Chapter 6

a) The Saroyanesque Self in Abject space: Comparative Reading of William Saroyan’s “Cowards” and Ruskin Bond’s “The Playing Fields of Shimla”.

In 1997, Ruskin invokes the ghost of his abject self as it was lived in the uncertain days of yet another turning point of Indian history. The vicarious representation of the self’s desires and fears in *A Flight of Pigeons* become actually lived experiences of the author now.

In 1997, the 50th year of India’s Independence, the BBC chose to broadcast a short but significant biographical vignette, “The Playing Fields of Shimla”, which Ruskin wrote as part of his *Memoir*. The author narrates the nostalgic experience of his adolescent friendship with a Muslim friend, Omar, in Bishop Cotton School at Shimla in India during the days of the Raj; how they came close to considering each other their alter-egos and in one of their joint intrigues found a tunnel in a defunct drainage pipe in the school’s third flat to escape into a no-man’s land. These idyllic excitements ceased with the 1947 Partition of the Indian subcontinent, forcing Omar to migrate to an unknown land called Pakistan. The feeling of estrangement comes to a head during the 1965 Indo-Pak War, when Ruskin finds out that one of the pilots of the Pak bomber which is shot down by Indian flak near the playing field of his Shimla school is Omar.
Ruskin's apparently innocuous manner of narrating his childhood memories hides a deep sense of identity-seeking concerns. Given the kind of hatred and socio-political rejection that the young author encountered himself during the Nationalist movement in India, it was quite natural for him to feel concerned about fostering, like Omar, a sense of ambivalence towards the place that he otherwise identified with. It is important for the reader to know that on the eve of India's Independence the identity crisis of the Anglo-Indians turned into a nightmare as they were jettisoned by the British government as flotsam of the Empire and spurned by the Nationalist Indians for their English bearing and alleged truck with the colonists. Omar's fear of territorial belonging during Partition was shared by Ruskin, who for his physical aspect of a white "sahib" felt rejected by the natives. Central to both their crisis, however, was a fear of displacement. For both Omar and Ruskin, the school's third flat provides the site for a symbolic escape from institutionalized space, the political implication of which is to escape territorial boundaries into no-man's land for two persons, a Muslim and an Anglo-Indian, whose identities were under Nationalist scrutiny.

Omar's desire for a no-man's land becomes a prescient foreboding for the kind of forced disjunction his adult personality will suffer from childhood impressions. Had Omar been able to make a tunnel to escape the politically enforced geographical and later ideological dislocation in the wake of the Partition, he could have been saved from the psychic schism of his adult life. His is a case of schizoid anti-normativity because unlike Ruskin his adult sensibilities underwent recursive disorientation from the formative influences of childhood experiences. In fact, the reversal of the normative in Omar is governed by a perspective that in itself is rendered highly fickle by the psychopathology
of nationalism. Omar's alleged neurosis is, in Jacques Lacan's schema, a position taken up with respect to the Other.

I will problematize the concept of normativity by exploring how the socio-political structures of power underwrite the change of content in Omar's psychoanalytic component of abjection and validate the author's adolescent fear about his own subjectivity. Can Omar's aggressivity from an integrationist point of view be treated as having born from a culturally complicit enforcement of abjection, that nations in order to allay their own fears of abnormality force on each other? I seek to negotiate this question by comparing Ruskin's dilemma with Saroyan's concerns embedded in a text whose interpretation casts light on the implications of psycho-social abjection in a world roiled by war and terrorism.

In Saroyan's "Cowards", a short story based on the psychological effect of drafting among the able-bodied young men of Fresno, California, USA, during World War I, the protagonist prefers infantilism to state-controlled coercive fatalism. When the Selective Service Act reached Fresno in 1917, eligible sons of various families were supposed to throw down their lots and present themselves to the draft board. A twenty-four-year-old man, Kristofor Agbadashian, who had lost his father at three, lived with mother and three unmarried sisters at 123 M Street and worked at the menswear department in Cooper's, suddenly disappeared. His mother, Aylizabet, told her friend Arshaluce Ganjakian that she was upset over her son's disappearance. From the War officials and the sheriff who had come in search of Kristofor she had learnt that her son was not in the Army. As the war came to an end and fear of conscription melted away,
Aylizabet confided to Arshaluce that it was she who made her son evade drafting by stowing him in home:

He has been home all this time. It is my fault. I told him I would die if he went away. His father died when he was still a small boy. I could not bear to lose the only man remaining in the family”

(Fresno Stories 69).

Kristofor emerged from his hideout, went to San Francisco in search of a better prospect, married and had children. When the military inquest caught up with him ten years later, he explained, without mincing words, that he was a coward. However, the sympathetic investigator put down “Father” as the cause of Kristofor’s failure to present himself for drafting. When the Saroyanesque Kristofor sought infantilism to save himself from the fatal consequences of death drive, the authorial narrator in Ruskin’s memoir dissociates himself from his abjected double who ends up an exiled warrior trying to kill his own people.

In “Cowards”, Kristofor Agbadashian is a fatherless orphan living with his mother, a situation inflammatory enough to push him towards the anti-normative pole of the characteristic double bind of adolescence: desire for and fear of the mother’s body. His libidinal proclivities are intensified further by the threat of fragmentation that emerged in the form of war conscription in 1917. So, he is subjected to a state of double abjection – absence of the father and institutional fatalism. Throughout social history, the exclusions of peoples based on race, sexuality, disabilities and religion have established and bolstered both personal and national identities. Julia Kristeva’s primary insight is that what we have expelled as abject does not simply and finally disappear. Identities, communities and nations are “permanently brittle” constructs because they are built on abjection, which haunts their borders. In Ruskin’s memoir, both the author and Omar are
primarily abjects, like Kristofor and his creator William Saroyan, in having lost their fathers in childhood. This brought them together in contradistinction to the other “horde of rowdy, pea-shooting fourth formers” (Bond 51). The cause of Ruskin’s abject distinction lay “in sharing my father’s loneliness after his separation from my mother” (51-52). That his desire to assume the father’s role stemmed from a libidinal economy becomes clear in the psychological revival of the Oedipal feelings that endangered the narrated time of the persona’s life portrayed in “The Playing Fields”:

It had been a lonely winter for a twelve-year-old boy.
I hadn’t really got over my father’s untimely death two years previously; nor had I as yet reconciled myself to my mother’s marriage to the Punjabi gentleman who dealt in second-hand cars” (51).

He was still obsessed with the images overwhelmingly invested with his father’s presence: his father’s rare visits on brief leaves from RAF duties, sharing tent or Air Force hutment with him outside Delhi or Karachi, visiting Lawrence Royal Military School, his father’s alma mater, and discovering his name on the school’s role of honour board. In such a state of loneliness, when he yearned for identification from the social rim of the fourth form of his school, he discovered his prototype in a quiet, “taciturn” new boy, Omar, who showed a complete indifference to the form’s “prevailing anarchy”.

Ruskin’s identification with Omar is based on the sympathetic principle of abject grouping. “Omar, too, had lost his father – had I sensed that before? says the author in a retrospective reflection on the etiology of a unique camaraderie. A shared objective of fighting libidinal urges and abject vulnerability establishes a communicable reciprocity between them:
Even before we began talking to each other, Omar and I developed an understanding of sorts, and we’d nod almost respectfully to each other when we met in the classroom corridors or the environs of dining hall or dormitory” (52).

At hockey and football, Ruskin and Omar, as goalkeeper and full-back respectively, communicated on the same wavelength. When the school hockey team visited Sanawar to play out their rivals, the Lawrence Royal Military School, both of them “thrown together a great deal” “exchanged life histories and other confidences”. On the eve of the Indian Independence when word spread that the British are going to divide the country, Omar evinced apprehensive fear of a breach of communication. The fear was realized in the form of abject schism when Partition forced exile on him. Although Ruskin tried to assuage Omar’s anxieties saying, “Oh, it won’t happen...How can they cut up such a big country?” he too reeled under the fearful memory of a nationalist rejection he had suffered earlier. Like Kristofor, Omar suffers a second bout of abjection when his identity was redefined on the basis of religious Nationalism snapping the communicative chords, discreetly tautened by multivalent ties, and fragmenting his sense of integrity. Omar’s paranoid aggressivity that subsequently blows him up in the 1965 War springs from what Lacan calls the “delusion of the misanthropic ‘belle ame’” (Ecrits 20), seeing into the world the disorder of his own fragmentary self. The dissection of the country energizes the infantile trace of the unconscious lack of coordination of motility. His abject desire for the mother, who is invested with the imago of the fulfilling complementer of the lack, inspires him to desire the object of the other’s desire in the form of a spatial Gestalt of a place Ruskin continues to enjoy. Deprivation of the Indian Other that he identified with becomes the cause of his resentment.
The connection between libidinal normativity and cultural normativity appears all the more obscure in analyses of aggressive symptoms. Kristofor in “Cowards” and Harry Cook and Wesley Jackson in *The Adventures of Wesley Jackson* by William Saroyan have something of the author in them. It is not only metaphorical of Saroyan’s libidopaternal angst that he chose to write *The Adventures* in military conscription in London in August 1944 in a promised exchange for a furlough to New York to see his wife and baby son. Although he was denied a furlough on the grounds that the novel levelled a treasonous tirade against the US government, the fictive retelling of his Army experience was for Saroyan a mode of refracting and heaving his psychic pressure through projection. The Saroyanesque resentment at war and conscription is played out in intriguing ways in the portrayal of each of these characters. “Cowards” and *The Adventures* being works on identical themes, it is imperative to read them intertextually for a better understanding of the paranoid delusions that the characters try to negotiate during war-time coercive fatalism. Inherent to both the choices of infantilism and fatalism is a psychoanalytic “death drive”. The difference between the two expressions of the instinct operates in the former being purely fantasmatic and the latter social symbolic: the former works at the symptomatic level while the latter teeters on the verge of terminal malignancy. This is why Slavoj Zizek explained, “the forced actualization in social reality of the fantasmatic kernel of my being is the worst and most humiliating type of violence because it undermines the very basis of my identity – my “self-image”” (161). In reaction to the egotistic state-craft of legitimizing fatalism through war and conscription, Saroyan employs fantasmatic means to simulate libido-cultural economy and resist discernment of the deviant process of tackling aggravated symptoms.
A clever tongue in cheek enactment of such a veiled retaliation takes place early in *The Adventures*. Wesley Jackson and Harry Cook, privates drafted into the US Army during World War II, are relaxing outdoors on a pile of reclining timbers in an Army camp when the colonel comes up with a phalanx of soldiers and a newspaperman. Harry’s resentment at the entire business of war and drafting is so intense that his symptomatic hostility to and infringement of Army codes of conduct smack of bland distaste. He has already made derogatory comments against the Army at the risk of being court-martialled. When the colonel and his team approach him, he evinces discourteous apathy in not acknowledging their presence and singing “If I had my way, dear, you’d never grow old” sufficiently loudly to register his aggressive disavowal of militarism and rankle the colonel. When the scribe accosts him for an interview, he dismounts from the pile and walks away, bearing himself in a manner that might have attracted obvious disrepute for the Army had not Wesley volunteered to offer plausible explanation for his friend’s behaviour and save the colonel from embarrassment.

