic cultural signs for global audience.

Institutional and methodological self-criticism and oppositional positioning have always been an integrated part of postcolonial studies as an academic field. The constant self-scrutiny of the field from within its own ranks prevents the discipline from reaching a stagnant and self-complacent level of homogeneity. While postcolonial field has become melancholic by its institutionalization and its consequent danger gaining power as the authoritative critical position eliminating the illusion of identifying an “authentic” margin, its self-critical enterprise has also now created unexpected worries and anxieties. The dimension of “consciousness-raising” is, according to Michael Denning, “a virtue when it means a genuinely reflective sense of one’s own being, one’s own situation in the world, and one’s own impact on others”, thus an integral part of the “emergence of any social movement of subaltern peoples”. It is true that the danger of institutionalization, which haunts the contemporary field of postcolonial studies in the age of global commodification, would seem to demand even more pronounced calls for a self-critical approach; but at the same time it may equally be relevant to see this demand in itself as something that has become a fetishized, empty, and self-congratulating gesture. Relentless self-flagellation or a theoretical short-circuit or impasse, playing a vital part in the process of contemporary melancholia. In other words, while the dimension of self-criticism or self-reflexivity seems to constitute a necessary disciplinary maneuver in postcolonial studies, it may simultaneously be conceived as a symptom of a certain methodological narcissism, which legitimizes institutionally an increasingly prescriptive framework that dogmatically maintains its position as the critical position in academia.

But despite such widespread politics of production, consumption and reception, we must not be overwhelmed by a melancholic sense of resignation that the postcolonial writers
are necessarily and always helpless and passive victims who fall easy preys to the metropolitan marketing monster. In other words, we need to have a balanced view and look at the exceptions and other factors which might get lost in the noise of wholesale condemnation and rejection. In contrast to the critics who see the market as omnipotent in the shaping and valuing of postcolonial literature, there are other critics who claim that the situation is not exclusively so. Among this group of critics, we would examine the views of Sarah Brouillette, Bishnupriya Ghosh, and Deepika Bahri.

Notwithstanding the pressures and tactical marketing strategies, it would be wrong to say that postcolonial writers are necessarily dupes of the global industry. In an earlier part of this chapter, we discussed how postcolonial writers like Rushdie, Mistry and Chandra participate in a “strategic exoticism” or “staged marginality”¹²² to cater to the market demand and the taste for exotic and ‘authentic’ documents of the Third World. But at the same time, we must not forget that the same authors respond to the market’s dictates in critical and ironic ways. One of the ways in which these authors evade the exoticizing tendency of the market and subvert the anticipation of the market reader is by writing novels that display a keen understanding of an author’s function. Sarah Brouillette points out such authorial function via her strong critique of Graham Huggan’s cynical and, at times, simplistic description of a cosmopolitan consumer with a touristic desire for exotic products. Brouillette argues that in critiquing “an unnamed cosmopolitan consumer who seeks mythic access to exotic experience”, Huggan implicitly posits “a group of educated, elite, distinguished consumers who actually have access to the reality that the other consumer can only ever wish to possess”.¹²³ In place of such a contest between bad, touristic readers and good readers with access to insider knowledge, Brouillette finds it “more fruitful to understand strategic exoticism, and likewise general postcolonial authorial self-consciousness, as comprised of a set of literary strategies that operate through assumptions shared between the author and the reader, as both producer and consumer work to negotiate with, if not absolve themselves of, postcoloniality’s touristic guilt”.¹²⁴

We have also discussed the penchant of global institutions for rewarding postcolonial fictions—that the prizing cultures like that of the Booker replicates older historical forms of cultural imperialism. But we must remember that it is not just the Booker winning postcolonial texts but there are numerous other texts which are equally guilty of complicity.
We must remember that literary awards do not or should not change the dynamics of reading. This issue of “complicity” of the writers with the market demands is one of those self-reflexive gestures in the postcolonial studies which decry the emptying out of “resistance” postcolonial texts as multicultural staples. One way of coming out of this melancholia of too much self-reflexiveness of the postcolonial field is to return to a consideration of the aesthetics dimension in the postcolonial texts in an attempt to unearth the social function of artworks.

