

**BACK/SIDE ENTRY:
QUEER/POSTCOLONIAL REPRESENTATIONS
OF SOUTH ASIA**

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Abstract

Back/Side Entry: Queer/Postcolonial Representations of

South Asia

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Back/Side Entry examines contemporary queer fiction in English from South Asia and its diasporas. It underscores the critical significance of a double-pronged theoretical approach by combining insights from queer and postcolonial scholarship. Building upon recent research that re-maps queer discourses through an encounter with postcolonial theory and narratives, this thesis argues that South Asian queer fiction disputes the Western bias in queer paradigms, and challenges the elision of sexual and gender non-normativity in postcolonial studies in order to make both queer and postcolonial sites truly transformational. It interrupts routine practices of absorption and gradual obliteration of non-Western/non-White subjects in standard accounts of queerness and concurrently locates queer self-representation from postcolonial/diasporic South Asian writers as central to a discussion of the larger conceptual debates in queer theory. Queer narratives from South Asia and its diasporas emphasise the significance of postcolonial, diasporic, ethnic, racial, religious, class, caste and linguistic formations in addressing questions related to the representation of alternative genders and sexualities. Through a close reading of novels by Hanif Kureishi, Leslie de Noronha, P. Parivaraj, Shyam Selvadurai, Ghalib Shiraz Dhalla and R. Raj Rao, this thesis analyses South Asian queer formulations, which simultaneously continue and contest Western models of queer identity. The focus on unconventional arrangements of gender and sexuality in the postcolonial site of South Asia repositions the field of queer studies towards non-Euro-American contexts and legitimates the status of “queer” as a pluralistic critical formation. This thesis extends the transnational/trans-disciplinarian academic framework that registers a rising discontent with Western models of global queerness and contributes to the growing presence of non-white, non-Western and Third World voices in queer studies. Adding to newly emergent discussions of queer subjectivity in South Asia, it offers an original contribution to the field through a thorough investigation of current South Asian queer fiction.

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Introduction

In the provocative video rendition of the song “Kamasutra” from the album *Festival* (2002-03), the renowned Italian sister duo Paola and Chiara engage in a highly sexualised performance of female same-sex desire. Inscribed in the contemporary trend of lesbian hypervisibility for male spectatorship, which global artists such as Madonna, Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera have popularised in recent years, Paola and Chiara’s act extends the visual limits of lesbian sexual pleasure by incorporating scenes of explicit sadomasochism with glossy PVC strap-on and other leather outfits. The cascade of images that accompanies the rhythmic and ecstatic incantation of “Kamasutra” creates the impression of an unproblematic, harmonious emancipation of queer female sexuality. Throughout the song, heterosexual desire appears restricted as its representation remains confined to the television screen that the sisters watch intermittently. It seems as if heterosexuality relates to a distant past and inevitably functions as a sign of faded memory. Where bright spotlights enhance the sensual quality of the *corps à corps* between the sisters, etiolated images of male-female lovemaking serve to displace heterosexual desire as the master signifier. For a brief instant, an almost inaudible sound of Punjabi women singing a traditional folk song “Kaleyan Baghan di Mehendi” (“The Henna of Dark Gardens”) interrupts the Italian-language song. As the Punjabi voices merge with the Italian rhythms, the verbal cadences replicate the visual contrast between same-sex and heterosexual desire. Like heterosexuality in the visual arrangement, the remote voices of the Punjabi women exist as a mnemonic as well as partial presence in the overall vocal composition of Paola and Chiara. The final audio sequence literally effaces the sharp and irregular Punjabi beats, and the sisters end the song in soft tones.

The song aptly attests to the international circulation of artistic and cultural practices that is manifest in Paola and Chiara's reference to the classical Indian text of *Kama Sutra* and the Punjabi song. As a paradigmatic moment of Western cultural theft of Third World art, the song follows the routine trajectory of what Gayatri Gopinath terms "the standard circuits of commodification and appropriation" (*Impossible Desires* 29). The performance offers an insight into how global modes of consumption underpin questions of queer identity whereby exoticism in the form of South Asian culture can become readily available for the articulation of the Western queer subject even whilst the sisters play at being lesbian and do not indeed offer a positive perception of queerness. By absorbing the literary and cultural forms of expression from other geographical locations, Western queer subjectivity simultaneously defines itself in opposition to a non-Western Other and opens up mainstream spaces to cross-cultural influences. However, it embodies the exotic otherness of South Asia in a tangential and subordinate relation to Western queer sexuality as the exclusive focus on the sexualised bond between the sisters resists any sustained representation of the South Asian elements. Queer sexuality, framed within the dominant Western cultural specificity of "fusion" between the East and the West, elides and occludes alternative spaces of cultural expression when such spaces encounter their Western counterparts. In other words, the centrality of the incestuous relation between Paola and Chiara inevitably marginalises and results in the erasure of non-Western cultural spaces that the song invoked in the first place.