Wesley invents an impromptu story about Harry’s mother being fatally ill and that he is upset crying over it through the afternoon. The explanation appears to relieve the colonel who immediately swings into damage reparation, demonstrating to the newspaperman how humanely disposed the Army is towards its soldiers by ordering the Major to make arrangements for Harry’s speedy transportation to his sick mother. In fact, Wesley attributes Harry’s intransigence and passive belligerence to enforced abjection. The stimulation of the “death drive” under conditions of real threat of castration, dismemberment and mutilation in time of war leads individuals to revive delusional infantile imagoes of narcissistic wholeness of the other. Concerns of the fragmentary self
seek alleviation in the unity of the other that the infant in its state of physical disability attributes to the complementary succour of its mother. Harry is obsessed with the song whose theme sheds ironical light upon the threats inherent in growing out of infancy into an adult being. What is symptomatic in the mirror stage becomes perceptibly real when a 24-year-old adult is conscripted for war. So for Harry, if he had his way he would have never grown old; infantile symptoms are preferable to adult eviscerations. In keeping with the motif of Harry’s obsession, Wesley acts like a psychoanalyst to ascribe his abject aggressivity to neurotic tendencies of infantilism. Harry has been crying for his mother through the afternoon, says Wesley, because the apprehensions of the supplementer’s death incite fear of fragmentation in the infant. It occurs to Wesley that the symptoms of forced abjection can find remedy in the invocation of subjacent urges of Oedipality. It is Harry’s father, according to Wesley, who asks Harry to join his ailing mother. If the notion of war seeks to normalize libidinal instincts by drafting civilians into regimental systems engendered by real threat of self-annihilation, it needs to camouflage its asocial defilement of superegoic strictures by evoking utopian images of altruistic submissions. The presence of the newspaperman inquiring into the lives of soldiers in an army camp is a sort of metaphoric implement reflectively introjected into the Army’s psyche probably to buttress its weak libido-cultural economy. The colonel’s satisfaction at Wesley’s explanation is ironically self-defeating in that it is a symbolic approval of the treatment of the symptoms that the Army has chosen to aggravate. The difference between the deviant and the normal is all the more fudged. The militarist subterfuge intended to cover up its inherent contradiction requires a civilian critic in the form of a newspaperman for its excoriation and dialectic validation. The war programme
itself being based on a schizoid pattern of psychic economy, it finds greater efficacy in conscripting those deviant beings from civil society who are already suffering from delusional paranoia and are conveniently hewed to the doctrines of war. A capitalist system would maximize profit through such deployments; it reduces the cost of attitudinal denormalizing of patients who are already in the midst of hysterical trigger-happiness.

Psychiatric case files of two female suicide bombers who killed nearly 100 people in Baghdad in February 2008 show that they suffered from depression and schizophrenia. Al Quaeda insurgents in Mesopotamia deployed mentally disabled persons as suicide bombers. Dr Ralph Hoffman, a psychiatry professor at Yale University, said in a telephone interview to The New York Times (p. A6) that it is possible for schizoid people to suffer from delusional or paranoid beliefs that would allow them to be convinced to take such drastic action. Once inducted into the war and deployed in combat zones, civilians formerly of normal mental health grow stress disorders making them convenient and more effective weapons for repeated deployments, not to speak of those who are already suffering from paranoia in civil life; they are always already tailor-made for war. Frantz Fanon in The Wretched of the Earth cites the example of an Algerian police officer whose colonial task of inflicting physical torture on natives had such a toll on his mental health that he ended up battering his own wife and children. Examples of such stressful neurosis and its exploitation as a reinvestible capital are numerous in the US Army. A few months after Sergeant William Edwards returned to a Texas Army base from a mission in Iraq in 2004, shot his wife Erin Edwards point-blank in the head before turning the gun on himself. Sergeant Jarred Terrassas, who was suffering from symptoms
of aggressivity and convicted of domestic violence misdemeanour, was knowingly deployed into an Iraqi combat zone to exacerbate his frenzy further. He returned from the war to kill his 7-month-old son by inflicting severe head injury. In one instance, the US Air Force repeatedly deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan Sergeant Jon Trevino, a medic with a history of psychological problems including post-traumatic stress disorder. Multiple deployments eroded Sergeant Trevino's marriage and worsened his mental health problems until, in 2006, he killed his wife, Carol, and then himself. In 2003, Jose Aguilar, 24, a sufferer of child-abuse trauma, returned from the Iraq War to his North Carolina home to kill his infant son, Damien. Christine Hansen, executive director of the Miles Foundation, which provides domestic violence assistance mostly to the wives of officers and senior enlisted men, said the organization's caseload had tripled since the war in Iraq began. Ironically enough, the court trials of combat-trauma induced perpetrators of domestic violence are indicative of the obfuscations of the deviant-normal divide when the irreducible inertia of pretences and meconnaisances is systematized into an institutional project.

In each of these cases of traumatic violence, one witnesses aggressivity as an introjective effect in abnormal condition of "turning round of the Oedipal conflict upon the subject's own self" (Ecrits 25). War is a psychologically anti-normative function that tends to thwart the typical development of the human subject in a manner that contributes to propping up of the narcissistic moment that lies subjacent in all the genetic phases of the individual, even in a stage he is supposed to achieve normative sublimation of the instinct. The sustenance of the motif of this capitalist form of utilizing human aggressivity despite its suicidal nature is probably received from a misdirected "quest for
ever more neutral subjects in an aggressivity where feeling is undesirable” (*Ecrits* 28) or only feeling of detestation is necessary. According to Lacan war has advanced its demands for dehumanizing or demonizing subjectivity to a preposterous extent “after teaching us a great deal about the genesis of the neurosis” (*Ecrits* 28).

Wesley’s masked psychoanalysis of Harry’s queer behaviour refers to symptomatic infantilism that will also act as an apt clarification for Kristofor’s behaviour in “Cowards”. An example of human resistance to the unconscionable demands of war to spur aggressivity by divesting humanity of feeling, Kristofor’s tactic of hiding himself in his mother’s boudoir to hoodwink the government and evade drafting is based on the psycho-social morality of pitting natural Oedipality against the artifice of organized, state-controlled, coercive abjection. Wesley’s desire to escape drafting by hiding in the Coast Range Mountains off San Francisco is like a primordial desire to reverse the genetic course into an embryo and is collateral with Kristofor’s strategy. When Battaglia, the man from the government, catches up with Kristofor on an inquest ten years after the war, Kristofor has lived his life satisfactorily. He has evaded death by war; Americanized himself by changing his name to Charles Abbot; prospered in business – moved from Fresno to San Francisco, hired by Roos Bros. for their menswear department and finally opened his own store in Post Street; and has married a Scotch-Irish girl and borne four offsprings. To Battaglia’s suggestion that he should offer amnesia as an escape from the dragnet of the war inquest, Kristofor does not accede. He wishes Battaglia to record cowardice as the cause of his failure to present himself for drafting. Finally, Battaglia resolves the crisis by putting down “Father” as the reason for Kristofor’s absence from war.
It demonstrates his Oedipal instinct to assume the role of his own father, whom he has lost at the age of three, and stay with his mother, who claims to have threatened Kristofor with alternative abjection by choosing to die if her son – the only male person in the family – goes to war. The author makes a significantly open-ended jibe at the mother-son relationship when he says: “Only Kristofor and his mother knew what they had done and why they had done it.” (*Fresno Stories* 1994) Simultaneously, it is a constative expression for the man’s human-specific desire to sire his own children. It is possible to explain Kristofor’s symptoms as an authorial attempt to come to terms with his own concerns of paternity. When Saroyan could not avoid conscription into the US Army as a buck private in December 1942, his insidious worries of fatality, which were till then fed by the unconscious imago of his father’s untimely demise, were aggravated to such fretful proportions that he wanted to have Carol Matthau bear his child without delay, even out of wedlock, before he was sent off to war. The specific desire inherent in human sexuality appeared overwhelming to the man threatened by fatalism. Quite significantly, when his son Aram was born on September 25, 1943, he gained a furlough from the psychiatric ward of the New York Army Hospital where he was being examined for insanity. Carol observed that he was becoming a “bitter and touchy man” (Lee and Gifford, 111) much in the likeness of the enlisted cases of paranoia in US soldiers referred to before:

Carol Matthau: It was all like a nervous breakdown. It was all – very, very hard to explain. He lived by his own gut. If he had the slightest discomfort, he felt like killing someone. (Lee and Gifford, 111)

The natural comity that lies between the Oedipal and paternal elements of human sexuality lends energy to deflect “death instincts” to forces of alterity. The biggest
waiting for a soldier in the war is either waiting to be killed or spared. But there are saner things worth waiting for according to Joe Foxhall who accompanies Wesley Jackson on Guard Duty one day. It is better to get killed without going mad, says Joe.

...every man born into the body of a human being is waiting for that body to wear out and go back to the mud. He's waiting to die. But since he knows he's apt to have the use of the body for thirty or forty years more, he goes to work and waits for other things. When he's a boy, he waits to be a man. Then he waits for a wife. Then he waits for a son. Then he waits to talk to his son...

