Chapter II

Class Concerns

In effect, it means this: that we want English rule without the Englishman. You want the tiger's nature, but not the tiger; that is to say, you would make India English.

MK Gandhi

2.1. Introduction

Albert Memmi in The Coloniser and the Colonised (1990), speaks of the 'mummification of the colonised society' (164) which does not allow it to grow, since it fossilises some of the structures that colonisation has spawned. This implies that even when a nation has won its freedom, the relics of colonisation remain and sometimes grow even stronger, resulting in a kind of neo-colonisation by the elite sections of society; those sections which have appropriated the cultures of the coloniser to such an extent that they seek to propagate it as both modern and inevitable. Acknowledging the class compulsions of the process of colonisation. Memmi further points to the fact that, the root of colonial privilege is the economic disparity that is cultivated assiduously between the rulers and the ruled. Class difference, therefore, is seen as indispensable to the colonial and post-colonial situation.
The gap between what may be called the classes and the masses, thus, forms the core of the privileges that the elites enjoy. In the Indian context, this privileging has been amply illustrated by a novelist like Upamanyu Chatterjee, in *English, August*. The following episode epitomises the dichotomy effectively, in the almost unbridgeable gap that persists between the upper class protagonist Agastya Sen and his attendant Vasant:

‘Let the water begin to boil, then let the water remain on the fire, boiling for about ten minutes, and then switch off the gas. Boiling for ten minutes means counting ten minutes after the water begins to boil, not leaving the water on the gas for ten minutes.’ He said words like this to Vasant, slowly and carefully... Whenever Vasant brought the jug he would ask, ‘Is it boiled?’ and Vasant would nod, sometimes dip his finger and say, ‘Its hot.’

(Chatterjee 1997:66)

The patronising, semi-exasperated tone used to depict the incorrigible and ignorant Vasant is what has earlier been called a colonial relic; it is the tone in which the coloniser would speak of the natives, - the ‘they’ (‘the mark of the plural’, to use Memmi’s phrase) who would never change. Further, this class consciousness revealed in the fastidious use of ‘boiled water’ is dramatically juxtaposed with the chronic water scarcity in the tribal village of Chipanthi, which comes under Agastya’s jurisdiction at
Jompanna, where he has been posted as a trainee officer of the elitist IAS cadres:

They have children, but they were all busy. Women were tying them to ropes and letting them into the well. After a while the ropes were bringing up buckets... the buckets were half-full of some thin mud. The only sounds were the echoing clang of the buckets against the walls of the well, and the tired snivelling of a few children on the side. He looked at them. Gashed elbows and knees from the well walls; one child had a wound like a flower on his forehead.

(Chatterjee 1997:255-256)

It is somewhere between these two telling narratives that the story of the ‘below-the-poverty-line’ existence of the vast sections of the Indian populace, and their near-invisibility to the middle and upper classes lies. They also point to the total abdication of the responsibility of the better-endowed citizens of the nation towards their downtrodden counterparts, because social inequality is the base on which power relations subsist. This kind of indifference to the concerns of the under-privileged, however, calls for inspection, in the post-colonial context, since every nation claims to model itself on the principles of equality and justice. The silence surrounding this inequality, provokes a social critic like Pawan K. Varma (1999), to question the role of the privileged classes in Indian society:

Can India prosper in the long run in an enduring manner if the privileged sections of society refuse to see any interest or
priority beyond their narrow self-interest?

(Varma 1999:xii)

and subsequently warn that

no nation can prosper if its more well-to-do citizens actually think that the best way to counter the unspeakable squalor and poverty and disease and illiteracy of the vast majority is to take as little notice of them as possible.

(Varma 1999:xii)

An interesting aspect of this severe criticism is that it is, at the same time, an indictment of, and is also verbalised by, the microscopic English-speaking elites, - the ‘Babus’ as Khair (2001) refers to them; what needs to be examined is whether the voices of Chatterjee and Varma are stray voices or whether they form part of the larger canvas of Indian English fiction, especially the novels written in the 1980s.

2.1.1 The ‘Surrogate Englishman’

Anai Loomba’s term ‘surrogate Englishman’ (Loomba 1998) shows the overwhelming extent to which Macaulay succeeded in creating ‘a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect’ (Young 1952:729). The hegemonic role of the English speaking elites remains undisputed both in the freedom struggle and in the more than thirty five years of the hold of the Indian
National Congress in its various avatars in the political and social domains after Independence. The fact that the neo-colonist elite constituted not more than 2% of the total population of India in 1947, perhaps, in an ironic manner, mimics the colonial fact that even at the height of its power there were not more than 80,000 Englishmen in India, who wielded undisputed power and authority over millions. In a democratic nation, where strength ostensibly lies in numbers, the predominance of the minority of 'Macaulayised Indians' speaks volumes, not only for the insidious continuation of the colonial hangover, but also for the lasting embedding of the basic structures of British rule in the institutions left behind by them - notably, the parliamentary system of governance, the education system, the bureaucracy and the legal system.

Macaulay had also anticipated the exclusivist and elitist nature of the class of his creation, and hoped for its gradual expansion by the filter-down process:

... it is impossible for us, with our limited means, to educate the body of people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions we govern,... to that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich these dialects with terms of science borrowed from the western nomenclature, and to render them, by degrees, fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population.

(Young 1952:729)
This class, then, became the intermediary between the government and the 'masses', but whether they could fulfil their intended role of taking on the onus of the responsibility of handing down the 'benefits' of their education to the lower classes still remains open to debate.

The fact that a section of the English-speaking elite was at the vanguard of the freedom struggle was certainly due to its more vocal and organised nature; its chief votaries, represented, among others by Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, M.A. Jinnah, Subhash Chandra Bose, Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Lokmanya Tilak, found acceptance because they were perceived by the masses as educated enough in the ways of the rulers themselves to lead the struggle against the English. They were also considered idealistic and patriotic enough, and their popular appeal set in motion the process of decolonisation by taking on the might of the colonial masters; - however, they retained their role as intermediaries too, but also at the same time posed a challenge to the very authorities they were mediating with. Even after independence, their role in political and public life continued to gain weight. Their ideological moorings, summarised by Varma (1999:32) as follows, indicate the vision of India they projected:

(a) an acceptance of the role of ethics in society, probity in public life and the link between politics and idealism.
(b) a belief in the vision of an industrialised India, rational
and scientific in outlook and modern in the Western sense of
the term.
(c) a social sensitivity towards the poor...
(d) a reticence towards ostentatious display of wealth, which
was seen as something in bad taste and incongruent in a
country as poor as India.
(e) an acceptance of the goal of self-reliance, reflecting an
optimism in India’s economic strengths and the political need
to be insulated from external manipulation.
(f) a belief in a secular state above religious divides.

The post-Emergency disillusionment and the rise of new, often sectarian
and regional identities gave a jolt to these ‘ideals’ and lead to a scrutiny of
some of the premises of the dominant pan-Indian elite. The agonies of
Shashi Tharoor and Salman Rushdie with the constructs of post-
independence realities is a far cry from the unquestioned optimistic
acceptance of the Gandhi-Nehruvian legacy that one finds in a work like
Kanthapura or The Untouchable. Yet, what needs to be stressed at this
point is that the frame of reference remains the same: pan-Indian,
westernised, secular, industrialised, urbanised and idealistic; and the class
affiliations of a Raja Rao or R. K. Narayan are not very different from
those of the novelists of the 1980s.

2.1.2. Elites and Intellectuals

Elitism, per se, is not a bane and it is an inevitable aspect of any
society. If an elite is truly representative of the group/groups it seeks to
speak for and if these groups have a wide social base, elites can provide the required leadership at any given moment of time; the value of an elite group lies in its instrumentality for social change and as Tom Bottommore (1964) says the importance of elites also depends on how far they are products of other, more fundamental changes in society or representative of more powerful interests. In the Indian context, the role of elites finds greater acceptability, mainly due to the hierarchical nature of Indian society:

There exists in every community a natural elite, which better than all the rest represents the soul of the entire people, its great ideals, its strong emotions and its essential tendency. The whole community looks to them as their example. When the wick is ablaze at its tip, the whole lamp is said to be burning.

(Radhakrishnan 2000:72)

Now, what constitutes the elite and what are its functions in society? Bottommore (1964) considers three categories of elites in 20th century society: the intellectuals, the managers of industry and high government officials. Suren Navlakha in his study of Indian elites (1989) categorises them as civil servants, industrial managers and university teachers. Pareto’s classification (quoted in Bottommore 1964) into the ruling and the non-ruling elites points to the social stratification of the elites within the elites themselves, and the intricate network of elites and sub-elites
from which the ruling classes draw their authority and over which they establish their hegemony. So, apart from the aristocracy, the heads of state and religions, and the new middle and upper-middle classes consisting of the bureaucracy, management professionals, media professionals, scientists, engineers, teachers, scholars and intellectuals from the sub-strata from which the ruling groups emerge. The elites, however, are not a closed system or a fixity: new elites may be created, members of the lower classes may become upwardly mobile and get incorporated among existing elites, or new groups (caste/class/race/community based) may aspire to and attain enough power and influence so as to be regarded as the new elite groups. The world represented by the Indian English writer, is, by and large, situated within the categories mentioned by both Bottommore and Navlakha, and will be discussed in a later section of this chapter. What will also be explored is whether the Indian English novel of the 1980s ventures into the world of the caste/class/community-based neo sub elites, or does it restrict itself only to what may be called the colonial elite only.