Interestingly, both citations of South Asian culture in the song "Kamasutra" are dependent upon diasporic rearticulations of the nation. The US-based Indian filmmaker Mira Nair directed *Kama Sutra: A Love Story* (1996), and the Punjabi song features in her internationally acclaimed film *Monsoon Wedding* (2001). Paola and Chiara's

references thus borrow from diasporic translations of South Asian culture, and make evident the transnational trajectory of cultural and literary representations. The incorporation of exotic themes in fact illustrates how Third World cultural practices systematically require diasporic revision and adaptation in order to become intelligible in the West.¹ Furthermore, the direct reliance on diasporic frameworks to (re)present post-colonial national cultures regulates the movement of non-Western cultural products. Extending the paradigm of capitalist regulation of goods, I suggest that South Asian cultural products necessitate the process of validation through the diasporas prior to their entry as global commodities. By opting for Nair's version of Indian culture, the sisters control and command the access of Third World cultural practices in First World markets.

Paola and Chiara's allusions to South Asia demand additional scrutiny as they obliterate complex histories of South Asian queer sexuality. Vatsyayana's text *Kama Sutra* (fourth century C.E.) has gained popularity in the West, as Michael J. Sweet notes, for "its treatment of sex in its more mechanical aspects, although that only forms a part of its subject matter" (77).² It also offers an examination of non-normative sexuality such that "the proponents of a gay liberation ideology ... have sometimes refashioned this text according to their own wishes" (Sweet 77). Even though the reference to the ancient text *Kama Sutra* is a coded acknowledgement of its queer aspect within the thematic specificity of the song, it explicitly functions as a complement to the performance of the sisters. On the other hand, Punjabi folk songs with all-female voices, often known as "ladies *sangeet*" (music), conventionally feature in

1. For an insightful assessment of *Monsoon Wedding* as a diasporic product that, in several ways, explains Indian culture to the world, see Gopinath, *Impossible Desires* 114-26: "Nair functions as native informant and tour guide who traffics in the production of "authenticity" for the global marketplace" (115).

2. Ruth Vanita enumerates the same-sex practices that appear in the ancient text. See "Vatsyayana's Kamasutra" (46-53).

wedding rituals and celebrations in North India and Pakistan. Culturally, they are markers of female homosocial spaces and often involve overtly sexual lyrics and homoerotic performances. In her critical evaluation of Nair's diasporic refashioning of female folk songs, Gopinath suggests that she replaces the "queer potential" of the female homosocial place by "straight female bonding" in *Monsoon Wedding (Impossible Desires* 120). Similarly, in referencing the Punjabi song, Paola and Chiara evidently point to the space of queer female pleasure that it occupies. However, the gradual absorption and elision of the song "*Kaleyan Baghan di Mehendi*" forecloses the possibility of South Asian queer female pleasure even while it evokes it. The South Asian voices are conveniently absorbed and occluded in the Italian setting. Yet, the silencing of the non-Western subject is in effect the erasure of female homoeroticism with its enduring legacy of homosocial history in South Asia, especially since the sisters fashionably appropriate queerness. Therefore, the song establishes queerness as a Western construction in which queer elements from the Third World can only become visible when they serve to augment, highlight and complement Western queerness.