(Saroyan The Adventures 31)

The seemingly stoic rhetoric of Joe's declamation is invested with a positive desire for procreative alterity that characterizes the human species. The effect of destabilizing the Oedipal-paternal entropy by real combat-zone threats of castration can be realized in the case histories that I have offered of soldiers who returned from war to kill their wives and children. The forces of alterity are so expended in absorbing tactile imagoes of the fragmented body that the subject is left with no residual energy for sublimational activity.

In “Cowards”, Aylizabet’s friend Arshaluce refers to “The Evening Herald” report of the German boy who drowns himself in the Kings River to escape conscription, because war to him not only means self-annihilation but also homicide of his own German brothers. The sense of fraternity stemming from the instinct of alterity leads him to prefer the Oedipal drive to the more gruesome abjection of the death instinct. In a state of regressive infantilism he drowns in the water which is like the sea of the mother’s womb. He retraces his journey into the oceanic oneness of what Jessica Benjamin calls “the engulfing mother” (The Bond of Love 50). The economy of the Imaginary phase that sustains itself on the self-other dynamics acts as a psycho-religious bulwark against committing a Christian sin by hating the Other. In The Adventures, Joe Foxhall’s
conscientious objection to army duty is based on his disavowal of the principle of hating the enemy so that "we could kill him when we met him in combat" (32). For Joe and the Fresno German, hating others means hating one's own self. However, the German has acted upon a dogmatic notion of alterity, killing himself before killing the other. The potential of the procreative other should have mediated between forced abjection and euthanasia: his psycho-religious concerns are inflected more towards the Oedipal direction than the paternal. The necessity of striking a centre of gravity in the intersection of the lines of Oedipal and paternal forces is felt by Kristofor: under all circumstances self-annihilation needs to be resisted; self preservation is preferable to even minor breach of religious law.

"Germans," Arshaluce said. "Enemies. All of a sudden they are enemies, but after the war will they still be enemies? The boy will still be drowned. Even a life of sin in a big city is better than to be drowned, because after the war the sinner will still be alive, at any rate. There is always such a thing as redemption. He can start all over again. He can speak to the Holy Father at the Holy Church and be born again. He can take a nice Armenian girl for his wife and start a family of his own." (Fresno Stories 65)

It is a stable sense of alterity that saved the life of Hovsep Lucinian in "Cowards" when the Assyrian fellow soldier of his company, whom he considered an enemy all along, dragged him to safety after he was hit by shrapnel and left for dead in an area under bombardment. Back home from war, they became friends, married American wives and had large families of kids who spoke neither Armenian nor Assyrian. Kristofor, for that matter, married a Scotch-Irish girl and had four children whose identity consisted of not less than four different cultural affiliations: Armenian, Scotch, Irish, and American. If the Oedipal-paternal dynamics of Kristofor's psychological make-up is underwritten by a
specific desire, his notion of the human species is broadly inclusivist insofar as his sense
of alterity is energetic enough not only to enable him brave the odds associated with a
deviant form of conscientious objection – in the stark absence of such rights during
World War I – but also to help him scotch memories of communal differences that his
Armenian past might have anthropologically excited. There is an ironically pregnant
allusion to the absurdity of sustaining communal hatred in the face of forced abjection in
a multiethnic army that is metaphorically homogenized by the singular threat of
castration:

Gissag Jamanakian was killed at Verdun, Vaharam Vaharamian at Chateau-Thierry, and the
Kasabian twins, Krikor and Karekin, at Bellau Wood. All under twenty-five years of age, all
brought to Fresno from Armenia when they were still babies in arms or small boys. (*Fresno
Stories* 66)

If the existence of the Armenian diaspora in America is the result of the ethnic-cleansing
pogrom perpetrated by their malefactors in the Caucasus, their quest to escape symbolic
castration even in the new land remains abortive when they are drafted into war. The
sense of alterity in superegoic conditions of normalcy should work independent of space
and time for the human species. But politics of space and predatory concerns that
generate abnormal conditions of war and enforce culturally complicit form of mutual
abjection on subjectivity serve to distend sense of alterity neurotically. Those who have
escaped persecution once are least likely to avoid it again because ethnic-cleansing is
now replaced by a form of terrorist eradication of alterity and difference in war-time
skewed normativity.

Kristofor’s choice of an apparently deviant form of abjection in the face of a
totalitarian norm is more constructive and curative in the sense that he chooses to master
the symptom of the disease by enacting it in the form of infantilism before the disease grows malignant and terminal. The energy needed to pursue such a course is greater because the degree of isolationist abjection in his case far exceeds that of the draftees who form a society of compliant abjects under the gregarious charm of delusional heroism. It is a normative formation classifiable as society as much as the bodies of the dead by epidemic constitute a community. When Kristofor bravely describes his conduct as cowardice he is commenting euphemistically on the corrupt variant of normalcy in the same spirit Falstaff in Shakespeare’s 1 Henry IV explodes the myth of posthumous honour and Wesley Jackson in *The Adventures* proclaims his pacifist conviction:

Military men and politicians like to refer to the dead as the brave dead or the heroic dead or some other kind of dead. I guess I don’t understand the dead, because the only dead I can imagine are the dead dead, and that’s going too far. I can understand the brave alive, though. [Italics author’s]

(*Fresno Stories* 70)

Between the signs composed of signifiers “coward” and its signified (puns included) and “father” and its signified work the dynamics of Kristofor’s and, for that matter, Saroyan’s libido-cultural identity as the ego works in the liminal space between id and superego in psychic economy. The split of the ego – referred to as “decomposition” by Ernest Jones in the 1910 version of his famous study of *Hamlet* – takes place when “various attributes of a given person are disunited and several individuals are invented, each endowed with one group of the original attributes” (*American Journal of Psychology* 105). The fantasmatic act of creating the double, whether through fission (“decomposition”) of the Self or through autoscopy, is governed more or less by the same libidinal economy that underlies the Self-Other framework in the mirror stage. Saroyan’s self undergoes decomposition in the representative likenesses of Kristofor, Wesley and
Harry Cook. Wesley, in turn, become Kristofor’s double like all the other documented cases of combat-trauma induced neuroses in the US Army, in whom Kristofor lives his identity crisis of a variant psycho-literary kind before sloughing him off as a scapegoat. When others got drafted into the war like Wesley, Kristofor evaded military service by a symbolic mastery of his Oedipal symptoms.

Such a therapeutic performance is resorted to by Ruskin and Omar in Bishop Cotton School’s third flat one day when they discover a dark, defunct drainage pipe and creep through its musty orifice out of the school’s boundary on to a grass knoll:

After crawling on our bellies for some twenty feet, we found ourselves in complete darkness. Omar had brought along a small pencil torch, and with its help he continued writhing forward (moving backwards would have been quite impossible) until we saw a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel. Dusty, musty, very scruffy, we emerged at last on to a grass knoll, a little way outside the school boundary.

It’s always a great thrill to escape beyond the boundaries that adults have devised. Here we were in unknown territory. To travel without passports – that would be the ultimate in freedom! (Bond Memoir 55-56)

The symbolic action and the signifiers demonstrating the action replicate, like Wesley’s yearned-for descent into the Coast Range Mountains and Kristofor’s war-time amniotic bunking, a libidinal quest for incestuous union consistent with Ruskin’s desire to assume the role of his absent father. They crawl on bellies like infants (or pre-natal embryos) in darkness of a cavity that evokes the image of a genital passage during childbirth or copulation. They writhe forward in a musty and scruffy tunnel where moving backward was impossible. A sado-masochistic orgasm is reached when both emerge in a state of jouissance on to a blissful pine knoll. In an attempt to master the fear of fragmentation that loomed large on the eve of Partition, Omar and Ruskin enact a sexually loaded
incursion of the mother's body. The nature of the prohibitive act — "to escape beyond the boundaries that adults have devised" — is ambivalent in terms of the dream-like condensation it attains by combining Oedipal reflexes with spatial imagoes. They travel without "passports", as though in disregard of territorial boundaries and license ("passport") for incest, under nationalistic threat of forcible dislocation in a condition already hobbled by fatherless abjection. In a symptomatic reversal of the Imaginary phase of psychic development, Omar projects his autoscopic self on Ruskin and Ruskin lives his decomposed identity in Omar. In a joint project of achieving their specular completeness through canal surfing, they lose their objective realities into mutually subjective doubling.

In a retrospective musing on his schooldays, Ruskin makes his relationship with Omar explicit: "Years later, when I read Conrad's *The Secret Sharer*, I thought of Omar" (Memoir 53). Like the captain-narrator who discovers his double in Leggatt, the criminal first mate of the jinxed ship, Sephora, in Conrad's novel, Ruskin projects in Omar his own identity crisis. If Conrad's captain harboured Leggatt to secure confidence in his ability to be "faithful to that ideal conception of one's own personality every man sets up for himself secretly" (Conrad, 26), Ruskin shares with Omar an insecurity of belonging at the face of a territorial politics of nation formation. As a fair complexioned Anglo-Indian with blue eyes, he had suffered Nationalist Indian ire in forms of scornful invectives and physical assault. His faith in his identity as an Indian is threatened as much as Omar's credentials of being an Indian are challenged by Partition. An outline of the genesis and development of such a spatial politics in the Indian subcontinent becomes imperative at
this point to make intelligible the neurotically charged trajectory of the relationship between the decomposed selves.

Among the factors that contributed to the build-up of the Indian Partition in 1947, the most malevolent was the historical tradition of reductionism the European administrators, travelers and scholars embraced, most often unwittingly, in their assessment of the country's socio-cultural scene. In their ignorance as to what value should be placed on the subtle differences that exist among Indian communities, they reduced the pluralistic syntagm of Indian diversity to an abysmally simplified matrix based solely on religious ethnicity. Reducing the plural dimensions of identity to a singular parameter for making differences among people is an exclusionary practice that instills a sense of abjection in the masses where there was none before and intensifies feelings of discrimination into a major conflagration. The genesis of the contemporary bogey of world terrorism can be traced to such a reductionist attitude of governance during the colonial days. Internecine wars in the Indian subcontinent during the pre-European days were often fought on religious lines, but the bone of contention was always localized and did not take as behemoth a shape as to encompass all imagined subscribers to a faith into anything of the nature of Pakistan. There are examples of Hindu kings willingly playing into the hands of Mughal conquerors to defeat their Hindu adversaries, but those diplomatic equations seldom turned out to be egregiously fundamentalist: tactical reason did not give way to passion.