Elites, by their very nature are a minority; their importance derives from the fact that they perform political functions, monopolise power and enjoy the advantages that power brings. They are expected to provide social and moral leadership, and among other functions they perform is
the maintaining a myriad of modern institutions and furthering the pace of
techno-industrial advancement’ (Navlakha 1989:27). Navlakha also points
out that while in pre-independence India, the educated-professional groups
were actively involved in the anti-colonial movement, after independence
they have moved away from this political role; they have become reluctant
to mediate in the political and civil processes of social change.

Increasingly, elites in India are today being identified with industry
managers and civil servants. Writers, especially Indian English writers,
who are also regarded as intellectuals, become an obvious target of attack
for the abdication of their role as agents of social, moral and political
change.

At this point, it would be pertinent to take a brief look at the class
background of the Indian English novelists of the 1980s. Invariably, all of
them, Salman Rushdie downwards – are second or third generation
educated professionals, having attended some of the most prestigious
educational institutes in India and abroad. They pursue high-profile,
sometimes international careers, as in the case of Amitav Ghosh and
Shashi Tharoor, both of whom work for the U.N. Similarly, Rushdie and
Sealy are associated with the international mass media. Chatterjee is an
IAS officer, and Das the CEO of a multinational company; Gita Mehta
moves in the highest echelons of power, being the daughter of an
important politician. In fact, all of them write for the national and the international press and they may be classed among the managers of high industry and high government officials mentioned by Bottommore and Navlakha. As writers, they combine the role of intellectuals along with their other pursuits. Hence, it becomes important to look into the obligations of the writer-as-intellectual, and to what extent the Indian English novelists live up to their role as intellectuals.

While Gramsci maintains that ‘all men are intellectuals... but not all men in society have the function of intellectuals’ (Hoare and Smith 1996:9), Edward Said is more exacting in his demands on intellectuals. For him, an intellectual is more than a ‘faceless professional’; s/he is

an individual endowed with the faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as far as possible, for a public.

(Said 1994:10)

He stresses the non-conformism, the proclivity for dissent, anti-status quo stance essential in the mental make-up of an intellectual. Among the functions of the intellectual are the breaking down of the ‘stereotypes and reductive categories that are so limiting to human thought and communication’ (Said 1994:x), the questioning of patriotic nationalism, corporate thinking and a sense of class, racial or gender privilege'
(ibedum:xi) and the speaking out ‘on behalf of underpresented and disadvantaged groups’ (ibedum:xv). It is his task to ‘raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than to produce them), to be some-one who cannot be easily co-opted by governments or corporations, and whose raison-de-etre is to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug’ (ibedum: 8-9). As against the ideal intellectual he posits, Said quotes Russell Jacoby, who talks about the downgrading of the identity and the perceived social role of the intellectual today:

... today’s intellectual is most likely to be a closeted literature professor, with a secure income, and no interest in dealing with the world outside the classroom. Such intellectuals, Jacoby alleges, write an esoteric and barbarous prose that is meant mainly for academic advancement and not for social change.

(Said 1994:57). (emphasis added)

Wherein, between these two poles of Said and Jacoby do the Indian English writers fall can emerge only after an analysis of the class contexts of the novels, which then may lead on to a discussion on how these class affiliations affect the representations of family, gender, society, community, the state/nation, depicted in the novels.
2.2. The Upper Class World of the Novels of the 1980s.

The social and the cultural world of the novel of the 1980s is predominantly elitist, and even among the elites it often focuses on the erstwhile and contemporary ruling classes. This class, which may roughly be identified with Marxist bourgeoisie has

Since the establishment of Modern Industry and of the world market, conquered for itself, in the modern representative State, exclusive political sway. The executive of the modern State is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.

(Marx and Engels 1992:5)

They are the ‘priviligentsia’ to use Varma’s term (1999) – beginning with the earliest beneficiaries of the 1835 Bill of Education which followed Macaulay’s Minute. The multi-generational, almost dynastic nature of the novels of the 1980s, apart from signifying the post-colonial scramble for the retrieval of the past on the personal, familial and national levels, also places them within a class structure in which the status of a family is in direct proportion to its antiquity. Thus, we rub shoulders with kings and queens (The Great Indian Novel, Raj), political leaders (Midnight’s Children, The Great Indian Novel, A Suitable Boy), doctors (Midnight’s Children), lawyers and magistrates (A Fine Family, A Suitable Boy), high-ranking administrative officials (English, August), landlords (A Suitable Boy, Days of the Turban), diplomats (The
Shadow Lines), businessmen and corporate managers (A Fine Family, A Suitable Boy, The Shadow Lines), and upper-level educators (A Suitable Boy, The Shadow Lines). The rarefied atmosphere in which the protagonists of these novels move is marked by privileges, wealth, prestige, social control and power.

These elites, introduced in the preceding section, whose representatives are vocal and who have aligned themselves with the ruling classes at different stages in both colonial and post-colonial regimes, have been centre-stage during crucial, political moments in the history of India. A study of the growth/decline/mutations of this class, its contamination by the colonial presence through the last two centuries can be instructive about their attitudes, the roles they have taken on at different times, their affiliations with the power centres on the one hand, and with the masses, on the other, and their contributions to the ideological climate of the past two hundred years.

2.2.1. Educational Levels and Professional Background

Elitism, as seen earlier, is marked by higher levels of education and entry into the 'learned' professions; The novels of the 1980s focus upon, at least, three generations of the educated professionals, who, by virtue of their social mobility, affluent life-style and proximity to centres
of power, are in positions from which they can negotiate their relationships with the power centres (both colonial and post-colonial), and can also have a direct bearing on the lives of those who do not enjoy this proximity. Their hegemonic role links directly with the fortunes of the next generation, and it is their decisions that have shaped events on the national level. A study of their concerns across generations could be instructive about the processes by which the colonial mentality got embedded in the psyche of the nation.

2.2.1.1. The First Generation

The first generation of the educated professionals comprises of the earliest of Macaulay's creations — 'a class of learned men set apart from the masses' (Vishwanathan 1989:116) already existing in the caste hierarchy of Indian society in the late 19th century, and taking their place in their chosen professions sometime in the 1920s and the 1930s. So, Aadam Aziz in Midnight's Children, returns as a qualified doctor from Germany in 1915, to set up practice in the Kashmir valley; Bauji in A Fine Family is already a successful, prosperous lawyer in the 1920s at Lahore; and the Grandmother in The Shadow Lines takes up a teaching job in the 1930s after the death of her engineer husband at Rangoon, at a time when women were confined mostly within their domestic space; a
whole generation of Sealy's Trotters benefit from favourable government policies (1857 to 1919), bagging coveted posts in departments like the railways, the posts and telegraphs; Many of these groups, especially, the Anglo-Indians in The Trotternama also represent the assimilation and appropriation of colonial life-styles and patterns of speech, due to their perceived proximity to the rulers. However, this assimilation is problematised by Sealy, Rushdie and Ghosh, since the Trotters, Aadam Aziz and the diplomat Datta-Chaudhari remain 'half-and-halfers' to use the term, so tellingly, coined by Sealy to describe the Anglo-Indians. Thus, Aziz stands alienated from the valley and its ethos, yet unable to grow fully into the new westernised context his medical education has provided him and to which he has moved uneasily from the gem-stone business of the family. Ghosh uses satire to foreground the half-and-half status of the diplomat, Mayadebi's husband, in his alienated reaction to a family member like the narrator's mother, when he uses a presumably time-tested formula to strike up a conversation with her, by inquiring about the price of eggs in the local market, till it is revealed that in Africa he had conducted 'precisely the same conversation, merely substituting mutton for eggs, with the wives of two third secretaries successively'. (Ghosh 1997:41). A more pertinent problematisation is also found in the racism that the upper class Ila has to cope with in England.
However, this generation has almost succeeded in overcoming the naïve euphoria of the earliest enthusiasts of the university system: a euphoria characteristic of students like Nobinchandur Dass, who, in the post 1857-'reform' era had completely internalised the objectives of colonial education, as is shown in the following excerpt of an essay written by him:

> England... is particularly engaged in the cause of Indian improvement. She not only carries on commerce with India, but she is evidently employed in instructing the natives in the arts and sciences...in...everything that is calculated to elevate their understanding, meliorate their condition, and increase their resources.

(quoted in Vishwanathan 1989:139)

This kind of contemptuousness towards Indians (referred to as 'natives' by Dass) does not mark the attitudes of Aziz, Bauji or the Grandmother. It does find a strong echo among the Victorias, the Rubys and the Victors in *The Trotternama*; but in their case, it is also the desperate voice of a displaced, insecure, rootless and abandoned community, apart from being a reflection of their class background.