The inclusion and ultimate suppression of the Punjabi song in the sisters' purported queer performance depends on a particular interpretation of Indian culture in terms of temporal stereotypes. The fading voices of the Punjabi women invariably recall the visual sequence of heterosexuality as anterior to the lesbian act. Like the almost invisible images of heterosexuality, the gradual disappearance of the Punjabi song locates it in a binary relation to the Italian song. In a way, it becomes the past, the earlier template of the modern "Kamasutra" of the West. North Indian queer folk culture, which "*Kaleyan Baghan di Mehendi*" references, appears as a former, almost ancient version of the politically mature queer presentation by the duo. Clearly, in this context, South Asian queer configurations are subjugated in conventional Western

narratives of modernity whereby constructions of “Third World” sexualities as anterior, pre-modern, and in need of Western political development ... are recirculated by contemporary gay and lesbian transnational politics” (Gopinath, *Impossible Desires* 12). Within heteronormative frameworks, the category of modernity is mobilised in an attempt to depict the West as progressive and (temporally) advanced. For instance, in her recent study of queer nationalism, Jasbir Puar argues that “even as patriotism immediately after September 11 was inextricably tied to a reinvigoration of heterosexual norms for Americans, progressive sexuality was championed as a hallmark of U.S. modernity” (41). Puar’s analysis points to geo-political strategies of temporal distinction between the West and its others that are regularly used as justification of international intervention and aggrandisement in which queer sexualities are co-opted. However, by investigating the vast array of queer experience from postcolonial South Asia, my thesis contests the logic of Western discourses of progress and development, which posit Western formations as central to articulations of modernity.³ My focus on literary representations from contemporary South Asia is particularly critical of the traditional assumptions about the modernity of the West—assumptions that foreclose any engagement with the complex colonial and postcolonial queer histories of South Asia.

The elision of South Asian homoeroticism in the pastiche of queer identity resonates with the routine process of commodification of Third World items in a First World context, a process that neither acknowledges nor disputes the global hegemony of the West. Paola and Chiara’s song proffers a critical point of reference in engaging with the multiple issues and problems that constitute the subject of this research project. My thesis makes evident the regular, matter-of-fact silencing and marginalisation of

3. In the domain of global politics and history, Amartya Sen disputes both the assumption that modernity is a Western specificity and that it is a Western import in Asian societies. See *Development as Freedom*, especially 146-59.

non-Western practices when considered in relation to their occidental counterparts. It seeks to interrupt such practices of absorption and gradual obliteration of non-Western/non-White subjects in dominant Western representations that, like the Italian song, subsume local specificity in global products. Unlike Paola and Chiara's ultimate suppression of elements from the Third World, I underscore the significance of post-colonial, diasporic, ethnic, racial, religious, class, caste and linguistic formations in addressing questions related to the representation of alternative genders and sexualities in contemporary queer fiction in English by South Asian male authors. The texts that I examine in this thesis locate postcolonial literary productions of Shyam Selvadurai, P. Parivaraj, Hanif Kureishi, Ghalib Shiraz Dhalla, R. Raj Rao and Leslie de Noronha as critical sites of a formulation of queer politics in local contexts. It is only through the careful consideration of "other" queer subcultural forms, which are firmly rooted in Third World narratives, that queer boundaries, both theoretical and geographical, can extend beyond hegemonic Western discourses. Therefore, I ask what alternative meanings emerge when racial, cultural and national matrices are made to bear upon queer epistemology? Building upon recent research that re-maps queer discourses through an encounter with postcolonial theory and narratives, this thesis argues that South Asian queer fiction disputes the Western bias in queer paradigms, and challenges the elision of sexual and gender non-normativity in postcolonial studies in order to make both queer and postcolonial sites truly transformational.

Reading queer self-representation from postcolonial/diasporic South Asian writers as central to a discussion of the larger queer paradigm enables queer scholarship to elaborate its scope and contest the North American and Eurocentric partiality of the Western academy. Judith Butler rightly denounces the evolution of queer studies in terms of absence of the racial other. According to her, queer research marks a "pre-

dominantly white movement that has not fully addressed the way in which “queer” plays—or fails to play—within non-white communities” (*Bodies* 228). Butler’s comment makes evident the pertinence of expanding queer parameters to non-Western/non-White cultures such that “queer” becomes a more inclusive term rather than an exclusive and exclusionary framework. For instance, following Gloria Anzaldúa’s critique of the “homogenising” impulse of queer theory, E. Patrick Johnson rearticulates the queer theoretical framework to foreground “the ways in which lesbians, bisexuals, gays, and transgendered people of color come to sexual and racial knowledge” (Anzaldúa 250; Johnson 3).