Ruskin Bond's nostalgic reflection on his friendship with Omar prior to their Partition-induced separation is a critical account of the imperial practice. He reverses the notion of identity into an inclusivist project. If Omar and Ruskin are Muslim and non-
Muslim respectively, they are also pupils of the same grade and same school, both communicate in the same language, are players of the School Colt's Hockey team, and if they belong to different houses according to the rules of the public school system, they share a bonding in both having lost their respective fathers and are attracted to each other by virtue of their sense of unbelonging to the general brood of feverish, Marx Brothers-imitating fourth formers. The sense of psychological abjection suffered by two twelve-year-old boys is transformed into a sense of fraternity. The difference in their religious bearings during their public school days is occluded by the availability of multiple other choices of dispensation.

In the concept of identity inhere the notions of both similarity and difference: similar to someone or something and different from another person or thing. Similarity is posited in terms of relational differences from others where others act as "trace" within the affiliative choice, thus divesting the point of similarity of any ontic substance. Similarity becomes a peculiar absence diffused among the constituents of the trace which can be categorized in terms of religion, class, profession, caste, ethnicity, country, etc. The possibility of a singular choice – until forced into making by historical circumstances like the infant makes of his delusive "Ideal I" in the mirror stage – becomes always a possibility of infinitely deferred realizability. Until circumstances culminated into dissection of the country by a handful of "people who mattered", who presumed having in the Imaginary ideal a better orientation for the infant nation, identity exclusively in terms of a singular dispensation independent of its traces was a metonymic absence. The following description by Yasmin Khan of the sociological makeup of the country at the
end of World War II and on the eve of Partition is a well researched observation testifying to the irreducible nature of the relativity of identity:

On the eve of Partition, even in the places where there was a heightened sense of difference, there were many countervailing forces. Mercantile and manufacturing communities from sari weavers to tea planters depended on pragmatic cooperation for their livelihoods, while festivals and holidays were flamboyantly celebrated across the board. Class, as ever, acted as a social gel and rich Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims of the same social standing partied together in gilded hotels, irrespective of religion; university friends of various backgrounds attended the same classes; and poor agriculturalists relaxed together on charpois at the end of a day’s work. Above all, it was a very long jump from a sense of difference, or lack of social cohesion, to mass slaughter and rape. There was nothing ‘inevitable’ about Partition and nobody could have predicted, at the end of the Second World War, that half a million people or more were going to die because of these differences (22).

In Rahul Todakia’s film, *Farzania*, based on the Hindu-Muslim communal riot at Godhra in Gujarat in 2002, when the Hindutva activists attack a mohalla that houses people of all sects and religions, both the Hindus and the non-Hindus are shown deliberately clinging to whatever Hindu insignia are available at hand to save themselves from the massacre. The defensive attempt by non-Hindus to privilege the Hindu trace in relation to which they are non-Hindus in time of peril metaphorically demonstrates the paradox underlying the principle on which identity-markers work. The Hindutva wrath is directed at the Muslims in this case, but the way both Hindus and non-Hindus – a Parsi family being one of them – are caught up in the holocaust explodes the exclusivist myth of identity formation. The story of the film is narrated from the perspective of an American researcher of Gandhi’s non-violence, who gets involved in the massacre on account of being based in the Godhra locale of the riot and his humane reaction to the carnage. By
the end of the story, the American’s objective pursuit of scholarly knowledge changes into a subjective reaction projected into a utopian dreamland (“Farzania”, in Urdu) of confetti, where innocent lives are promised freedom from violence. The fantasy land he envisages in the form of a book is like the one Omar and Ruskin escaped to, creeping through the disused drainage pipe of their school’s third flat.

The Indian politicians who tinkered with the issue of Partition in the run-up for the 1946 election of provincial and interim central government found it expedient to ensure quick support for a cause which preferred emotive investment to rational thought. At the end of World War II, the imperial interest of the British in India began to flag. Displays of anti-colonial feelings were so intense that the war-ravaged British government perforce envisaged a process of hasty decolonization. The democratic means of electing an Indian party to whom power could be transferred was resorted to with such breakneck speed that neither the Congress nor the Muslim League – two major players in the power game – had time to chalk out a rational and constructive agenda of self-governance. Both parties took recourse to playing the religious card that would yield instantaneous harvest by exciting sentiments that the colonial rule had exploited for a considerable time. In other words, the inconvenient pace in which an uncertain state of modernity with its accompanying apprehensions of material inequality was ushered in made communities fall back on pre-modern instincts of religiosity for defensive energy.

The Muslim League, under the leadership of Jinnah, staked claim to a separate Islamic state for the Muslims, which induced a quick-fire effect on the imagination of a sizable chunk of the community’s electorate, if not on its entire adult populace. Although the 1946 election is referred to as a democratic process, only ten percent of the total adult
populace enjoyed franchise. So, when I mention the Muslim community's choice at the hustings, I take care to ascribe the choice to its electorate, of which many voted for the League, but the electorate itself constituted only a sliver of the community's and also the country's adult populace. In order to counter the League's campaigning strategies, the Congress wielded both Hindu and Muslim communal cards, to attract voters to the cause of an undivided, sovereign Indian nationhood. The fairness of the election is questionable not only for its numerically undemocratic representation but also for the rigged nature of its conduct:

At the polling booths, people long dead were frequently registered, boxes of ballot papers went missing and women electors wearing veils impersonated other women in order to vote multiple times, in at least one case by changing saris on every occasion (Khan, 37).

The sine qua non of communication is undistorted transparency. Defined by Jurgen Habermas in *The Theory of Communicative Action*, this sort of communication is the pivot for benign human relationship. The entire democratic process that seemingly galvanized fission in the Indian subcontinent, however, is based on a communicative pathology that infected the pre-modern defensive mechanism into a septic sore. Those who voted for a separate Pakistan had hardly any inkling of what freedom it would secure. Because Pakistan was still then an imaginary construct with its territorial expanse undecided. The electors were lured into invoking their own disaster insofar as they did not foresee that the creation of a separate state might mean exile and dislocation for many.

When the deliberations of the Cabinet Mission failed to produce a viable solution to the tangle of power transfer, visceral killings and rapes were organized between Hindus and Muslims across the country, in places like Calcutta, Bihar and Central
Provinces which had no likelihood of being apportioned to a separate Pak territory. The intention was to demonstrate to the British government, who were responsible for the crisis to a great extent, that Hindus and Muslims are inimical to each other and are unable to coexist at the same time and space. People tried to force abjection on each other in the absence of any superegoic police or sublimational channels to defuse “death instincts”. Identity was reduced to a singular motif: Hindu (also Sikh in Punjab) or Muslim. When Pakistan was finally carved out, most of those who craved for it either had to suffer exile or stay put in the face of bitter sectarian violence. The arbitrary dividing line between India and Pakistan was mapped roughly in terms of number – numerical strength of communal populations based on a dated census – irrespective of human relationship, historical and cultural heritage associated with space and not the least, memories of growing up.

The “death instinct” in a state of enforced abjection is a revival of the Oedipal urge that deprives the abject of the normative order of psycho-social independence. The multiple identity-marking factorials offer a sublimational post-Oedipal dynamic to sociocultural beings whose normal development is towards freedom. But when a reductionist ideology hopes to achieve freedom by conceptualizing subjectivity in terms of a unitary dispensation, it suppresses the self-other dynamic to a state of static oppositionality. The fragmented nature of the Self in opposition to its mirror-image intensifies aggressivity and destructive urges. (The sexual content of the drive became perceptible in the gruesome nature of the riot killings and rapes.) Freedom becomes a metonymic absence: the democratic means (the 1946 election) adopted to usher in freedom became a suicidal
project. National identities of Indians and Pakistanis tended to lose their multivalence into a singular oppositional reality:

There was no simple blueprint for becoming an Indian or a Pakistani. One thing people could agree on, though, was that the ‘other’ state was rapidly looking like an adversary, or even an enemy. Nationalist politics had collapsed into two national tragedies (Khan, 166).

A perceived threat of the “other” gave birth to unconscionable defense spending in the budgetary allocations of both states. Rapid militarization ensued and the Pak government and politicians engaged in activities that instilled a sense of fear among their countrymen that the Indian “other”, who were not well disposed to Pak separation, might use military power to annex what was their before. When the disputed princely province of Kashmir acceded to India, the fear intensified and an immediate armed skirmish in the Kashmir border between the two states became a reality in 1948-49. The spate of recruitment in the Pak Army reached its nadir when a coup under the Sandhurst-trained military general, Ayub Khan, based apparently on the motif of cleansing the Pak polity of corruption, wrested power from an elected government. Pakistan became a military state in terms of both internal administration and foreign affairs. With Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, an India-bashing foreign minister, most of the state’s energy and time were directed against India. Relation between the two countries exacerbated further with US arms supply to India in the wake of the latter’s defeat in the Sino-Indian War of 1962. It was quite likely that Omar in Ruskin’s Memoir would be motivated towards a Pak Army career in such a context. Ayub Khan’s clandestine plan to annex Kashmir through a terrorist attack code named Operation Gibraltar culminated into a full-fledged Indo-Pak War in 1965.

Omar piloted a Pak bomber into Indian territory and was shot down over Ambala. Unlike the drainage pipe in his school flat, there was no tunnel in the air where he could
practice symptomatic management of his death instinct. The reductive ideology of identity-formation that had forced political abjection on the subjectivity of a young boy during Partition worked at an invidious clip under a nationalistic authoritarian regime. If coercive drafting during war in a cosmopolitan society is a totalitarian aberration or, according to Derrida, an expression of democracy’s “autoimmune” (Rogues 37) tendencies, that inflame aggressivity in otherwise subliminal psyches, aggressivity in an authoritarian regime stemming from an exclusivist notion of religious identity is a normative phenomenon. The correspondences between the inhuman mode of capitalist production of warfare and the reductive principle of nation formation are so obvious that distortion of communicative systems and reification of social relations instantiated in Saroyan and Ruskin Bond find common ground for analysis. The etiological principle of the autoscopic self in Omar works in terms of communicative reciprocity. When communication founders in a pathological sense of betrayal and mistrust death instincts are first instigated towards annihilating the autoscopic self because tremendous amount of energy now scars the psychic object of narcissistic jealousy.