In some cases, the liberal, westernised education and entry into a modern profession has lead to a bi-polar dichotomy between what Gramsci has called 'civil' and ‘political’ society. The public/social life of this class has been transformed, but private life – involving
family/community ties has remained untouched. This dichotomy has been externalised in the Aziz – Tai relationship and the Aziz – Nadeem state of perpetual tension in *Midnight’s Children*. Tai and Nadeem, who repudiate the western heritage of Aziz, work with a vengeance to retain the pre-Macaulayan status quo within their own domains: Tai’s recourse to remain stinkingly dirty and unbathed, and Nadeem’s vows of silence, her insistence on an Islamic education for her children and her very stiffness in bed with Aziz, become symbols of their aggressive resistance to the ideology which western education brings in its wake. Even the doctor himself suffers fragmentation, and the ‘hole in his heart’ following his loss of faith, becomes a clear manifestation of this fragmentation.

In contrast, in *A Fine Family*, the separation of civil from political life is presented in simplistic terms as complete and unproblematic; in fact, it is privileged and valorised; for Bauji is at home in both the worlds and his private world remains totally untouched by his education. He is modernised and westernised only up to the ‘right’ degree: in his world the education of daughters is permitted, but their employment frowned upon; arranged marriages remain the norm and Bauji uses all his professional skills to rationalise, highlight and project the privileging of the status quo. Unlike Aziz, he has not been alienated, for his ideology and actions have remained within the parameters of caste and community. Even his
contempt for the ‘rural’, ‘poor’ relatives who come from the hinterland to attend Tara’s marriage does not rupture his ties with them – it is viewed as the mild, legitimate impatience of a successful professional who has ‘made it’ in life, perfectly acceptable with the framework of family and community relationships. Similarly, in *The Shadow Lines*, the Grandmother remains a votary of middle-class, patriarchal ideology; but Ghosh does not valorise her as Das does in the case of Bauji; Bauji is held up as an ideal; while the grandmother emerges as a disruptive force whose role is riddled with questions.

This generation belongs to the first stage of colonisation, - which Ashcroft et al (1989) refer to as the nationalistic stage, in which the priority is to resist and overcome the coloniser. At this point of time, Aadam Aziz, Bauji and the Grandmother are all nationalists; - but nationalists after their own fashion. In his incisive study of the psychological dimensions of colonisation, Ashis Nandy has pointed out that there may be ‘subtler and more sophisticated means of acculturation.’ (Nandy 1994:xii). He adds

They produce not merely models of conformity but also models of ‘official’ dissent. It is possible...to be anti-colonial which is specified and promoted by the modern world view as ‘proper’, ‘sane’ and ‘rational’.

(Nandy 1994:xii)
This kind of reaction is crystallised in the conservative ideology of Bauji, who, anticipating the peculiar predilection of the middle-classes in post-independence India, and reflecting the apathy of the educated — professional class to larger social concerns that Varma speaks of, often sits on the fence: he is both sympathetic to and wary of the nationalist movement. Ideologically, he applauds the role of the nationalist leaders, but when his own nephew takes an active part in the freedom struggle, he is not only sceptical, but even disappointed with the fact that Karan — his heir-apparent — has thrown away his future as a professional. In her university days, the Grandmother, in The Shadow Lines, harbours a secret admiration for the revolutionaries, but she is at no point directly involved with them. In both these typical cases, the characters are more concerned with issues of their own security, rather than with larger social and political issues, and they remain passive on-lookers rather than active participants in events of national importance. Even Aadam Aziz does not rise to the level of being a participant: he remains a mere victim at the Jallianwala Bagh massacre; since his identity has been fractured by his education and his consequent rootlessness, he tries to appropriate various identities, by aligning himself with the nationalists in 1919, the anti-partition Islamic Convocation of Mian Abdullah in 1942 and the liberal secular Muslims in post-independence India. But, while in Ghosh and
Rushdie, the attitudes of this class are critiqued and open to question, in Das one finds an admiration for its prioritising of professional growth, family, and the over-riding desire to ensure a safe, secure future and upward mobility of one’s children.

2.2.1.2. The Second Generation: ‘Midnight’s Parents’

The second generation can be situated somewhere around 1947 – ‘midnight’s parents’ – the generation which is at its prime at the moment of the official, political decolonisation of India – the moment of India’s freedom from colonial rule. Thus, in Rushdie they are represented by the Sinais and the other residents of Methwold Estate, in Ghosh by the narrator’s parents and Tridib, in Das by Karan, Sewa Ram and Priti, and the vague, shadowy figure of Agastya Sen’s father, the governor of Bengal in English, August. Seth’s novel falls into a separate category, since its action is restricted to the years 1952-1953; and the two generations it depicts are locked within this time-frame: the centres of power are represented by Mahesh Kapoor, Rupa Mehra, the older Chatterjee, the Nawab of Baitar and L.N. Aggarwal; and the generation that looks up to the future – Pran, Savita, Lata, Maan, Amit, Dipankar, Varun, Kabir, Haresh and Rasheed. These are the inheritors of Indian independence – the class and generation on whom the mantle of constructing the Indian
nation, and working out the future of the new nation-state has fallen. To this generation falls the task of mental decolonisation, to reiterate the point that 'colonisation is first of all a matter of consciousness and needs to be defeated ultimately in the minds of men'. (Nandy 1994:63)

This is also the class and generation that carries the burden of the Empire – the colonial legacy symbolised in Midnight's Children by the sale and construction of Methwold Estate. Methwold is the power centre and his Estate the colony that is transferred with its entire baggage into Indian hands in 1947; and its inheritors – the doctor, Narlikar, the lawyers and solicitors, the Ibrahims, the filmmaker Hanif, the businessman Sinai and the navy colonel, Sabarmati, - all belong to the class of educated professionals who have consolidated their base in the colonial period. They are the new elites, the managers of business and industry that Navlakha and Bottommore speak of, to whom the task of envisioning the political and economic fortunes of the new nation have been entrusted.

The professional growth of this class continues after independence. The Sinais move from a defunct leather business in Delhi to a booming real estate business in Bombay; the chillu-hating gynaecologist, Narlikar, makes his fortune in speculation, real estate and land reclamation schemes, before the bubble of prosperity bursts for Ahmed Sinai; the grandmother in The Shadow Lines surges ahead in her profession and retires in 1962
as the headmistress of her school, while her son ascends the corporate ladder from his humble beginnings as a junior executive to a top management position; the more affluent wing of the family, the Datta-Chaudharis move into the international circuit – the father is a diplomat and one of his sons is an economist with the UN, while Tridib is engaged in the cerebral profession of archaeology. Sewa Ram in *A Fine Family*, symbolises the Nehruvian dream – a man given to spartan, Gandhian living, and is part of the effort of the building of an industrialised India.

This generation also marks the beginning of the end of the idealism traditionally associated with the middle classes and moves from public priorities, however suspect, to private gains. So, the socially committed Nadir Khan is left behind, just as the ‘rebel’ Aadam Aziz almost disappears from view. Sewa Ram’s ideals are seen as the source of extreme discomfort and discontent for Priti. Social concerns are relegated to the background and the class becomes more ‘professional’ in Said’s sense of the term: money-making and social success become its priorities, at the cost of social commitment. So, speculation and gambling gain respectability in Amina Sinai’s secret forays into the racecourse at Mahalaxmi. The fact that all the inheritors of Methwold’s legacy agree to the humiliating conditions imposed by him reveals the extent to which
wealth and property have gained ascendancy, so much so that stray, dissenting voices like those of Amina are silenced.

Karan in *A Fine Family* typifies the attitude of this generation: he is projected as a dilettante, an achiever-manqué, the false prophet, with talents galore which he simply cannot put to any productive use; - in this respect he could easily be identified with one of the midnight's children. To begin with, he belongs to that 'small section of the ruling class [that] cuts itself adrift, and joins the revolutionary class, that class that holds the future in its hands.' (Marx and Engels 1992:13). His transition from the young, shifting idealist in 1942 to the man-about-society to his final fall from grace as the seducer of Priti is not only a story of opportunities missed and talents gone astray, but could actually be seen as a reflection of the frittering away of the energies of a whole new generation, in serving narrow, personal ends.

The message of this class and generation seems to be: personal and family security are the main priority; education is the key to material wealth and prosperity; any forays into reform/public life are counter-productive. Take care of industry and management, intellectual commitments can be relegated to the background. This generation has taken care to build the material infrastructure, but the social and moral euphoria generated by the freedom struggle has evaporated, and the task of
strengthening the moral fibre of the nation does not seem to be anywhere on its agenda.

However, there are honourable exceptions: Sewa Ram and Tridib. Sewa Ram, unlike the rest of his class, clings to his spiritual and religious priorities — leading a life of semi-renunciation. Tridib’s renunciation of the priorities of his class stand out: he is the intellectual in Said’s professional/intellectual dichotomy:

... the intellectual ... is neither a pacifier nor a consensus builder, but someone whose whole being is staked on a critical sense, a sense of being unwilling to accept easy formulas, or readymade clichés, or the smooth, ever-so-accommodating configurations of what the powerful or the conventional have to say... the intellectual [maintains] ... a state of constant alertness,... a perpetual willingness not to let half-truths or received ideas steer one along.