Similarly, Eve K. Sedgwick notes the crucial development in queer theory whereby, intellectuals and activists of colour “are using the leverage of ‘queer’ to do a new kind of justice to the fractal intricacies of language, skin, migration, state” (*Tendencies* 9). As I explain in detail in Chapters 3 and 4, these numerous “fractal intricacies” become critical sites of articulation and negotiation of queer subjectivity in various South Asian contexts. Clearly, queer representations that I consider in this thesis mark a simultaneous impulse to continue and contest Western models of queer identity. The reading of alternative arrangements of gender and sexuality in the postcolonial site of South Asia repositions the field of queer studies towards non-Euro-American contexts and legitimates the status of “queer” as a pluralistic critical formation. Extending queer/postcolonial research initiated by John Hawley, Ruth Vanita, Gayatri Gopinath, Jasbir Puar among others, my work highlights the urgency of queering postcolonial cultural practices so that queer politics remains inclusive of non-normative identities across disparate geographical locations. *Back/Side Entry* explores the interconnections between same-sex desire and the Third World, between postcolonial and diasporic signifiers in recent queer literature from South Asia and its diasporas.

The disruption of the East/West hierarchy enacted in this research hinges on questions of definitions. Following Michel Foucault's formulation of the category of the "homosexual" as a "species," David Halperin suggests that "homosexuality and heterosexuality, as we currently understand them, are, modern, Western, bourgeois productions" (Foucault 43; Halperin, *Hundred Years* 8). However, my project defies the Eurocentric assumption that "homosexuality" is a Western concept. Instead, my research focuses on the geographical location that is traditionally associated with repression of all forms of sexuality. It extends the informative archive that Indian queer historians Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai excavate in their groundbreaking volume *Same-Sex Love in India* (2000), and that Vanita continues in the anthology *Queering India* (2002).

Like Vanita, I underscore the immediacy of interrogating the "tendency of queer theorists to avoid using terms like *homosexual* to refer to persons or relationships in earlier periods of Euro-American history or in places other than the first world today" (emphasis in original; *Queering India* 1). My work contributes to the growing presence of non-white, non-Western and Third World voices in queer studies. In relation to India, this body of literature includes Suparna Bhaskaran's analysis of queer representation in media and press in *Made in India* (2004), Vanita's work on same-sex marriage in *Love's Rite* (2005) and, Arvind Narrain and Gautam Bhan's path-breaking collection of queer activism in India, *Because I have a Voice* (2005). In terms of South Asian diasporas, Gopinath's influential reading of queer diasporic framework in *Impossible Desires* (2005) and Puar's critique of American queer nationalism in *Terrorist Assemblages* (2007) offer nuanced understanding of the imbrication of queerness in transnational processes of movement. Although rooted in disparate disciplinary locations, this emergent field of South Asian queer scholarship marks a rising discontent with Western

models of global queerness where questions of class, caste, language, religion and other South Asian specificities remain relatively unaddressed. My research attends to such theoretical critiques of, what Puar aptly calls, “new normativities in these queer times” (xiii). It adds to the debates about queerness in South Asia and offers an original contribution in its detailed examination of contemporary South Asian queer fiction.

My primary concern is to develop the span of queer studies by enabling a dialogue between queer and postcolonial analyses, which productively decentres Euro-American paradigms of queerness. The project simultaneously reassesses entrenched narratives of Western dominance and points to re-articulations and re-productions of Western models of queer subjectivity in a South Asian context. The questions that have impelled my research include the following: What is the relevance of studying queer and postcolonial theories in parallel? Given the myriad discursive strategies of resisting master narratives, what are the shared concerns of these two areas of inquiry? In what ways are queer and postcolonial perspectives transformed by their intersection? How can a queer reading of South Asia expand the scope of queer theory such that it incorporates non-White and Third World contexts, and addresses the elision of non-heterosexual sexualities in postcolonial scholarship? And most significantly, given the Western origin of queer studies, how can a formulation of South Asian queerness (albeit not singular) challenge Euro-American queer discourses, if at all, without reproducing them? The import of the last question is largely suggested by recent developments in queer activism in parts of South Asia, following the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in India and Nepal in 2009. Rather than proposing a distinct or singular response, I seek to highlight the diverse interrogations that arise when queer and postcolonial sites converge. Reflective of an ongoing and constant re-evaluation of queer

theoretical boundaries, this dissertation repositions queer paradigms in postcolonial and diasporic contexts.