Marxist aesthetic theories of Theodore Adorno, Walter Benjamin and Herbert Marcuse demonstrate how the aesthetic dimension can be a crucial category in assessing such social function. A close and serious engagement with this aesthetic paradigm in postcolonial texts like Midnight’s Children, The Great Indian Novel, Such a Long Journey or Rich Like Us can help us recognize that some of the canonical postcolonial texts, despite their authorized circulation in global markets, are replete with utopian political dimensions. Deepika Bahri who makes such an appeal for Marxist aesthetic consideration argues in her book Native Intelligence: Aesthetics, Politics, and Postcolonial Literature (2003) that the work of criticism can elucidate the "unknowable" utopias of postcolonial texts by attending to a “native intelligence” that is not informancy. In other words, critics need to work at dislodging the flow of postcolonial literature as commodity by preventing the quick translation of literature into information. A reading of the literary text’s aesthetic capacities might lead us somewhere else: to consider how the text calls into question the means by which the end of political struggle is achieved, how it asks us to ponder the relation between theory and practice and how it gestures toward an unknowable utopia. In her chapter on Rushdie where Bahri proceeds through readings of Grimus, Shame, and Midnight’s Children to alight on Moor’s Last Sigh as the culmination of a certain Rushdian aesthetics, Bahri elaborates on Rushdie’s Benjaminian habit—his “improper subscription to modern units of time and space” (a requisite for signing the modern nation) in representing a “disaggregated and plural” nation.

In Bahri’s theorization, the concept of “Native intelligence” is a “mode of perception relevant in its own context,” stirrings in indigenous and vernacular contexts that shore up the limits of metropolitan knowledge authorized by disciplinary postcoloniality. In Rushdie’s case, this limit of metropolitan knowledge is exposed by his concept of time and space which disrupt the concepts of Western modernity. This search for alternative modernity can be seen
in Sealy’s appropriation of the “nama” form as a valid form of writing history; in Chandra’s flouting of Cartesian and Aristotelian rules; in Tharoor’s epic, digressive historiography; and in Kesavan’s counterfactual mode of history. All these writers, from Rushdie to Sealy and Mistry, from Tharoor and Ghosh to Baldwin and Deb are questioning modernity in their representation of “disaggregated and plural” nation. The easy consumption by the metropolitan readers can be countered by a dedicated aesthetic criticism which would situate these texts in their historical context. This thesis, in its own small ways, has made such an attempt to align epistemological histories with the literary texts, examining the similarities between the Subaltern School of history and the novels that emerged in the 1980s.

Self-scrutiny is important, particularly at this historical moment, when postcolonialism’s success internationally, and academically, risks becoming its own liability. Though the major part of this research has underlined the oppositional and subversive potential of the novels at recuperating lost, suppressed histories, we cannot avoid examining the politics of production and reception. It is necessary to recognize the blind-spots to remain truly committed to an oppositional postcolonial politics. Such self-scrutiny not only helps us to confront our internalized uncertainties, but also provides a window to see how postcolonial writers and theorists are at once empowered and constrained by the very success of the discourse they embrace.
Notes and References


9. Scholars like Immanuel Wallerstein and Janet Abu Lughod, among others, have articulated such a stand within a body of work known as world systems theory.


30. Hower, *op. cit.*.


34. Blair Mahony, Book Review of Siddhartha Deb’ *The Point of Return*, *The Modern World Magazine* 16 April 2007 [www.the
modernworld.com/review/pointofreturn.html].


45. See Amit Chaudhuri, *Clearing a space: reflections on India, literature, and culture* (Witney, Peter Lang, 2008).


64. Nivedita Majumdar 12.


86. Prominent among these were Arjan Appadurai, Carol Breckenridge, Dipesh Chakrabarti, Partha Chatterjee, Bernard Cohn, Nicholas Dirks, Ronald Inden, Lata Mani, Gyan Prakash, Peter van der Veer, and Gauri Viswanathan.


89. Dirks, Ibid, 14.


102. Chaudhuri 113.

103. Chaudhuri 113-114.


105. Sundar Rajan, “Dealing with Anxieties.”


111. Mukherjee, Meenakshi, “The Anxiety of Indianness: Our Novels in English


119. Huggan, The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins 72
120. Sundar Rajan “Dealing with Anxieties”
126. Bahri, Native Intelligence 158.
127. Bahri, Native Intelligence 20.