(Said 1994:17)

Tridib is engaged in a materially unproductive activity, he does not make money, he is perceived as lazy and self-indulgent, someone who has opted out of the rat-race — a pernicious influence, according to the more professional grandmother. On the other hand, his immense knowledge, vision and eidetic imagination open up a whole new world for the young narrator. He emerges as the quintessential intellectual that Said speaks of — the only one who can also ‘act’ in a moment of crisis, paying with his life for the empty, misguided idealism of the grandmother.
A Suitable Boy, Seth’s magnum opus, offers a wide range of the educated-professional groups. Even though, chronologically, limited to the happenings of two years, it telescopes class ideology and class conflicts over two generations and across a range of professions; it is also the only novel which, at least partially, attempts to cover the urban-rural divide of the nation. From the corridors of power in the capital, Brahmapur, it ventures into closeted villages like Debaria and Sagal; from metropolitan Calcutta it sweeps across the dusty bye-lanes of provincial small-towns like Rudhia; from the lush environs of Arun Mehra’s Benston and Pryce establishments it moves into the filth and stench of Jatav bastis, where animal skins are flayed and processed. What stands out in this depiction is the fact of the total separation of these dichotomous life-styles from each other; there is no interaction between these worlds. For each of these worlds the other is totally obliterated; they get related only through the interactions of Haresh who strides both the worlds with ease, and in the learning experiences of Maan, in whose case, as in the case of the politicians, the rural/poor classes exist as the other, the outsiders, the ‘people’ as masses.

Among the older generation, idealism and Nehruvian ideology reign supreme in the ruling classes – the MLA Mahesh Kapoor, his wife and the Nawab of Baiter. LN Aggarwal anticipates the more
‘professional’, utilitarian politician of the next few decades, and in his case, idealism is replaced by cynicism, secularism by communal, sectarian and largely self-serving interests. Aggarwal, and later on, the upstart Waris Khan are the transitory politicians – the kind which is set to take over from the Mahesh Kapoors. Nevertheless, they resemble the sorcerer that Marx and Engels speak of in the context of modern industry, ‘who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells’ (Marx and Engels 1992:8). The Mehras and the Chatterjees of both generations, live in their own exclusive world, betray the same privatised consciousness, more or less remain the protected classes, who are beyond the pale of societal, class conflicts.

But class tensions do come to the forefront, and sometimes simmer in the background, and are epitomised in the contrasting world views of Arun, the ‘Babu’ and Haresh, the aspiring ‘Coolie – Babu’. Arun is the Westernised Oriental Gentleman, the quintessential surrogate Englishman – who exults in his perceived and cultivated distance from the masses. Seth employs all the sarcasm and irony at his command to depict the sham and pretentiousness of his existence. He is lambasted for the abrogation of his heritage both on the personal and the social levels. His aspirations to mimic the ‘Englishman’ become the butt of ridicule and mockery:

I always believe, though, Mrs. Khandelwal, that one should go
to the tried and tested stores. And really, there still is nothing to compare with Hamley’s. Toys from top to bottom – nothing but toys on every floor. And its done up beautifully at Christmas. Its on Regent Street, not far from Jaegers.

(Seth 1993:933)

The masterstroke of irony is that Arun, who has never stepped on the shores of England, is boasting in the presence of the uncouth, common, but nevertheless, England-educated Haresh, - exposing the hollowness of his pretensions.

Seth damns him further by taking up for the ‘suitable’ boy, Haresh. Arun’s letter to Lata (Seth 1993:1292-1294), highlighting the unsuitability of Haresh as a match for her points to not only his own superficiality, but also reveals his lop-sided class snobbery. His objections to Haresh are straight out of the world of a Jane Austen novel and they have much the same effect: his ‘use of the English language leaves a great deal to be desired’, he is a foreman at a factory, he has taken up a trade rather than a profession, he lacks social graces, and he will not be able to send his children to the most sophisticated schools. These objections are not only an oblique indictment of Arun Mehra himself, but that of his whole class, and in varying degrees, are applicable to the likes of Dipankar, Amit, Meenakshi, Billy Irani, the Khandelwals...
2.2.1.3. The Third Generation: Midnight's Children

These are the midnight's children, who have grown up in the decades following the independence of India and they have been witness to the transition from the idealism of the earlier generation to the cynicism of the later ones. What is more to the point: they belong to the very generation of the writers themselves and in some cases – Rushdie-Saleem, Ghosh-the narrator, Chatterjee- Agastya, Seth-Amit – the overlapping of author-narrator-protagonist is all too obvious. The upward mobility of the characters continues in this generation: Arjun, in *A Fine Family* makes it to the top of the corporate ladder in the city of Bombay, the narrator in *The Shadow Lines* has completed his post-graduation from a prestigious college at Delhi and moved to London for higher studies, joining the international circuit of Ila and Robi; Raskaan and Satyavan in *Days of the Turban* have moved from the national to the international arena and widened their area of influence and operation, Raskaan, making it big in Germany. Moreover, this is the generation which has started questioning the priorities and values of their parents; like Balbir, who has received a university education, finds himself a misfit in his rural set-up:

He despised the village, its primitiveness, its slow pace, seeming lack of enterprise. He was annoyed even with the rudimentary nature of the facilities around him... why had they sent him to boarding school and university among the sons of industrialists and professionals if they intended him
to return and rot here? Of course, among the boys there had been the sons of zamindars and maharajahs and nawabs, but they were all being prepared for a bigger world than their land-owning fathers. Balbir felt land bound, land locked.

(Sharma 1986:8)

Perhaps this is inevitable in a community which views education as responsible for all the political and cultural ills of the state:

It was these educated men who ruined our peace and carved out Pakistan. They made Haryana and Punjab. Now, maybe they'll start riots in the cause of Khalistan. Is this education, is this culture that teaches men to misbehave with man?

(Sharma 1986:12)

At the end of the day, like Agastya Sen in *English, August*, Balbir is not all sure of the profession he would finally settle in; Sharma uses his predicament to point to the total irrelevance of the university system of education in the rural, agricultural, feudal set-up of the Punjab.

If *Days of the Turban* negates the value of education, *A Fine Family* valorises it as a stepping stone to success. However, Arjun, breaks off from the older mould of entering the intellectual professions of his father (engineer), his grandfather (lawyer), or his mother (college teacher), to tread into the comparatively insecure worlds of marketing and advertising, and to fight it out for himself in a strange metropolitan set-up, which, fortunately, rewards initiative and enterprise. It represents the
success story of a corporate manager, who by virtue of his ability to take
risks, can alter the rules of the marketplace. Their belief in the
empowering roles of industry and finance make them the precursors of
what goes under the name of post-Manmohanic liberalisation and
globalisation of the 1990s, which have been projected as a more viable
and dynamic alternative to the earlier socialist policies. They also become
indicators of the neo-colonisation brought in by a market economy.

The idealisation of these two icons is reinforced by the fact that
both of them project the values of honesty, sincerity, hard-work and self-
confidence: above all, the courage they display when they need to take a
stand on issues. So, Arjun marries Priti in spite of her transgression of
traditional gender codes, and during the Emergency, he is able to stand up
to authoritarianism and emerge a hero; Haresh's ability to move across
class boundaries is his greatest asset; and his confidence in the face of
sophistry and the pseudo-superiority of people like Arun earns him respect
and, ultimately, the hand of Lata. (They can both be regarded as the
Marxian 'socialist bourgeoisie', one who combines capitalist ideology
with social concerns.)

The darker side of the educated-professional class is typified by the
failure of the midnight's children, including Saleem Sinai and his counter-
part Shiva, both of whom, along with the other midnight's children, seem
to rupture the classes/masses divide. Saleem Sinai – the privileged child, with all the advantages of affluence (convent school, Methwold Estate, movies etc.), moves into genteel poverty, and after his various roles as assistant to the military rulers of Pakistan, sniffer in the Bangla Desh war, resident of the slums of Delhi during the Emergency, he finally settles down to the writing of his memories in the environs of Mary's pickle factory, which becomes the ideal setting for his own chutnification of history/biography/myth. The steady upward mobility of his alter-ego Shiva, on the other hand mirrors the passing of the reigns of power into the hands of the lumpen elements of society, very much like the rise of Waris Khan in A Suitable Boy. The final dislocation of Saleem from his position in the privilegentsia by Shiva becomes symptomatic of the displacement of the macaulayised Indian from the centres of power and the appropriation of these centres by the class of Shiva. As it is, most of the midnight's children are drawn from the lower classes. But the switch between the classes is never complete; it retains its fluidity and at the end of the novel, Saleem is the maligned, impotent, failed, ruptured, truncated, defaced persona, but he also becomes the author of the narratives, who speaks to the reader. Shiva continues to people the nation with his illegitimate progeny, (again obliterating the divide between the classes and the masses, since he infiltrates into the ranks of the elites, whose wives he
seduces), but the power of language, the ‘telling’ and the narrative empower the broken Saleem. The switching game, thus, goes on ad infinitum, and not only does Rushdie write back to the imperial centre in a language that he has masterfully appropriated, and even hybridised and revitalised; it is also Saleem Sinai who writes back to the destructive fury of Shiva, reinventing his fractured identities in the process. Though the midnight’s children come to a tame end, the midnight’s child, Saleem, ensconces himself in a position of authority because it is finally he who speaks; and not only speaks, but also speaks for, on behalf of. The babble of the midnight’s children converges into the narrative of Saleem Sinai, who having started off as one of the macaulayised Indians has merged with the identities of the teeming millions around him.