The Kashmir issue becomes a spatial metonymy for a broader sense of belonging that had suffered a severe psychological drubbing at the time of the territorial dissection. If Omar is Ruskin’s double, Ruskin is Omar’s autoscopic decomposition who also becomes the object of his envy for being able to persist in the course of the libido-cultural economy when he is unjustly disbanded from it. From Ruskin’s point of view, Omar’s death instinct leads him to unite with the maternal object symbolized in the space his preschizoid normative self affiliated with, the place where he and Ruskin once tried to master their Oedipal drives in symptomatic attempts at achieving superegoic
independence. Unfortunately, there is no scope for mastery now; Omar’s double abjection has led him to self-annihilation in a pursuit of murdering his incestuous double. Like the paranoid soldiers of the US Army who returned home to kill themselves and their wives and children, Omar kills himself in the act of killing his decomposed self/selves (his Indian kins). For Ruskin, however, the death of his double appears to be a symbolic release from his own death instinct that remained repressed in the memories of abjection and Nationalist rejection. Like Conrad’s captain who sloughs off his double by letting Leggatt take his punishment at the end of *The Secret Sharer* and Kristofor who disclaims any truck with his Wesleyan alter-ego through an infantile gesture, Ruskin confirms his emergence from identity crisis by recounting the death of Omar. It is absurd for a German/Armenian-American to fight a German or an Armenian and an Indian-Pakistani to fight an Indian. Through extrapolation or by dint of the logic of exemplarity a bilateral case study becomes a trope for cosmopolitan dystopia.

Although the author appears to emerge from identity crisis here, it does not bring to an end the repetitive process of the dialogic act. We will find the self-other dialectic persistently renewing itself—according to Freud’s principle of the “repetition automatism”—in a couple of supernatural stories of 1999 that I will take up for discussion in the following part.
Whenever Ruskin Bond was beset by personal and professional problems, he claimed to have turned to writing for children. He thought writing for children needed a less subjective approach and would help him get away from himself. Ruskin's wish to get away from himself is in fact a psychological quest to be his Other. Perry Nodelman (29) equates orientalism with the concept of “the Other” – of that which was opposite to the person doing the talking or thinking or studying. According to Lacan, “the unconscious is the discourse of the Other” (Fundamental Concepts 172). Lacan explored how the Other is what defines the self not only by being what the self is not, but by being only what it lacks and therefore what it both fears and desires. The way in which Ruskin tends to see children as wonderfully innocent, primitive, and desirably different reveals their function for him as this Lacanian sort of Other. He makes childhood his own unconscious, prior to and separate from his real human life. In claiming to write for children, he uses a generic space to enact the quest for self-discovery. As an adult writing for the child he carefully structures a self-referential trope or hides a reflective core within the narrative. Here I will take up two of Ruskin Bond’s apparently innocuous ghost stories, written in 1999, “Wilson’s Bridge” and “Night of the Millennium” – otherwise pleasant reading for young adults – to show how they represent the dynamics of identity formation that engender the author’s mind. I will attempt a comparable analysis of Rudyard Kipling’s The Phantom Rickshaw, which appears to me a partial model for Ruskin’s stories.
The childhood as the Lacanian Other posits the shaping principle of Ruskin's fears and desires, a supplementary space for self-determination. Childhood as an irretrievable lack (desire) is structured as a veil of "fundamental fantasy" (Dor 21) in the Oedipal complex. Ashis Nandy underscores the metaphoric extension of this European concept to the construction of such binaries as childhood/adulthood and primitive/modern (The Intimate Enemy 40). Ruskin, in his quest for identity, plays innumerable roles within these structured binaries as a child in his mirror stage plays interrelated series of gestures, forming a collective locus between the real I and his fictive (misrecognized) mirror image.

The self-assumed colonial venture of bringing the oriental "child" — and therefore "primitive" — to "adulthood" — and therefore "modern" — backfired in two different but interactive ways. Rusty's metaphoric reinvasion of the centre of power and disavowal of the proprietary mindset by returning violence on his guardian in The Room are triggered by a dynamics of appropriation that works insidiously in a so-called puerile/primitive colonial space. In other words, such colonial space represents the geography of the Other, which the self both fears and desires. This complemented, and was complemented by, the consequences of overwork that the Raj imposed on the Britons in the inhospitable tropical plains of India. The fate of those who succumbed to their travails generated by the colonial mission — the sepulchers in the Indian hill stations being mute witness to the irony — created a perceptible effect on the bereaved minds.

The physical torture John Harrison inflicts on Rusty is typical of the violence that accompanied the colonial mission and marked the process of self-reflexive decivilization of the civilizers. In the course of my review of "The Playing Fields", I have referred to
Frantz Fanon’s description of a police officer who, as he tortured the freedom fighters in Algeria, became violent towards his own wife and children. The psychological counterpart of such aggressiveness can be located in the Other’s desire to be looked upon with love and care. This became the cause of guilt and remorse and a form of mental torture in many of the colonial perpetrators of violence. Apart from the debilitating influence of the tropical weather on the physical health of the Europeans, and its subsequent effect on their mental sanity, the feeling of guilt is another factor that undermined the sanity of many a sensitive colonizer. These mentally disturbed Europeans were treated like “stripped natives” (Hartnack 24) in the uncared-for public asylums in India. These asylums were “filthy, congested quarters – abandoned stables, vacated barracks or unused prisons … the mortality rates were extremely high, and inmates of such institutions continued to be perceived as public nuisances” (Hartnack 26). That the cause of their derangement was partly due to a sense of suppressed guilt and partly due to stress of weather can be vindicated by close reading of stories like Kipling’s The Phantom Rickshaw and myths like Pahari Wilson that Ruskin Bond uses in “The Wilson’s Bridge”.

The actual psychological representation of guilt can, however, be read in such “scandalous” events as European inmates of the central asylum at Bhowanipur in Calcutta driving scavenger carts through the streets of the city (Varma 26-53, 138-164). The disturbing phenomenon of such symbolic nativization of the members of the white race was reported in the press, threatening the colonizer’s supremacy in the process. The government forthwith transported the inmates to a newly established (1918) European mental Hospital in Ranchi, at a safe distance from the centre of attention. Owen Berkeley
Hill, who was appointed superintendent in the asylum in 1919, recorded his first impressions of the place: “It did not take me long to see that I had been asked to take charge, not of an asylum, but of a bear garden. My heart sank… I felt so overcome with disappointment…a sixteen feet high wall [sic] had been erected around an area of eighteen acres, and the European insane males and females were…swept through the huge iron gates…and lost sight of beyond the formidable walls” (All Too Human 38).

Berkeley Hill introduced some psychoanalytical and psychiatric therapies, much of which were in line with the kind of treatment meted out to British lunatics who afforded to go to the expensive private asylums that grew up in India in the mid-nineteenth century.

Among them was the Beardsmore family’s “pleasure garden” (Hartnack 25) on the outskirts of Calcutta. Among the different therapies offered were prolonged bathing and exercises known as Swedish drills. When Kipling wrote his *The Phantom Rickshaw* in 1888 he was acquainted with these treatments, and Dr. Heatherleigh’s private hospital is modeled on these asylums. The treatment Jack Pansay receives under Dr. Heatherleigh is constituted of long bathing and exercises.

Dr. Heatherleigh, like Dr. Berkeley Hill, is one of the many European doctors posted in the Indian hill stations, which grew up mainly as sanatoria for all those colonists who suffered the grueling weather of the plains, diseases, and overwork throughout the year. That they were overworked can be testified to by the reviews they did of their own social life in India. Christiane Hartnack refers to these people as “able to create exclusive enclaves on the sub-continent, where they could compensate for the uncomfortable climate and heavy workload” (23-24). Dr. Heatherleigh ascribes Pansay’s symptoms to the consequences of overwork: “Overwork started his illness, kept it alight,
and killed him, poor devil. Write him off to the system that uses one man to do the work of two and a half men" (Rickshaw 127).

Describing the hospital, Kipling says it is "a sort of fitting up shed for craft that had been damaged by stress of weather" (Rickshaw 126). Kipling hints at the debilitating climate of India and the mechanical nature of colonial work. It dehumanizes the colonizer and reduces him to a "craft". Of the weather and the burden, Kipling adds: "The weather in India is often sultry, and since the tale of bricks is always a fixed quantity, and the only liberty allowed is permission to work overtime and get no thanks, men occasionally break down and become as mixed as the metaphors in this sentence" (Rickshaw 126). Ruskin Bond realized the truth of the statement when his father died of a similar malaise. Kipling developed a mystique of work naturally associated in his mind with colonialism, the particular social structure within which his labours were performed. Colonialism became for him less an abstract political theory than an almost private metaphor for self-discovery. Ruskin sympathized with the sufferings of the man who, like his father, worked with "The taste of fever in [his] mouth, and the buzz of quinine in [his] ears; the temper frayed by heat to the breaking point, but for sanity's sake held back from the break..." (Myself 59).