SOUTH ASIA: (CON)TEXTS AND CONTESTS

The British Association for South Asian Studies (BASAS) defines “South Asia” as the geographical region that comprises the eight neighbouring countries of the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC), namely, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka (basas.org.uk). Constituting several differentiated populations in terms of linguistic, ethnic, religious and communal identifications, South Asians often share common legacies of colonialism and cultural signifiers. In the Western imaginary, the region is synonymous with uneven economic development that is the outcome of the disorganising forces of tradition and modernity. The enduring class, caste (a very specific South Asian issue), religious and ethnic rifts further fuel the tensions that the area embodies. Contemporary Hindu-Muslim opposition in India, especially in Indian Kashmir, the Tamil-Sinhala ongoing discord in Sri Lanka, the Maoist-guerrilla control in Nepal and the regular bomb scares in Pakistan or Bangladesh are some telling instances of South Asian postcolonial failures. The current US-led invasion of Afghanistan inevitably adds to narratives of instability in the region. Further, within the frames of postcolonial theory, South Asia exemplifies an “institutional paradigm” – a privileged signifier of postcolonial representation (Goldie 17-18, 18). However, as mentioned above, queer readings of South Asian texts, cinema and cultural output have only begun to appear in the new millennium. My thesis pays specific attention to these gaps and contributes to the growing field of queer South Asian studies.

Within scholarship concerned with South Asia, certain discourses tend to represent India as the over-arching political and economic signifier of the region such that it subsumes cultures and nations (like Nepal or Bhutan, for instance) under a common rubric of the Indian subcontinent. In such narratives, South Asia typically becomes a shorthand description for India. *Back/Side Entry* resists the prevalent metaphoric domination of India in South Asian contexts by incorporating discussions about diasporic writers of Pakistani and Sri Lankan origin like Hanif Kureishi and Shyam Selvadurai. Given the contemporary focus on India's neo-liberal economy as an exemplar of the positive consequences of globalisation, authorised versions of geo-political economy invariably reinforce the centrality of India in South Asia. However, my thesis deflects attention from India in order to include multiple queer voices that emerge from elsewhere in South Asia and beyond such as the analysis of queer diasporic subjectivity in the debut novel of the Kenyan/Asian/American writer Ghalib Shiraz Dhalla in Chapter 3. However, like all terms, "South Asia" is an arbitrary construct that covers a loose description of the geographical origins of the authors analysed here. Yet, the use of "South Asia" in my subtitle does not succumb to a fashionable element of academic marketability nor does it imply a mere tokenism by including texts from places other than India. Rather, it reflects a concerted effort to find common and even contradictory parameters of queerness in South Asia and its diasporas.

Breaking the mould of strict geographical boundaries allows a careful understanding of transnational representations that move beyond the confines of a fixed location. It facilitates an inclusive methodological approach to explore the intertextual pertinence of seemingly disparate authors such as the Goan Indian novelist Leslie de Noronha or the canonical British Pakistani writer Hanif Kureishi. In addition, the extension of national frontiers to embrace diasporic productions produces an enabling

expression – one that can function to challenge the nationalist inclination. In the first and the last Chapters, I demonstrate the usefulness of the comparison between South Asian diasporic texts and non-diasporic novels. Such parallel readings defeat the nationalist legitimization of the nation as an authentic category. For instance, in his assessment of Indian writing in English Vinay Dharwadker is critical of diasporic re-exoticisation of India through its tendency of “swerving away from the realities of the subcontinent” and enacting a “postcolonial revenge” from the West (258-59). I would suggest that Dharwadker’s reading considers the diaspora in an inauthentic relation to the nation and such readings risk essentialising India and Indianness that postcolonial scholarship attempts to implode. In similar regard, in Chapter 3, I investigate the concept of cultural diaspora as opposed to geographical diaspora in order to propose an alternative to the conventional relation to homelands.

In the Western imaginary, South Asia typically embodies both a threat (Islamic homophobia) and the Orientalist promise of sexual liberation (*Kamasutra*, sexual tourism in Sri Lanka and India). *Back/Side Entry* works contrary to such popular conceptions of the East by suggesting that the rich cultural heritage of same-sex eroticism that South Asian historians excavate produces instances of alternative sexual and gender configurations, which are neither more liberatory nor more repressive than elsewhere. In this respect, I concur with Vanita and Kidwai’s argument that Indian “society rarely provided institutions that allowed it [non-normative union] to be chosen and lived out as primary, in refusal of marriage” even though the expression of same-sex love in South Asia “was romanticized and to some degree encouraged” (xviii). I focus rather on narratives of transgressive desire and non-normative genders that reference allegedly historical same-sex representations and present-day gay consumer identities without discomfort. It is within these criss-crossing lines of global queer

identities and specific cultural manifestation of queerness in the figure of hijras, the queer sacred and/or other non-normative identities that South Asian queer narratives can become legible. My thesis therefore contests neither the advent of global queerness through English language, transnational culture, and diasporic circulations, nor the pre/post-colonial continuation of alternative sexual and gender arrangements in particular South Asian contexts as highlighted above.