The further contamination of the already hybridised Indians is found extensively in Upamanyu Chatterjee’s English, August. The only ‘real’ surrogate Englishman here is Agastya and his friends in Delhi and Calcutta. The other power centres which have arisen, - the District Collector Shrivastava, the Police Commissioner Kumar, the entrepreneur Sathe are all drawn from more Indianised, local groups; they do not belong to the convent-educated class of Agastya, and their roots with their own smaller districts are stronger. Hence, they naturally become mediators between the government and the masses. In return, they enjoy
all the pre-requisites of power, - large government quarters, office attendants, who willingly and inevitably become also house-attendants for their wives; and the _mai-baap_ status, that was once the pejorative of the colonial masters is reinforced. In fact, this class savours and relishes its power: Mrs Shrivastava manages a secure college job in whichever district her husband happens to be transferred; she has obtained her educational degrees, too, due to the influence wielded by her husband, since he controls all institutions, including educational ones, in his jurisdiction as Collector of the district. The power exercised by Shrivastava is conscious and legitimate, even when it is unjust, since he derives it directly from the government of India, - that represents the nation/state.

The bureaucratic class, - the one drawn from the sub-elites, can be instrumental in bringing about social change. But Chatterjee’s indictment of it is severe. The immense power that it enjoys produces only bullies like Shrivastava or corrupt officers like Kumar. Instead of working towards social change, they become the custodians of the status quo, - the Collector himself has started off with a huge dowry at the time of his marriage – and they are satisfied by mere tokenisms, like the Peace March, instead of working towards real long-term solutions to the problems of their constituencies. Obviously, Sen is out of his depths in this world; and the only time he exerts himself as the SDO, to provide water for the tribal
village of Chinpanthi, it is an impulsive, sporadic attempt that cannot be replicated or worked out as a permanent policy. Immediate success—that at least on one occasion he has been able to provide water to the village— is further overshadowed by the fact that it has been achieved by sheer exercise of power and is not the result of any change that has been brought about in the system. The fact that at the end of the novel Agastya gives up this world speaks for his own alienation and the abdication of responsibility by the whole class to which he belongs. The alternative career that he has in mind is very revealing: he will probably join the world of advertising, in which the images of plenty will soon erase the realities of Jompanna.

2.2.2. Life-Styles

Life styles are reflections of ideology, class concerns and class background. The upper and middle classes analysed in the previous sections reveal their traditional conservatism, their alienation from the larger sections of the deprived, and the cocooned world in which they thrive, totally oblivious to the classes and issues that do not intrude upon their interests:

When he reached Bombay, Jai Singh could not decide whether he was waking from a nightmare or entering a dream. Inside imposing homes Indians and Englishmen alike
discussed how magnificent the Indian rulers would look when they paid public homage to Victoria in the Jubilee procession. Not once did they mention the famine.

(Mehta 1993:17)

The analysis of the life styles portrayed, therefore, may point to both the affluence of the class, almost showcasing its glory for the uninitiated, both the western reader as well as the local Indian lower classes for whom this world is a spectacle of pomp and undreamt of luxury.

2.2.2.1. Royalty and The Ruling Classes

The ruling classes are depicted in four of the novels discussed - Raj, The Great Indian Novel, Midnight's Children and A Suitable Boy. Since The Great Indian Novel concentrates almost exclusively on political issues, it does not dwell upon the life styles of the rich and the famous, apart from merely hinting at the grandeur and splendour of the class. In contrast, Raj showcases the life style of the royalty in minute detail in the proper tradition of Raj literature, recreating the world of the aristocracy, princely India at the time of the British rule; A Suitable Boy delineates the ruling elite in a democratic set-up, in which political power, ostensibly, derives from the masses. Midnight's Children, on the other hand, subverts all notions of royalty in its depiction of the military rulers of Pakistan; but whatever the stance adopted towards it - valorising,
critical, ironic or subversive – in all the four novels, luxury, pomp, show and ostentatiousness form an inevitable part of the world.

Raj often elaborates exotica at its richest, containing all the elements that would go into the ‘construction’ of the orient that Said speaks of – the elaborate palaces at Blamer and Sirpur, the hunting expeditions, the pageantry that marks public occasions, the decorated elephants, the dancing girls, the sparkling lights, the golden anklets, the royal canopy, the swords, the horses in all their festivity. Only one instance will suffice to illustrate this constructed world.

The Blamer dancing girls waited in the marriage courtyard with long necked rose water sprinklers in the shape of peacocks and swaying lotus blossoms and opium poppies. Thousands of clay lamps flickered in the courtyard lighting the falling coins and silver sprinklers, so that the moving crowds looked like bursts of fireworks as they milled towards the marriage pavilion, shrouded in its three curtains of scented flowers.

(Mehta 1993:170)

The visual impact of this splendour targets two types of audiences simultaneously: the west, undoubtedly; but also the “other” India for whom the charmed circle of the royalty always remained an object of awe and curiosity; the festivities in the royal palaces are, to some extent participatory (the ‘subjects’ of the monarch/king are expected to be a
witness to them) but the spectacle is dazzling enough to communicate to its viewers a complete picture of prosperity, plenty and well being.

**Raj** is also significant because it contradicts the stereotype of princely India as self-indulgent, weak and ineffectual and therefore, an easy prey for colonisation, as depicted in works like Premchand's *Shatranj Ke Khiladi*. The monarchy in both Sirpur and Balmer is largely benevolent and responsible towards its subjects, and actively resist the annexation of their kingdoms. Maharaja Jai Singh’s social commitment is revealed in his breaking of the age-old tradition and asking his Maharani to step out of purdah in order to help the subjects during the famine years. The royalty, which is the custodian of custom and tradition, which prescribes the secluded world of the zenana for its women, the royal code of conduct for its princes, can break the traditions it sets up and upholds, only in the interests of the people. Otherwise, everything in this world is pre-ordained, prescribed and ordered - right from modes of address, to rituals and ceremonies established for various occasions.

The world of the royalty is also caught up in the winds of westernisation, as Jaya learns after her marriage to Prince Pratap of Sirpur. It learns to balance the worlds of purdah and polo, henna and high-heeled sandals, traditional hospitality and European guests. The royal houses of both Sirpur and Balmer show their predilections to the world of opulence,
glamour, extra-marital affairs, concubines, travels abroad, jewellery and extravagant socialising.

Both *Midnight's Children* and *A Suitable Boy*, deal with the non-aristocratic ruling elites, the political class that has taken over from the British or the princely states in the two newly-independent nations of India and Pakistan. However, Seth views this class as more responsible, more accountable and more in touch with the common man, whereas Rushdie sees it as ultimately self-serving and alienated.

Though *A Suitable Boy* includes two elaborate marriages, it does not portray a very ostentatious life style of the ruling classes. The Kapoors do not live opulently and the usual litany of servants one expects is not found. LN Aggarwal, the MLA, lives in a one room flat and the Nawab of Baitar finds it increasingly difficult to maintain the large heritage of Baitar house. Their children, too do not have a luxurious inheritance. They all work as professionals and are fairly successful in their chosen professions on their own merit. Pran’s promotion at the university is not the result of the lobbying of his father. Even Maan tries his best not to use the influence of his father too often. On the other hand, it is the Raja of Marh and his son (representing decadent princely India) whose brashness and vegetating luxuriousness contrast with the sober life-style of the Kapoors and the Aggarwals. Democracy, it appears has this sobering effect; the
accountability that elections engender is viewed as partly responsible for this sobriety and maturity.

Rushdie depicts the ruling classes of Pakistan - the military rulers and a kind of darkness shrouds all their activities: the men are in uniform and the women in purdah. There are no obvious symbols of power or opulence – though the chaddar of Jamila Begum becomes more and more intricately embroidered and expensive; the unending meals at which the political manoeuvrings take place become a symbol for the decadence of this class, and the bedwetting of the general’s son becomes indicative of the hollowness of their pretensions thus obliterating the dividing lines between the classes. The sole representative of the British empire in *Midnight’s Children*, Methwold is also debunked; - his Methwold Estate has accumulated unusable stuff over the years pointing to the fruitless acquisitiveness of the mercantile class.