In the early 1960s, Ruskin wrote a story, "The Man who was Kipling", in which the first person narrator sees the weird visitation of Kipling's ghost while sitting on a bench in the Indian section of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Back in India, the hallucination was inspired by the author's memory of the nostalgic yearning for the Indian atmosphere that he missed insufferably during his lonely sojourn in England. Kipling's portrayal of the Indian scene became vivid in his mind in exile. In the imagined
dialogue with Kipling’s ghost, the narrator exonerates the author from his alleged stake in
the imperial business by tracing his colonial baggage to youthful adventurism. Ruskin felt
the spirit of India so compellingly described by Kipling that he needed to guard his own
position against implications of colonial bias for acknowledging his fascination for the
author. By holding Kipling’s faith in the “White Man’s burden” as a callow enthusiasm
of a young boy – because Kipling was barely twenty when he appeared to subscribe to
such a faith – Ruskin not only justifies his interest in the author but fights an implicit case
as a defendant for him who requires to be reviewed as a critic of Empire for being
nonetheless the worse sufferer for belonging to the system. Ruskin’s realization of
Kipling’s worth when he was himself in his twenties acts as a transference module of
progressive maturation between the author and the reader. Kipling as an “immature”
author makes Ruskin the reader conscious of the importance of mature judgement that he,
in his turn as an author, conveys to us, his readers, in a chain of anticipatory progression
that slips through our author’s career. My reading of Kipling here is equipped with the
transference message that Ruskin presumed to convey early in his career as an anticipated
demand enjoined on his potential readers of the future.

Kipling was born in India and grew up largely an Indian child, but he wasn’t
Indian; nor could he call himself – such was his integrity – English, yet he belonged to
the British Empire. Although Kipling is looked upon as a colonist, a close analysis of his
Indian tales, like that of The Phantom Rickshaw attempted here, expresses the author’s
critical realization of the absurdities and ill effects of the colonial enterprise. Ruskin’s
impression of the story and its Shimla setting goes back to the most sensitive and
nostalgic time of his childhood. At Bishop Cotton School in Shimla his otherwise morbid
life was punctuated by the short and delightful meetings with his father. During one such meeting, as they walked around the Jakko Hill, the setting for the main action of the story, Aubrey told his son the story of *The Phantom Rickshaw*. Immediately after this, Ruskin suffered the shock of his father’s death. He was in school waiting for his father to accompany him during the ensuing vacation, when the saddest news of his life reached him, confirming his worst apprehensions about his father’s deteriorating health. This agonizing childhood memory, associated with the episodes and images of the period, determined much of his later thoughts. Particularly significant was *The Phantom Rickshaw*, the memory of which is undeniably associated with his father’s death. To his mind, Aubrey suffered in the same way as Jack Pansay in Kipling’s story; both of them put to death by the colonial system and by the vengeful ire it sowed in the colonized atmosphere.

The memory of the self-reflexive, psycho-physical backlash of the colonial mission affects the form of a setting – the hill station graveyard in Ruskin’s gothic tale “Night of the Millennium” (*Season 65-71*) – the act of another reinvansion and appropriation, this time of a neo-imperial protégé. Pasand, a “young computer whizkid” (65) is out on a prowl for sensual pleasure at the stroke of the midnight bell that ushered in the year 2000. His destination is the Camel’s back Cemetery in Mussoorie (India), on the fringe of which the late caretaker’s wretched but “comely” widow lives with a brood of hungry children. Pasand is a “patriotic multinational”, who wants to transact business within his country; unlike the mandarins of Empire, who, according to him, being unable “to hang out to their power and glory,” now lie buried all over the place he traverses. The
widow is in need of money to provide for children and herself, so she does not appear to resist Pasand’s entry into her “boudoir”. What follows is this:

Pasand had no time for tender love-play. Clumsily he clawed at her breasts but found they were not much larger than his own. He tore at her already tattered clothes, pressed his mouth hungrily to her dry lips. She made no attempt to resist. He had his way. Then while he lay supine across the cold damp slab of a grave that covered the remains of some long-dead warrior, she leaned over him and bit him over the cheek and neck.

He cried out in pain and astonishment, and tried to sit up. But a number of hands, small but strong, thrust him back against the tombstone. Small mouths, sharp teeth pressed against his flesh. Muddy fingers tore at his clothes. Those young teeth bit – and bit again. His screams mingled with the cries of the jackals.

“Patience, my children, patience,” crooned the woman. “There is more than enough for all of you.”

They feasted.

Down in the ravine, the jackals started howling again, awaiting their turn. The bones would be theirs. Only the cellphone would be rejected (70-71).

The children will not allow their mother, here a metaphor for the country, to be sold. In a figurative act of cannibalization they invade the dominant power centre; the appropriation of Pasand’s body brings an end to the attempted deal; the neo-imperial force is overpowered.

I have already pointed out that nationalist thought in post-Independence India has ironically invoked the cultural parameters of the colonizers to set the standards of the country. This is an obvious and inevitable behaviour in a situation that evolved at the end of two hundred years of economic, social and cultural miscegenation of the self and the Other. Since the 1980s, the economic set-up of colonial India opened up to globalized appropriation. This has become possible as the mindset of the country has become
predisposed to the idea of the superiority of the developmental projects taken up by the West. The Indian market opened up to usher in West-centred corporate players in the name of globalization. The postcolonial Indian psyche is colonized by neo-imperial lures so that the terms “neo-colonial” and “neo-imperial” appear to be interchangeable to me. If appropriation was a reversible process during the (post)colonial period, so it is now during the neo-colonial period. If the dialogue tends to be overbearing exploitative against a particular side, the latter has an inherent potential to resist the forces and revert the scales of power. This is what happens in Ruskin’s story where cannibalism acts as a trope for “social” subversion of the covert designs of exploitation pursued by foreign equity and fads. In Ruskin’s story, the act of cannibalism significantly takes place over a tomb, whose ghostly boarder presides over the reenactment of appropriation as a token of gratitude for those who have been his caretaker for long. This story with the ingredients of gothic in it can claim to perform what Eric S. Rabkin thinks fantastic literature has the ability to do: “contradict perspectives” (4).

Freudian Oedipality, as modified by Lacan, has three graded stages of psychological development in the child. In the first stage the child becomes both the object of the mother’s desire and the subject of his own desire to be a desirable object of the mother. Desire of the mother and desire for the mother coexist in an ambiguous relationship in the child’s unconscious. In the second stage, the child’s desire for the mother is threatened by paternal prohibition, or the father’s “no”. The child’s identification with the castration truth, however, inspires a coextensive resistance to the father’s law. In the case of the widow in Ruskin’s story, the mother’s desire and anxiety for her children in absence of the real father helps to commodify her sexuality in terms of
a counter neo-imperial consummation of the counterfeit father, Pasand. So, the mother herself fans in her children the flame of resistance to the father's law. The children hold Pasand down and gorge on his flesh in a symbolic act of castration. (It is not difficult to read into the act Rusty's counteractive violence on his guardian.) The Indian belief in the primacy of maternity – mother as a protector – over conjugality in feminine identity is well vindicated. With unavoidable or convenient violence, the empowerment of the mother takes place. The perspective of the dominant role of Pasand, and all that he stands for, is contradicted. The children's role in the story is framed by Ruskin's subconscious reaction to his stepfather's usurpation of his father's role.

It is interesting to note that the Lacanian interpretation of child sexuality is relevant here inasmuch as the Indian cultural tradition, internalized by both the widow in her childhood and her children, is simply a variation of the "universal themes of infantile psycho-sexual development" (Kakar 68) clarified by Freud. Sudhir Kakar refers to W.O' Flaherty's translation of Siva Purana to cite an authoritative evidence in Hindu mythology of incestuous desire prevailing in infants.

Brahma (the Creator) had displayed desire for his daughter, Sandhya (Twilight) as soon as she was born, and she had desired him. As a result of this, Brahma cursed Kama (Eros), who had caused the trouble, to be burnt by Siva. When everyone had departed, Sandhya resolved to purify herself and to establish for all time a moral law: that new-born creatures would be free of desire. To do this, she prepared to offer herself an oblation in the fire. Knowing of her intention, Brahma sent the saint Vasistha to instruct her in the proper manner of performing tapas. Vasistha disguised himself as a brahmacarin with matted locks and taught her how to meditate upon Siva. Siva then appeared to her and offered her a boon. She said, "Let all new-born creatures be free of desire, and let me be reborn as the wife of a man to whom I can just be a close friend. And if anyone but my husband gazes upon me with desire, let his virility be destroyed and let him become an impotent
eunuch." Siva said, "Your sin has been burnt to ashes, purified by your tapas. I grant what you ask; henceforth, creatures will only be subject to desire when they reach youth, and any man but your husband who looks upon you with desire will become impotent." Then Sandhya, meditating upon the chaste Brahmin for her husband, entered the sacrificial fire. Her body became the oblation, and she arose form the fire as an infant girl, named Arundhati. She grew up in a sage’s hermitage and married Vasistha (Kakar 69-70, Flaherty 64-65).

In another version of the myth, however, the daughter of Brahma is reborn not as a chaste woman, but as Rati, the incarnation of sexuality and desire. In Ruskin’s story, the widow embodies the conflated character of these two mythical versions. According to the second version she is like Rati, “comely” and seductive enough to inspire Pasand’s desire, while according to the other, she is a curse to any man (here Pasand), other than her husband, who dares to look upon her with desire. She, aided by her children, castrates him symbolically. The psycho-sexual behaviour of the widow’s children vindicates infant Sandhya’s desire for her father, Brahma; the gender roles being altered. The widow’s children desire their mother and identify themselves with their father, so much so that out of envy of another man usurping their father’s role, they lend their hands in the castration episode. In so doing they also perform the task of responsible children of avenging the ignominy suffered by their mother, a symbol for the country. In fact, Sandhya’s expiation for the incest she committed, and subsequent legal proscription of infantile sexual desire in Indian culture are the consequences of tendentious revisions of classical myth, done deliberately to allay social concerns. Kakar maintains:

...sexual development in Hindu daughters is socially influenced by the communal living pattern, the close quarters of the extended family and the indulgent adult attitudes towards infant sexuality. In this intimate daily setting, where constant close contact with many members of the family of both sexes and several generations is part of a little girl’s early bodily experience; where the infant
girl is frequently caressed and fondled by the many adults around her; and where playful exploratory activities of an explicitly sexual nature among the many cousins living in the same house or nearby in the neighbourhood are a common early developmental experience, often indulgently tolerated by the more or less permissive adults – a promiscuous sexual excitation, as well as the fear of being overwhelmed by it, looms large in the unconscious fantasies of an Indian girl (68).