Back/Side Entry analyses queer representations in English-language fiction of postcolonial South Asia. The title itself points to the unique place of English within postcolonial legacies in the region. The notion of “front-door” and “back-door” entrance is common in government buildings in India and thus the title references such particularities of South Asian English(es). Other common phrases include “Entry from the back,” “Enter from the Backside only,” and “Entry from behind.” My title thus invokes the specific brand of South Asian English without conceding to a simplistic parody of “proper” English. Instead of locating Standard English as a point of reference, I wish to point to the queer potential of South Asian English that, like colonial British English, evolves through an assimilation of other linguistic contexts. The wilful misreading of English, I would suggest, appropriates it as one of the many languages of the region. It bespeaks my own critical perspective on dominant discourses which, in several ways, I “enter” from a non-standard position of queerness/postcoloniality. The title also has queer resonances that indicate a “sideways” development of academic scholarship. In her book *The Queer Child* (2009), Kathryn Bond Stockton explains “sideways growth” as a horizontal movement of growing up for the gay child since “by reigning cultural definitions it cannot grow up,” and so “grows to the side of cultural ideals” (13). Similarly, as the title *Back/Side Entry* indicates, this thesis attests to the intentional *sideways*

development of hegemonic formations that read South Asia as both sexually perverse and not emancipated enough to incorporate queer subjects.

The novels that I analyse in this thesis reflect to some extent the arbitrary process that is the mandate of all selections. However, despite the disparate geographical locations of the authors in India, UK, Canada or the US, I focus on queer English-language fiction by male South Asian writers of the last two decades since in terms of literary tropes they reveal a coherent body of contemporary writing that propels the emergence of queer male subjectivity in South Asian literature. In addition, written from androcentric position and as a set of clearly identified novels, they offer similar features of the elision of female subjectivity. Indeed, my choice raises important concerns about the linguistic and gendered privileges of the male authors. Given the aim of questioning established hierarchies in this thesis, I therefore attempt to include instances of queer female subjectivity where they disturb, disrupt or challenge the South Asian male subject as the unique locus in queer discourses of the region. Concurrently, in the same contrarian logic, I juxtapose readings of other regional specificities of languages in South Asia in an endeavour to review the embedded hegemonic position of English.

POSTCOLONIAL VS QUEER OR QUEER AND POSTCOLONIAL

In the “Introduction” to the collection of critical essays *Postcolonial, Queer* (2001), John C. Hawley underscores the challenge that postcolonial and queer scholars confront when attempting to combine the insights of the two fields. His appraisal of the recent intersection of postcolonial and queer research probes the defining faultlines: “Some queer critics at times find themselves resistant to the seemingly deeply ingrained homophobia of much postcolonial culture and discourse; many of those in postcolonial studies decry gay/lesbian studies as “white” and “elitist”” (1). Antihomophobic inquiry

and non-white, non-Western perspectives do indeed constitute the two primary rubrics within which a meaningful intersection of queer and postcolonial theories can subsist. The double-pronged reading that takes into account both queer and postcolonial interpretive frameworks thus needs to attend to the “binarism” of “deeply ingrained homophobia” and “white and elitist” subject positions, and show it to be “false and mutually destructive” (Hawley 1). Hawley’s conception of theoretical intersections, to which my project is profoundly indebted, charts the methodological tools that aid a sophisticated comprehension of issues of sexuality and gender in a wider geographical context. My research deploys the twin-approach of a queer reading of postcolonial contexts that Hawley’s handbook initiates. It seeks to appropriate the “urgent opportunity”, as William Spurlin delineates in his contribution to Hawley’s anthology, “not only for comparative studies of sexual identities, but for a critique of the *heterosexist* biases of postcolonial studies and the *Western* biases of academic queer theory” (“Broadening Postcolonial Studies” 186; italics in original). An informed investigation of the relative “biases” of both theoretical positions addresses the neglect of multiple categories of identification (sexual and/or cultural), which are indispensable for understanding global regulation of power. In addition, it unpacks the possibility of queering the category of the postcolonial, thereby revealing the shared concerns of queer and postcolonial critique. In such an arrangement, queer and postcolonial analyses do not represent two distinct sites of inquiry. Instead, they constitute a productive re-mapping of two established areas of academic scholarship—a re-mapping that questions the underlying biases of postcolonial and queer studies.