**2.2.2.2. The Educated-Professional Classes**

The most obvious characteristic of this class is its urban-centeredness, located as it is in the metropolitan centre of Lahore, Calcutta, Shimla, Bombay and London, or state capitols like Brahmpur. The sole exception is the provincial Madna, to which Agastya Sen feels banished in *English, August*, while upper-class Delhi, and the vast
gubernatorial mansion of his father remains a constant background contrast to it in his mind. Chaterjee dwells upon, at length, Sen's dissatisfaction with unhygienic meals, drinking water, the housing provided at Madna, and clearly Sen's inability to come to terms with these factors is largely responsible for his withdrawal from the services. The other IAS officers like Shrivastav luxuriate in palatial though unkempt government quarters and madam collector manages a 'memsahib' type of lifestyle with the help of the office peons of the collectorate - an obvious colonial hangover, which is further replicated in the protocol she enjoys and the unofficial authority she wields. Though no match for the palatial flat of Arjun in A Fine Family, or the Chatterjee residence in A Suitable Boy, or even Methwold Estate, the collector's house has more trappings than either of them of power and greater far-reaching influence.

The clear demarcation between the classes can be seen from the fact that all social interaction - parties, marriages, clubs, dinners - takes place strictly within class boundaries. The exclusive world of the elite Chatterjees in A Suitable Boy is replicated in the social world of A Fine Family, whether at Lahore or Shimla, and the London residences of the Prices in The Shadow Lines. Since socialising happens to be a main pre-occupation of this class, it is not surprising that most of the action in the novels takes place during social occasions. Thus, Lata, in A Suitable Boy,
meets Kabir for the first time at a bookshop and their romance is nurtured by college meetings and theatre practice; Haresh meets Kabir at a cricket match, most of the characters get to know each other at the Pran-Savita marriage; in *A Fine Family* both the Priti-Karan and Priti-Arjun relationships flourish in the parties they attend. Obviously, social life for this world is of supreme importance. Once more, it needs to be remembered that one of the severest indictments Arun makes of Haresh is that the latter lacks the social graces. This is the world for which glamour, fashion, dress, culinary habits, jewellery ‘proper’ use of the English language and social etiquette is all important. The degrees of westernisation of the upper-classes ranges from neo-English types like Agastya Sen and the Chatterjees to more Indian types like Bauji, Shrivastava, Saleem Sinai and the Kapoor family. In *Midnight’s Children*, the westernisation is only a thin superficial layer as in the case of the Sinais and the other residents of Methwold Estate.

A leisurely existence is also an important feature of this class-which, in fact, leads to its hectic social life. Though the older generations like that of Bauji and the grandmother have had to work very hard for their social and professional success, for the younger generations, there is no immediate compulsion to earn a living: this is typified especially in the cases of Dipankar and Amit - both of whom are expected to take up the
family business; but both of them have the time and the leisure to 'explore' other avenues- the spiritual quest and the poet's vocation respectively before they come to a decision. When the older Chatterjees and the Dutta-Chaudharies and the Arun Mehras have made it in their professions, -socialising, nevertheless, remains important for their future prospects, which depend on effective networking with the rich and the influential. Of course, on the other hand, certain professionals like Pran (university lecturer), Firoz (lawyer), Imtiaz (doctor), Arjun (corporate manager), Aadam Aziz (doctor), have little time for social etiquette and social graces. However, the class is not monolithic in its nature and it can, however uncomfortably, accommodate even a Haresh, who is as comfortable in a five-star hotel as at a tannery.

Interaction between the classes is severely limited. The Shadow Lines portrays just one visit of the family to the poorer relations and that, too, because the grandmother seeks information about her Jethomoshai; the lack of communication between the two worlds is palpable in the scene, which talks of this encounter. The narrator's father refuses to go into the ramshackled house of the poor relatives and even prevents his son from doing so:

Turning to me he said: stay here with me. I don't want you to go up there. There was a harsh, insistent note in his voice; I
know he was angry with himself for having brought me here.

(Ghosh 1997:131)

However, Ghosh does emphasise that though the gentility tries hard to ignore this world, it is, nevertheless, present as a permanent threat:

It was that landscape that lent the note of hysteria to my mother’s voice when she drilled me for my examinations; it was to those slopes she pointed when she told me that if I didn’t study hard I would end up over there, that the only weapon people like us had was our brains and if we didn’t use them like claws to cling what we’d got, that was where we’d end up, marooned in that landscape.

(Ghosh 1997:134)

Similarly, in A Suitable Boy, Haresh and Kedamath are the only two characters who can stride across the two worlds and even though Jagat Ram, the tannery worker, does attend the marriage of Haresh, it is an exception that proves the rule. The breaking down of class boundaries is almost as difficult as breaking down of caste boundaries. What unites the class as one unit, however, is its faith in social mobility through education.

2.2.2.3 The Zamindars

The feudal set-up of India is brought to the focus in the depiction of the lifestyles of the Zamindars, the traditional landowners, in A Suitable Boy and in Days of the Turban. In A Suitable Boy, the plight of the Zamindars and their dependent tenants is represented by the
struggles of the Nawab of Baitar, who has lost his major land holdings and
who finds it increasingly difficult to keep up the traditional life style of
luxury. Consequently, a major part of Baitar House is shut up, while the
Nawab struggles to retain hold on that part of it that is used; and his major
concern is the preservation of his library, which he considers to be his
most valuable heritage. No longer able to afford a huge array of servants,
with just a couple of loyal family retainers, the slide into genteel poverty,
however, is arrested by the fact that the children of the Nawab have been
educated in the professions and have joined the new professional classes.

In the villages, however, the zamindars continue to flourish because they
are able to misuse the loopholes in the Zamindar Abolition Bill to do
tenants out of their rights and hence their interests remain safeguarded.
The Nawab’s world is portrayed as one which is constantly under threat
and its only hope for survival is to move out of its exclusivity and join the
professional mainstream; otherwise it represents a world that is being
irrevocably marginalised.

In contrast, Days of the Turban glorifies the world of the
zamindar and Lok Raj and his clan are viewed as being in full control even
in the troubled political times of the 1980s - because the zamindars are
projected as being flexible and adaptive. Money flows in not only from the
land holdings, but also from those villagers who have prospered in the
west; like Raskaan; they bring in the latest gadgets and electronic goods, so that the rich farmers, steeped in tradition, enjoy all the benefits of technology, while retaining their feudal outlook. The importance of 'foreign money', Sharma amusingly points out is reflected in the very names of houses in the Punjab:


(Sharma 1986:49)

The extravagant life style cultivated by the ‘foreign returnees’ is further symbolised by the bathroom which Raskaan builds and which he refers to as ‘My Taj Mahal’:

It was a large bathroom, the size of a small hall... There were shelves for books and a row of containers for magazines. There were some articles of décor - not in the best taste admittedly, since Renate was not there to advise Raskaan - and potted plants and some amazing contrivances, the sole function of which was to surprise. In one corner was an esentorre with a chair that revealed itself to be a commode. Another corner was devised like a changing room in a tailor’s establishment, with mirrors that angled to display every fall and drape and trick of stitch. Another section was dominated by a dressing table laden with cosmetics and lit by a garland of bulbs like a film star’s make-up room.

(Sharma 1986:344).
The monstrosity that the bathroom is, it becomes a metaphor for the blind acquisitiveness and total lack of aesthetic refinement of this class. However, Sharma views it indulgently, - there is no hint of censure in this portrayal, - rather it is marked by good humour and a kind of comic admiration for the mindless extravagance. However, what stands out in *Days of the Turban* is Sharma’s total lack of a social consciousness in the portrayal; - the superficiality leaves class tensions out, while in *A Suitable Boy*, where Seth works out diligently the dominating structures that are part of the Nawab and his retainers and the village zamindars (Rasheed’s father) and small tenants (Kacheru) relationships. Class dynamics, which are central to *A Suitable Boy*, are conservatively viewed in *Days of the Turban*, in which social differences are viewed as essentialist and inevitable in a rural, agricultural, techno-savvy, prosperous, yet feudal set up, which is the norm against which the lower classes are shown their proper place.

2.3 The Lower Classes

A work is tied to ideology not so much by what it says as by what it says as by what it does not say. It is in the significant silences of the text, in its gaps and absences, that the presence of ideology can be most positively felt.

(Paul Macherry quoted in Eagleton 1992:34-35)
The near-silence and the absence of the lower classes in many of the novels of the 1980s reflects the dominant ideology of the elite classes, and may be regarded as the products of what Lucien Goldman refers to as the 'trans-individual mental structures' of this group. Of course, to point the necessity of a portrayal of the lower classes may be an affront to the freedom of the writer's choice of material; but when a complete social community/class is sidelined in the work of a rather more-or-less homogeneous group of novelists – post colonial, even postmodernist novelists - the absence becomes significant; and its 'marginalised' subject calls for scrutiny. For, it is true that with the exception of Midnight's Children, A Suitable Boy and English, August, the other novels do not venture into the backwaters of India either in the rural/provisional set up or even in the urban centres which breed poverty and economic degradation. The world of the novels remains pre-dominantly upper class with stray, marginal forays into the lower sections of society, whether rural or urban.

2.3.1. The 'Masses'

One doesn't come across a Bakha in any of these novels, with perhaps the single exception of Jagat Ram, the Jatav in A Suitable Boy. Otherwise, the lower classes/castes figure as 'masses' – an abstraction
whose concerns are viewed from the outsiders' standpoint rather than with any degree of involvement. The novelist remains a 'clinical observer' rather than become an 'active participant' (Eagleton 1976:31) in the depictions of the class struggles.