Afraid of the consequences of such a “permissive” situation existing within the family, the average Indian girl is married off as soon as she reaches puberty. And lest her childhood memories and promiscuous impulses dominate her after marriage, her mind is carefully steeped in and indoctrinated with the images of Arundhati and her like. Such social imperative does not necessarily preclude the existence of Oedipal and psychosexual tendencies in Indian children. Freud and Lacan hold water in the Indian context as well. I think an afterword is necessary at this point. Although we identify Indian tradition with Hindu myth, the caretaker’s family in Ruskin’s story might not necessarily be Hindu. Casteist Hindu society would not accept the idea of any of its members living in a graveyard. The caretaker’s family, however, is Indian irrespective of caste and creed, and they are open to the universal nature of Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis. I will be returning to the story again later.

The revenge that Kipling hinted the hot and humid Indian atmosphere wreaked on the Empire is a counteraction or a Lacanian counter-castration, so to say. Any colonized space in the form of the Other has the potency to overwhelm the colonizing self, a symptom that I would call reflexive postcoloniality of the centric self. Francis Hutchins has described the late-nineteenth century attempt by British imperial discourse to represent English rule over India as natural or “orientalized rule” (69). If British rule is
natural, anything like the supernatural, which contravenes or transcends nature, consequently calls into question the power and permanence of that rule. In this way the supernatural stands as a surrogate Other, a form of allegorical subversion. The counteraction then might legitimately be represented as supernatural. In "The Phantom Rickshaw", Dr. Heatherleigh ascribes Jack Pansay's madness to the consequences of overwork that the Raj imposed on the Britons in India. This being an unfavourable critique of the Empire from within at a time when native revolts against domination threatened imperial designs, Jack tries to make a mystique of his insanity by tracing the cause of it to the visitations of the phantom rickshaw and its deathly pale rider. Kipling employs the supernatural as a trope for the subversive device in a metacritical way. The metaphor acquires the central position. Political imperative mystifies Pansay's suffering and foists on him a position that he has no choice but to accept. But in the spinning of an outlandish yarn can be deciphered "a coding of the breakdown of that rationalism on which imperial power is based" (Morey 15).

Let us now consider Pansay's explanation of his dementia. Pansay's treatment of Mrs. Wessington smacks of British attitude to the colonized Indians. Mrs. Wessington's servile solicitations – "Jack darling!" and "I'm sure it's all a mistake-a hideous mistake...Please forgive me Jack, dear" – and her inseparable attachment to the "rickshaw" and the "jhampanies" even after death represent her as duplicating the role of a native. Pansay's indignant word for her persuasive languishment is "childish" – a label attached to the Other in the politics of signification that engendered (post)colonial relationship of power. Even if we take Pansay's and, for that matter, the storyteller's explanation of his ailment to be true, he is not morally exonerated from the sin of
emotional torture he has meted out to the Other. The visitations of the supernatural are
the (sub)conscious representation of guilt, telling upon his mental health in the same way
as it undermined the sanity of many a white man and woman. Like Mrs. Wessington,
Pansay becomes a native and an embarrassment to the Raj, who tried desperately to hide
them from public scrutiny. Here Pansay is a medico himself, but an oriental medico who
explains the white man’s behaviour by ascribing it to mystic and “irrational” lores of
“Darkness”. Either way, supernatural is used as a critique of the critical function imperial
rationality claims to perform. Berkeley Hill describes a real life play-acting, the motive of
which was to exploit the natives’ belief in the evil spirits of Darkness. At the same time
that he becomes able to get rid of the disturbing cacophony of drummers by intimidating
them, he also becomes able to exorcize the irrationality behind the belief by criticizing it
—the very motif of simulation he uses for his instrument. The idea of supernatural turns
unreal. Trying to quiet a troop of village drummers who used to shatter the peace
prevailing in the ambience of his Ranchi asylum, Berkeley Hill armed himself with a
knife and hid among the trees along the roadside: “As soon as a party of drummers
passed the point where I was concealed, I would leap out, and uttering blood-curdling
yells, pursue them. The result was always the same. Believing themselves pursued by an
evil spirit, the drummers would throw down their drums and run for dear life...” (262-
63).

Like Kipling, Ruskin too uses the supernatural to a metacritical end. But his
supernature gets generically embedded within the supergenre of naturalist discourse and
transacts with nature in terms of parody. The narrative power of supernatural discourse
when parodied turns upon itself to expose its insubstantial claim to power. “Wilson’s
Bridge” (Season 13-20) is a story based on the legend of “Pahari Wilson” – a British adventurer who came to Tehri in Garhwal (India) in the early nineteenth century in search of game. Amid the excruciating condition prevailing in the Indian subcontinent, most of the British officials sought hunting as an entertainment that could temporarily hide their bitter feeling and loathing of the system they were part of. Lt.Col. R.C. McWatters, in a letter written on November 7, 1921 to his psychiatrist friend Ernest Jones in England, refers to hunting as a compensation for his painful situation in India: “I seem to run into situations...which arouse an anxiety which is acute and rather unaccustomed...But I have been more concerned with physical health this last hot weather, for I have had a good deal of malaria, two goes of dysentery and recovering from dengue, so you can imagine I am counting the days ‘til April when some interesting shikar [birds or animals hunted for sport] and jungle life come out of my last few months of India” (Hartnack 23). The myth of Pahari Wilson created and propagated by the British system looks upon the man as one who had come to the hills in search of game. In fact, he was, like McWatters, a victim of the colonial system, who sought shikar in the hills as compensation. Wilson married a Garhwali girl named Gulabi, had children of her and then switched his attention to an Englishwoman named Ruth in the modern and fashionable world of Mussoorie. The adulterous life he shared in the company of Ruth and other European and Anglo-Indian ladies was typical of the depravity Britain feared the colonial mission was harvesting. It is not difficult to find in the shadow of Wilson the spirit of Ruskin’s mother, who was equally inclined to shikar and dissipation. Ruskin spins a ghost story out of Wilson’s infidelity to Gulabi.
The author-narrator joins the families of Rays and Duttas in a weekend getaway. They put up in a forest rest house below Gangotri where the river “Bhagirathi” (another name for Ganga) runs in a torrent through a defile. Pahari Wilson, the name the local people knew him by, had built a wooden bridge across the river, a part of which still hangs precariously upon the gorge. Beside it a sturdy iron bridge spans the river today, making way for the daytime traffic. Upon the iron bridge late one evening, the narrator comes across the eerie sight of a village woman jumping to her death in the torrent below. On inquiry, Ram Singh, the watchman, relates to him the story of Wilson and Gulabi. When Gulabi came to know about her husband’s escapades with Ruth, she tried to coax an explanation from Wilson during one of his rare visits to the village. Failing which, she tried to shoot her husband, missed her target and broke the looking glass in smithereens instead. Frenzied Gulabi then rushed out and threw herself down to death from the bridge onto the torrential river below. Wilson came galloping on horseback only to find the body of his rustic wife being drifted away by the swirling water. On hearing Ram Singh’s account, the author realizes that he might well have seen the apparition of Gulabi rehearsing the suicidal act.

When the author recounts the story to his friends that evening, they find it fascinating, except of course the supernatural twist that they think is a personal “embroidery” of the raconteur. The evening before the party is scheduled to leave, Mrs. Ray, who has been engaged in petty squabbles with her husband, follows the Gulabi way to end her life. The narrator, who mistakes Mrs. Ray rushing to her death for Gulabi in the second occasion, actually fails to find any difference between reality and illusion. For that matter, however, his encounter with the dhoti-clad woman jumping to her death on
the first occasion – that he thinks to be Gulabi’s ghost posterior to the watchman’s connective account – is itself suspect. What I see here is a Lacanian endeavour in language to create an infinite deference of the divider between the real and the fictive. The transfigured binaries in the mirror stage are actually metonymic absences between which the locus of the Other is located. For the story’s sake, however, I will follow the narrator in suspending disbelief about Gulabi’s ghost.

The end of the story comes with the author locating the narrative to some distant past and referring to the repetitive nature of the act that might have inspired many a fatal imagination since its maiden occurrence: “If you happen to be in that area and decide to cross the bridge late in the evening, you might see Gulabi’s ghost or hear the hoofbeats of Wilson’s horse as he canters across the old wooden bridge looking for her. Or you might see the ghost of Mrs. Ray or hear her husband’s anguished cry. Or there might be others. Who knows?” (20). The curious way of ending the story lends a touch of playfulness to the fatal act and reduces the bridge to a space or arena where it is acted and reenacted since Gulabi’s time. The supernatural spectacle is parodied in an open-air theatre several times.

What I discover in the mythical Wilson-Gulabi story – a tale within the tale of “Wilson’s Bridge” – is a metaphorical structure not unrelated to the Empire’s psycho-social implications in India. Let us first consider the binaries of Ruth/Gulabi and of Ruth’s modern, urban Mussoorie society versus Gulabi’s primitive, rustic Harsil life. It is not unusual to read in it the codification of a colonial construct referred to earlier. Wilson’s fascination for the village girl Gulabi leads to nothing beyond wedlock and a couple of hybrid children. In fact, the Anglo-Indian community in India was born out of such union
either inside or outside marital relations. Ruskin imagines his kinship to these children.

No sooner did the community come into existence than the British who fathered them (for there was almost no evidence till the first decade of the twentieth century of an Englishwoman giving birth to a child of a native father) shirked their responsibility of parenthood. For Ruskin, however, the case was slightly different, but then he too suffered from the political apathy of the Raj and the rejection of the native people at some point of time referred to earlier. In the Wilson myth, the act of desertion is figured in Wilson reposing faith on the Englishwoman Ruth and her modern, urban, hill-station adulthood. The impossibility of a long-standing intimacy with the native counterpart is conveniently worked out by the death of Gulabi. She is obviously the lesser mortal in the relationship and her attempt at avenging herself with a gunshot at Wilson fails while her identity suffers near erasure with the shattering of her looking glass. Identity as a fictive mirror image is a reified denotation of the ego’s location. With the breaking of the mirror, Gulabi’s misrecognition of herself as the object of Wilson, the white man’s desire becomes evident. Wilson’s desire to be a desirable object in Gulabi’s eyes also suffers setback. Her voluntary death by drowning tones down the criminal implications of Wilson’s involvement in her death and at the same time saves her from the possible penal consequences of attempting to kill Wilson.