Although postcolonial theory represents an established field of scholarly analysis today, it nevertheless offers the possibility of self-reflexive interrogation. Postcolonial academics consistently re-define and re-mould their own theoretical discourse by

connecting it to contemporary global and social narratives. Beginning with the colonial discourse analysis that Edward Said investigated in *Orientalism* (1978), which Spivak describes as the “source book in our discipline,” the field registered significant shifts in perspective that informed the works of influential postcolonial critics (*Outside* 56). These theoretical shifts comprise Homi Bhabha’s formulation of mimicry as an “immanent threat” to colonial power, Ranajit Guha’s political historiography of the subaltern, and Gayatri Spivak’s work on the gendered subaltern through “a *strategic* use of positivist essentialism” to enumerate but a few (Bhabha, *Location* 86; Spivak, “Deconstructing Historiography” 214; emphasis in original). Furthermore, in her conclusive remarks to a comprehensive overview of postcolonial studies, Ania Loomba deplores the insufficient analysis of “neo-colonial imbalances in the contemporary world order” by “postcolonial critics who engage with the shades of the colonial past much more than with the difficulties of the postcolonial present” (256). Recent critiques in postcolonial studies therefore address the imbalance of neo-imperialism that emerged with U.S. hegemony. For instance, the editors of a special issue of *New Formations* (2006) on postcolonial studies, Priyamvada Gopal and Neil Lazarus contend that “the invasion of Iraq must have as its consequence a fundamental change in the framing assumptions, organising principles and intellectual habits of the field” (1).⁴

Additionally, the “linguistic turn” in postcolonial studies, whereby literature written in English became the privileged signifier of postcolonial critique, has now evolved to extend “the arena to Francophone, Lusophone, Hispanophone, and more localized languages” (Parry, “Institutionalization” 72). Continuing research in the area seeks to “define more clearly the nature of postcolonial studies in non-English-language

4. Similarly, Puar foregrounds the significance of the “event-ness of September 11” that enacted a critical shift of focus in academic debates to analyses of neo-imperialism (xviii). Sangeeta Ray also highlights the significance of the event in shaping postcolonial studies after 9/11 (576).

contexts, simultaneously borrowing from and challenging the established “norms” of anglophone postcolonial criticism” (Hargreaves and Murphy 221). Contemporary postcolonial terrain has thus constituted a site of multiple contestations that remains in a state of regular movement, re-inventing and re-routing its own discursive analysis of domination and resistance.

Queer interventions in postcolonial studies can significantly contribute to the cross-disciplinary dialogue that has enriched the potential of the field since its inception. Although Benita Parry asserts that the plurality of postcolonial theoretical production has facilitated an interconnection with “any discursive contest against oppression or marginalization – such as feminist or queer or disability studies,” encounters between sexual and gender non-normativity and postcolonial sites remain largely underdeveloped (“Institutionalization” 66). As mentioned above, the convergence of queer and postcolonial studies is a recent materialisation. Spurlin rightly notes that “queer theory began to address the historical gap between queer and postcolonial scholarship” only towards the end of the 1990s (“Theorizing Queer Pedagogy” 14). It is imperative to point out that queer and postcolonial intersections are still in the process of articulating a critical grammar for the existing relations between alternative sexualities and genders in a Third World context. Queer readings of the postcolonial paradigm that I offer in this thesis add to the foundational mechanism of these intersections.

The terminology of postcolonial and queer studies incorporates a certain indeterminacy and fluidity that reflects the constantly evolving theoretical position of the field. Both “postcolonial” and “queer” function as ambivalent terms with complex and layered significations. Scholars who interrogate the ambivalence of queer and postcolonial discourse demonstrate an engagement with the key issues of their respective domains and simultaneously enable a resignification of the terms through a continuation

of nuanced discussions. Thus, the terms often come under review from within and beyond the theoretical frameworks to which they subscribe. Certainly, a challenge to the elision of sexual and gender subaltern and a disruption of dominant markers of Western constructs represents a crucial extension of the multiple signification associated with the postcolonial and queer lexicon.