In Raj and A Suitable Boy, however, the authors show a degree of sensitivity to the deprived classes - especially in the portrayal of moments of crisis like the famine in Raj and the sufferings of the tenant-farmers in A Suitable Boy after the Land Reform Bill is passed. The Maharaja in Raj is aware of the plight of his subjects:

Lines of weary peasants stumbled beside the railway tracks leading to Bombay...Jai Singh stared at the devastation that had overtaken British India in the past year as frightened passengers told his ministers of the riots that had broken out when British officials had evacuated whole villages before setting every house on fire to prevent the spread of plague.

The railway stations were crowded with families fleeing the famine and disease in Bombay itself...

(Mehta 1993:12)

But, the poor always remain the ‘people’ out there, who like the Arabs in modernist French literature that Said points out, have no names and hence, no identity. Their ‘depersonalisation’ entitles them to ‘drown in an anonymous collectivity’ (Memmi 1990:147). In the stray case of a Parsini (the sweeper woman) or Jheera (the Afeemchi – the ‘opium addict’) in Days of the Turban, the names are typical/stereotyped, and the
characters themselves merely represent a class, which is useful to the elites because it falls in line with their wishes and remains obedient and subservient. Further, the focus is never on them: they are mere instruments of the upper class, which employs them.

Poverty, in both its urban and rural manifestations becomes a real presence in A Suitable Boy, even though its depiction remains at the explorative / visual level and does not concern itself with debates and issues; its presence, however, is recorded and established; in that sense, at least, it finds an acknowledgement in the otherwise exclusive world of the elites.

Urban poverty is explored in the leather trade to which Haresh and Kedarnath belong. The shoe makers strike at the Misri Mandi, where Kedarnath has his shop points to the perpetual state of conflict between the shoe manufacturers and the shoe traders and their fears that each is exploiting the other. Haresh’s visit to Jagat Ram provides Seth with the opportunity to portray this world of slime and deprivation: Ravidaspur is terribly unsanitary

with sluggish sewage trickling along and across the lanes. Picking their way between flea-ridden dogs, grunting filth splattered pigs and various unpleasant static objects, and crossing over an open sewer on a rickety wooden bridge, they found their way to Jagat Ram’s small, rectangular, windowless brick-and-mud workshop, at night after the
work was cleared away, this was where his six children slept...

(Seth 1993:203)

The life of Jagat Ram does not become an integral part of the novel and remains only as a symbolic reminder of the grim face of urban poverty.

There is some hope held out that enterprising persons like Haresh and Kedarnath might in the long run make some kinds of inroads into this world and even be instrumental in bringing some changes in it. Personal touches like the death of Jagat Ram’s daughter and the matter-of-fact acceptance of her death, and his uncomfortable presence at Haresh’s wedding help to bring alive the deprivation and social inequality to some extent, which would otherwise have remained an abstraction at the level of description only.

On the way to Ravidaspur, their encounter with the chamars, is also significant. First of all, Seth establishes the horror of the conditions in which they live and work:

The dirt paths stopped suddenly at a large open area surrounded by shacks and pork-marked by circular pits which had been dug into the ground and lined with hardened clay. A fearsome stench rose from the entire zone, Haresh felt sick; Kedarnath almost vomited with disgust. The sun shone harshly down, and the heat made the stench worse still. Some of the pits were filled with a white liquid, others with a brown tannie brew. Work scrawny men dressed only in lungis stood to one side of the pits, scrapping off fat and hair from a pile of hides. One of them stood in a pit and seemed to be wrestling with a large
hide. A pig was drinking at a ditch filled with stagnant black water. Two children with filthy matted hair were playing in the dust near the pits

(Seth 1993:201)

What is more significant, however, is that he goes on to portray a violent resentment of these workers with the traders and adverse government policies, - and marks the simmering discontent that pervades the ranks, the anger at the lack of government support, their utter neglect by the trading community and the pitting of their goods against cheap, imported ones (almost in anticipation of the policies of globalisation of the 1990s) which leads to their impoverishment:

He picked up a piece of rough, red-dyed leather from the ground and said, “This is better than cherry leather from Japan. Have you heard of Japan? I had a fight with them, and I made them fail. Patent leather from China? I can match them all. I am sixty years old and I have a full knowledge of all pastes, all masalas, all techniques.”

(Seth 1993:202)

It is these encounters which rupture the staid sense of well being and security of the elites. What Seth seems to be emphasising is that invisible though the masses may be, silenced as their voices may be, they are a reality which may burst into prominence anytime; and unaware as it may be, the upper class faces a constant threat which it would do well to
recognise. It is the realisation of this fact that makes Haresh the central positive icon in the novel.

Haresh succeeds where Rasheed fails, because Haresh has his finger on the pulse of both the worlds, while Rasheed is alienated from both. Perhaps Haresh's qualification, in a trade and skill score over Rasheed's confused intellectualism, which has taken him away from his roots. However, it is not only Rasheed’s sensitivity that is misplaced and the cause of his failure: he is up against a social system which actively punishes any attack on it: the social iniquities in the villages are more deeply embedded with greater social sanction. The landowners' class, represented by his father and grandfather – thrive on their oppression and the social obedience and deference that is expected from them, who have a vested interest in the inevitability and continuation of this system.

'We are tied to earth by such fine threads. And there is so much injustice - so much - it drives me mad. And if you think this village is bad, its because you don't know Sagal. There is a poor man there who - God forgive them - has been destroyed and left to die by his own family. And look at that old man and woman,' said Rasheed, pointing out a couple who were sitting outside their huts in rags, begging. ‘They have been turned out by their children, all of whom are doing tolerably well.’...

‘Whom do the children work for?’ asked Maan. ‘For us', said Rasheed. The great and the good of the village.' "Why don’t you tell them that this can’t go on?’ said Maan. ‘That they can’t treat their parents this way?’ Surely you can tell them that they must put their house in order if they want to work for you?" ‘Ah, now that is
a good question,' said Rasheed. But it is a question for my esteemed father and grandfather, not for me’, he added bitterly.

(Seth 1993:525)

The representative element predominant in the case of Jagat Ram and Kacheru in Seth, is also evident in the poverty-stricken Trotters of The Trotternama. The façade of upper-class-ness and the westernised life style of the Anglo-Indian community are not sufficient to cover its impoverished condition and its continuous slide into poverty. After the years of comparative prosperity, the slide begins sometime in 1919, when the preferential treatment accorded to them in government jobs is withdrawn; and from being almost the backbone of the Empire, they are reduced to being homeless wanderers, forced into small-time jobs or migration. In the case of The Trotternama, the sympathy of the author is with the community he so painstakingly depicts, and hence the poverty of the lower classes finds a voice. But here, too, the voice is that of a house - Sans Souci - fallen on bad days - the most influential members of the community who have slid down the social ladder. As such The Trotternama, too, remains top-heavy.

English, August, with its severe indictment of the administrative, bureaucratic class, does try to speak about the lesser mortals who people the streets of Madna, which is described as a dot on the map of India:
Vasant and his family, the unseen Tamse and his kitsch art, the lumpen elements who are invited by the police commissioner at the peace-keeping meetings, the tribals of Jompanna, and the hundreds of supplicants who throng the administrative offices. They represent what Nandy calls 'that other India which is neither pre-modern nor anti-modern but only non-modern' (Nandy 1992:74). The spotlight may not be on them, but they emerge as central to the narrative. When Agastya is posted as a BDO to Jompanna and Chinpanti, the 'other' India, the far-flung distant tribal settlements with its excruciating deprivedness comes alive as a real eye-opener. Maybe, the poor are still viewed as the 'other', or to use the unfortunately exclusivising terms coined by Gurucharan Das, PLTs, 'People like Them' as against the PLUs or 'People Like Us'; but the reality of the hinterland of urban India is focussed upon in English, August. It not only touches upon the poverty and half-baked development of provincial towns and what may be called the subaltern classes, it also draws attention to the dismissal of the representatives of these classes by the bossism rampant in government offices. Though Chatterjee does not touch the depths of these concerns in the manner of a Mahashweta Devi in 'Shishu', he, at least, ventures into a world largely unexplored by other writers. What Agastya does in the novel is typical of his class - he tries to shut out the vision of Madna, by opting out. The experiences he has had—
the water situation at Jompanna, the tribal violence which leads to the cutting off of the arms of the ironically named government official, Mohandas Gandhi, and the ineffectualness of the government machinery in handling these large-scale problems. Could have drawn him into the concerns of the marginalised India. Sen epitomises, thus, the failure of the elites and intellectuals of India in coming to grips with its realities, and critiques their total abdication of responsibility.