The Wilson-Gulabi story is structured within the literary paradigm of the late-eighteenth and nineteenth century colonial texts. In the denouements of the colonial love stories, the “cultural harmony through romance” (Pratt 97) invariably breaks down. “Whether love turns out to be requited or not, whether the colonized lover is female or
male, outcomes seem to be roughly the same: the lovers are separated, the European is reabsorbed by Europe, and the non-European dies an early death” (97).

The political imperative notwithstanding, Gulabi's death is a compromise with an imagined mortification of desire instigated by a partial misunderstanding of Wilson's words and gaze. Groomed in a cultural and linguistic setup quite different from that of Wilson's, Gulabi is expected to misunderstand Wilson more than the extent of separation Wilson's own set of signifiers could have possibly created. The mirror image is the Lacanian “big object” for Gulabi. The way she desires to be gazed at by Wilson is expressed through her own gaze (her “little object”), which is not returned now that the mirror is broken by gunshot. The misrepresentation of her gaze is due to a defect in the mirror, which is metonymic of obscurantist interference, coming in the form of cultural and linguistic divide between the Englishman and the Garhwali woman. Gulabi misunderstands the nature of Wilson's desire to reach out to the Other, which is represented in Gulabi. The implication of this is pointed out slightly later.

What happened to Gulabi's “two robust children”? Although the question appears to be immaterial as far as the main plot of the story is concerned, the mention of the children at all by the author has hidden psychological implications for Ruskin. The idea of a colonial impossibility of interracial marriage between the colonizer and the native is structured within the myth in such a way that by essentially closing the relationship with the native's death, it is trickily consigned to be the adulterous part in Wilson's promiscuous life. It is now misrepresented as a source of offence to British prudery, and half-caste Anglo-Indians born of such a union are conveniently forgotten. The psychological reason for such British condescension to the Anglo-Indians on the verge of
Indian independence has been discovered by Berkeley Hill: “That the Indian half-caste is the product for the most part of promiscuous sexual unions between European immigrants and natives of the country, is a perpetual source of offence to British prudery and this fact may explain why less kindness and sympathy is shown to half-castes in India than in the French and Dutch colonies” (Berkeley-Hill, Cedric Dover in Marriage Hygiene 333). In fact, Berkeley Hill had substantiating evidence of such an alienating attitude in his own life. He married an Indian woman and had five Anglo-Indian children who were considered second-class British in India. That Ruskin was able to turn such an alienating condition to favourable circumstance through unusual personal endeavour has been pointed out earlier. However, a sense of fear and isolation during the nationalist upheaval affected him all the same.

Back to our story, Ruskin uses the myth to inform the present and Gulabi’s ghost acts as a mediator in the conference of the two worlds. The legend appears to have been used in a ritualistic way. Rituals present time as a continuum and also impart continuity to the landscape in which they are performed. Although the conception of a myth’s transcendental nature in ritualistic formulations is based upon a temporal continuum, there are hints of an emotional component being attached to the space-time coordinate. The category of emotion attached to the seminal configuration of the myth remains unchanged in its ritual manifestations. What I intend to show here is that the relationship between the Gulabi story and its later offshoots is not that of myth and ritual but of a story and its many parodies. Neither the condition of space-time continuum nor that of emotional likeness is fulfilled here. The space-time coordinates along which the events of
the embedded Gulabi story unfold are different from those of the main plot in which the
storyteller himself participates as a constituent character.

The space of action of the myth is the wooden bridge from which Gulabi sprang
to her death and down which Wilson rode on horseback. Gulabi’s ghost (if it is ghost at
all and not any real person), however, reenacts the scene on the new iron bridge. If this is
considered an appropriation of new space, a characteristic intrinsic to colonial schemes,
then Mrs. Ray’s mimicry of Gulabi is a representational act explicating the position of the
new woman as subaltern. The assumed periodicity of the act over time between the
represented act of the main plot and the reader’s possible encounter with it in future, does
not necessarily speak about a woman jumping to her death. The author says: “Or there
might be others. Who knows?” (Season 20). Here “others” can mean men as well. The
semantic marker supplied by the author does not substantiate the thesis of
representational extension of space.

The temporal indicators of the Gulabi legend engage historical parameters that
distinguish it from the story of the Rays. Racial and political motives which denied socio-
cultural miscegenation in the colonial days and the situation in which a hybrid
community is born and subsequently orphaned are intrinsic markers of the legend that
distance it in time from the main plot of the Ray-Dutta story.

The temporal and spatial distinctions apart, the difference between the kinds of
emotion that drove Gulabi and Mrs. Ray to suicide are no less pronounced. Gulabi had
children and wealth. She was mad with envy of the other woman in Wilson’s life.
Whereas the slight indication that we find in the text of Mrs. Ray’s dissatisfaction points
at money and lucre being the bone of contention between the Ray couple. When the
narrator had finished recounting the Gulabi story to his friends, "Mrs. Ray thought Gulabi had been very silly. 'Money can't buy happiness,' said Mr. Ray. 'No', said Mrs. Dutta, 'but it can buy you a great many comforts.' Mrs. Ray wanted to talk of other things..." (Season 19). The laws of ritual having been broken, Gulabi's suicide turns into parodies of self-immolation in Mrs. Ray and in the subsequent conjectural cases.

Mrs. Ray's suicide is triggered by her ego falsely connecting her deprivation to that of Gulabi, whose suffering was due to colonial exploitation. The parody inherent in the action not only exposes the deception, but acts as a critique of the critical function of naturalizing the illegitimacy of slave-master union Gulabi's suicide claims to perform. Gulabi's hysterical outburst trying to shoot Wilson is symptomatic of "jouissance" reaching its climax in the act of suicide. It is a tortured compromise between her possessiveness of Wilson and her desire to hear the Englishman swear his fidelity to her. The latter being a politically inconvenient possibility during the Raj is not synchronic with the nature of lack that characterizes the relationship between the Ray couple. Gulabi's suicide and the suicide of Mrs. Ray are mutually exclusive events, historically removed from each other, so that the truth of both is not to be realized at one point in time.

In the parody of the Gulabi episode, the hypothetical intervention of supernature acts as a metacritical device. The author explodes the myth of Gulabi's suicide as a colonial construct for erasing the presence of the native (primitive) Other in the white man's psyche. But the attempt to erase the Other is abortive in the sense that it foregrounds the fear in the colonial self of being appropriated by its Other. If Gulabi's
ghost can be seen, so can the "hoofbeats" of Wilson's horse be heard – a constant self-referential pursuit of fear to the space dominated by the yearning of the self for union with its Other. Possibility of a symbolic chain of reversals and re-reversals of power relations is opened up when the self is overwhelmed by the dynamic forces of fear and desire objectified in and exerted by the Other. Wilson's dilemma is typical of the colonial crisis of choice between compromise with a cultural dissipation and nativisation. Wilson is seen trying psychologically to formulate a stance in the same way as Ruskin tried to come to terms with his father's vocation and the causes of his suffering. At this point a slight explanation is necessary for what appears to be loose end. The narrator never mentions he has seen anything whatever of the like of Wilson or his horse, but he refers to the possibility of hearing the horse's hoofbeats. Wilson on horseback, an iconic Gestalt, plays a series of self-referential gestures upon the differential connecting absentee binaries of Ruth and Gulabi. The fragmented selfhood works on the principles of a high frequency oscillator whose movement, by the blurring of the vision, melts into thin air.

In "Night of the Millennium," discussed earlier, the supernatural acts in a similar metacritical fashion. Pasand's attempt at vindicating his masculinity over the frail body of the widow turns futile. While Pasand lies spent upon an old tomb the widow is still powerful enough to fix him. "She leaned over him and bit him on the cheek and neck. He cried out in pain and astonishment" (Season 70). The overpowering of the male neo-imperial self is an act in reversal where the Other's supremacy is symbolically connoted in making another, already appropriated colonial self to work for it. The occupant of the grave on which Pasand lies now self-reflexively joins forces in the overpowering act of
the female. Here the supernatural in the form of a historical presence calls into question what Francis Hutchins described as the proclamation of the axiomatic nature of colonial rule. In so doing, it is also critical of its own self that it had to bend to the spell of the Other. We are once more reminded of Jack Pansay's inevitable surrender to the thrall of the phantom rickshaw and its already nativized rider's wraith. Even when Pansay was suggested deportation to England, he could not but refuse it because he felt himself already appropriated by the Other. It was his destiny to end his life in the company of the person he once exploited and spurned. Pasand's appropriation, Wilson's pursuit of Gulabi, and Pansay's nativisation all figure out a part of Ruskin's dialogue with the self and Other.

To Ruskin, supernatural is the paranormal extension of consciousness. One of the practitioners of the supernatural story who has, apart from Kipling, much influence on him is Lafcadio Hearn (1850-1904). In the 1989 "Introduction" to the Penguin India publication of "Time Stops at Shamli" and Other Stories, Ruskin quotes Hearn to complement his own idea of the supernatural: "The ghostly always represents some shadow of truth. The ghost story has always happened in our dreams and reminds us of forgotten experiences, imaginative and emotional..." (Shamli 10). The ghost story in the dream is a sort of postcolonial analysis of the psyche deluded by the misjudged idea of the purity of the self. What Ruskin means by "some shadow of truth" is actually a dynamic psychological interplay of different states of the mind where the obsolescence of any particular idea of truth is the essential (in)determinant. The genre of the supernatural is one medium in which he relives this truth in his search for identity. The stories are actually informed by the author's psychological experiences of negotiating his ironical
position during childhood. That he still continues to reenact the crisis is demonstrated by the very fact that the author felt it necessary to literalize the dialectic as late in 1999.

It is not possible to draw a conclusive closure to the study of Ruskin’s sense of identity embedded in his works. He continues to write and delight us from his hill-top abode in Landour, Mussoorie. Perhaps a sequel to this study would be required in future as a response to those works which are yet to be written. However, the metaphoric worth of the Anglo-Indian writer’s engagement with the historical self will remain undiminished.