Like *A Suitable Boy* and *English, August, Midnight’s Children* emphasises the fact that however cocooned and sheltered the upper sections of society may feel, whatever the physical and social distance that separates them from the masses, the lower classes are never far from even exclusive establishments like Methwald Estate. In fact, in *Midnight’s Children*, Rushdie blurs the distinction between the classes by the exchange of Shiva and Saleem, by ‘placing’ servants Mary and Joseph in such insidious proximity with their masters. In fact, Mary as one of the mother-figures and the owner of the pickle factory that nurtures and sustains Saleem, functions very much as the *dieu ex machina* both plotwise and thematically. The Zhuggis and Zhopdis that dot the rich metropolitan centres are never really far from them: Lifafa Das leads Amina Sinai to Ramram Seth, whose prophecy about Saleem is the
unfolding of the novel. During the Emergency, Saleem becomes a resident of the slums himself and observes at close quarters the on-going mass sterilisation campaigns. Nadir Khan and Joseph, embedded in the consciousness of Amina and Mary respectively, are a constant reminder of the disruption and displacement of the class structure in the higher echelons of society, as are the number of bastards sired by Shiva in his contact with the upper class women he seduces.

The centrality of the lower classes in the Indian ethos is reinforced by the fact that many of the midnight’s children come from the economically depressed classes: Shiva, Parvati-the-witch, children of dhobis, conjurers, Picture Singh, and that Saleem himself joins their ranks.

2.3.2 The ‘Outsider’ View

The elites (read novelists in this case), therefore, do often manage to speak ‘for’ the lower classes and the question that can be posed at this point is: Is the representation of the lower classes as effective as the indictment of the upper classes?

The lower classes, too, do not form a monolithic unit; they are the rural poor represented by Kacheru and his ilk by Seth, the urban tannery workers like Jagat Ram, and ‘orientalised professionals’ like Lifafa Das, Ramram Seth, the magicians, the witches, the snake-charmers etc., the
urban servants like Mary in *Midnight's Children*, the low-down government officials and the tribals in *English, August*, the impoverished Anglo-Indians in *The Trotternama*, the subjects in *Raj*. Obviously, they do not all qualify to be called subalterns, unless we take the definition of the term in its broadest sense. Yet, the question posed by Gayatri Spivak's 'Can the subaltern speak?' becomes relevant in this context.

'They' or the 'PLTs', are spoken about and spoken for by a string of narrators: Saleem Sinai, Haresh, Rasheed, Agastya; and more often than not, their own intellectual make-up and ideology impinges upon the portrayal. That is why Rasheed is unable to foresee how Kacheru will be coerced into signing away his land and even lose his status as the tenant when he aspires to get him ownership of the land he has cultivated for years. Similarly, Haresh and Agastya are unable to present any permanent solution to the problems of the Jatavs or the tribals they speak for. They perhaps represent what Spivak refers to as that part of the Indian elite who are 'at best native informants for first-world intellectuals interested in the voice of the other' (Ashcroft 1995:26), once again, raising the question of the readership of these expositions.

One aspect of the author's/narrator's speaking for and speaking about the subaltern classes is the employment of the descriptive and the visual as against the dramatic in their depiction. While Seth can find a
distinguishable, identifiable voice for the Chatterjees and the Mehras, or
Upamanyu Chatterjee can find one for Shrivastava, who belongs to a
dominant indigenous group at the regional or local level, Kacheru and the
tribals are not given such identifiable voices. The Indian-English
employed in the case of Shrivastava or Makhijani, the poet in A Suitable
Boy, is not ripe yet for the subalterns to appropriate for themselves. This is
because this English is again more suited to the urban temperament, with
at least a degree of westernisation in it. Thus,

'It was my own foolish pride and vanity, Saleem baba,
from which cause I did run from you, altho' the job here is
good, and you so much needing a looker-after! But in a short
time only, I was dying to return. 'So when I thought, how to
go back to this man who will not love me and only does some
foolish writery?

(Rushdie1982:231)

Rushdie, too, with all his innovations with the English language can
penetrate the minds of the masses only to the extent to which Saleem can
view the minds of the midnights' children - only upto a certain point, and
no further.

On the other hand, The Trottermama presents the 'insider' view,
because the Anglo-Indians it depicts are not the usual subalterns Guha
speaks of; in fact, whether they can be called subalterns at all is open to
debate. Their parentage and basic education has given them a language in
which to voice their concerns. Their documentation is intense - right from the diaries of Mik, the ‘history’ of the Great Trotter, the essays written by Theobald Montague-Trotter, the letters between Pearl and Ruby, the miniatures and paintings, the poetry of Henry Fonseca, the representations to England lead by Jacob Kahn-Trotter, the speeches in Parliament by Marvis - all hold the key to both communication and transport. Their mastery of the colonial language ensures a hegemonic role for them, but only as long as the imperial government supports them economically. The fact that language is unable to save them from penury gives the lie to the notion that a mere knowledge of the language of power can ensure prosperity. Their disintegration and scattering, voiced by the insider himself/herself is viewed by Sealy (again an insider) as being due to the fact that the community does not succeed in establishing links with the rest of India. When power shifts from the dominant foreign elites to the indigenous elites, this community finds itself marginalized. Still, The Trotternama does emerge as the only novel, which speaks in the voice of the community and class it represents. Perhaps this is so because the language they speak – English - enables them to build bridges between themselves and the colonial power-centre.
2.3.3. Social Mobility /Interaction

The perception of the ‘other’ classes as mere ‘masses’ and the outsider’s view of them ensures that there appears to be a water-tight compartmentalisation between the two vertically split sections of society, with no real interaction between them and no real attempt to bring about a material integration between them. The ‘subjects’ of Raj remain subjects, their ‘welfare’ is spoken about in terms of the relief that is to be provided for them in times of crisis; the Jatavs of A Suitable Boy remain the deprived sections, and the silences that surround them in the novels reflect the silences of the actual social and political ethos of the nation regarding them. As in government policies, and as evidenced by the flood of relief operations for the 2001-quake-affected in Gujarat, where it was the middle and upper middle classes who had faced nature’s fury as against the comparative indifference to the victims of floods and droughts in Orissa, where the majority of the affected population lives below the poverty line, the novels too indicate that the concern of the upper classes for the lower classes is peripheral and in only in so far as the realities of the other India impinge upon their own interests. Thus, the failure of the Land Reform Bills in A Suitable Boy prove that even when progressive legislation is enacted, it misfires if it does not suit the interests of the privileged. Agastya Sen acts, on impulse, when he actually ‘sees’ the plight of the
tribals: but his reaction is momentary and due to a sudden onrush of philanthropy; nowhere does one see a realisation that as an IAS officer it is his duty and the duty of the whole administrative machinery to work out long-term and lasting solutions to the problems of the tribals.

Linked with the indifference of the classes to the masses is the near-impossibility of social mobility for the 'others'. Shashi Tharoor in 'Scheduled Castes, Unscheduled Change' (Tharoor 1997:79-111) narrates the upward mobility of a lower caste boy Charlis, who by dint of hard work, enterprise and the favourable government policies of reservations, succeeds in breaking through the shackles of caste and class to become the Collector of a district in Kerala. He highlights the fact that the story of Charlis is the story of 'change, democratic change, the kind that India has sought to promote for fifty years since independence' (ibidem:103). In our novels, however, this kind of social mobility takes place only among the already privileged sections. A Haresh or Rasheed can succeed, because they already belong to groups and communities which are already high up in the social scale and who have received the benefits of education, since education is considered a valuable asset in these groups. But, no such mobility appears possible for the Jatavs, the landless labourers like Kacheru, the slum dwellers in *Midnight's Children*, the subject-classes in *Raj* or the tribals in *English, August*; even petty government officials like
Tamse and servants attached to government officials like Vasant do not appear poised for any rise in their social status. A Suitable Boy does point that one single individual like Rasheed cannot tackle such a massive problem, - for it is not the problem of a single Kacheru. These are concerns on the group level (community, caste, class etc), and as such need to be tackled on a larger social scale. Otherwise, individual reformers like Rasheed have no option but suicide and Agastya has no option but to quit the system.

2.4 The Summing Up

Therefore, the class-bias in the novels, though obvious, does not totally erase the lower classes or the deprived sections; on the other hand, it reveals the indifference the affluent sections of society feel towards them. It is not necessarily the indifference of the English-educated elites only, but even the sub-elites (like Waris Khan and Maan in A Suitable Boy) and intellectuals (like Agastya Sen in English, August, Pran in A Suitable Boy and Karan in A Fine Family) who form the link between the rulers and the masses. Further, the failure of the upper classes to provide intellectual, moral or social leadership is highlighted because of their overall concern about their own security and the satisfaction that they find in their limited role as educated professionals, without an acceptance.
of social accountability or responsibility. Moreover, even when the lower classes do find space in these urban-centered, middle-and-upper-class, and upper caste narrations, they 'bring[s] to bear on the backward marginal place a sensibility and perspectives that derive from the big city' (Khair 2001:335)

However, classes - upper as well as lower - cannot be viewed as monolithic, fixed structures and in isolation: they do have their own pan-Indian concerns, but these concerns are mediated by other structures of civil society like family and community. In fact, family, community, caste and class interact upon one another in a dynamic relationship. Often the boundaries between caste and class are blurred and overlapping. In the Indian context, moreover, it is often believed that concerns of family, community and caste take precedence over class concerns. The following chapters will try to explore these dynamics and contextualise class concerns within the parameters of family, community and caste.