Defining the term “postcolonial” is a fraught exercise since it is the subject of vexed academic debates and ongoing reassessments. In the 1970s, the term gained currency as a method of historical classification to signify newly independent nations of the Third World. In this sense, “postcolonial” referred to “erstwhile territories that had been decolonized,” and was “a periodizing term, a historical and not an ideological concept” (Lazarus 2). However, immediately following decolonisation, postcolonial scholars engaged in a politically charged exchange with Marxist parameters, which could not adequately explain colonial history from a Third World perspective. The term therefore incorporated the counter-discourses that emerged as a challenge to “settled metropolitan histories, forms, and modes of thought,” to borrow a phrase from Edward Said (“Representing” 223). Thus, prominent postcolonial scholars, notably Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak, redefined the historical impulse of the arena to dispute Eurocentric claims of the interrelations between the formerly colonised world and the West.

Aijaz Ahmad’s significant response to Frederic Jameson’s theoretical framing of Third World literature exemplifies the pivotal moment of the binary tension: “I realized, that what was being theorised was, among many other things, myself” (“Jameson’s Rhetoric” 3).⁵ Similarly, as a migrant, Third World intellectual, Spivak shifts the focus to the “negotiated postcolonial positionality” of the postcolonial critic who “tries to

5. See also Frederic Jameson, “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism.”

change something that one is obliged to inhabit, since one is not working from the outside.” (*Post-Colonial Critic* 72). Her stance reflects on the role of the postcolonial scholar in the Western academy who functions in opposition to the notion of the native informant by developing a self-reflexive analytical frame of the West/East binary. The category of the postcolonial, in Spivak’s works, lends itself to a politics of negotiation of identity. It adheres to a self-conscious project that focuses upon and functions around the subject-position of the Third World migrant in the West.

Like Spivak, Bhabha reworks the site of the postcolonial through the identitarian politics of representation. Despite the temporal signification of the term “post-colonial,” both Spivak and Bhabha re-position it within the binary schisms that inform the contemporary world. In his oft-cited compilation *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha formulates and develops the foundational logic of “postcolonial perspectives” (171). The uneven distribution of power in the post-colonised world becomes a causal factor in “specific histories of cultural displacement” and the “fraught accommodation of Third World migration to the West after the Second World War” (*Location* 172). The articulation of the politics of location, dislocation, migration and “hybrid,” “in-between” culture signals a “radical revision” of hegemonic “normality” associated with the West. In this sense, postcolonial perspectives, as Bhabha explains, “emerge from the colonial testimony of Third World countries and the discourses of minorities within the geopolitical divisions of East and West, North and South” (*Location* 171). He relocates the word “postcolonial” beyond a historical definition towards a more critical understanding of international geopolitics. In a perceptive appraisal of the term “postcolonial,” Peter Hulme offers a particularly useful caution: ““postcolonial” is (or should be) a descriptive not an evaluative term” (120).⁶ However, Bhabha’s use of the word consti-

6. See also Stuart Hall, “When was the Post-Colonial” (246).

tutes a re-evaluation of cultural politics from the standpoint of the postcolonial, Third World academic. Rather than describing the historical classification of periods, it becomes a strategic subject-position in an analytical framework whereby “postcolonial” signifies a perspective and a critique of the existing relations between the First and the Third World.

In one of the earliest collection of critical essays in *Social Text* 31/32 (1992) a propos of key issues that define the term “postcolonial” and the field of postcolonial studies, the editors John McClure and Aamir Mufti note “the emergence, on the left, of a new discourse of global cultural relations” (3). The contributions in the volume attest to the enabling discussions that “deploy, defend and dispute” the postcolonial perspective that includes the “postcolonial,” “hybridity,” “the local,” “the particular,” “multicultural,” “the national,” and “the cosmopolitan” (McClure and Mufti 3). Particularly evident in the formulation of these privileged categories of postcolonial enunciation is the emphasis on the exchange between the West and the formerly colonised cultures. In the same collection, Gyan Prakash identifies its particularity: “Recent postcolonial criticism ... seeks to undo the Eurocentrism produced by the institution of the west’s trajectory, its appropriation of the other as History” (8). Similar to Bhabha and Spivak’s positioning of the postcolonial theorist, Prakash raises concerns about the analytic aspect of postcolonial discourse through a questioning of Eurocentric orientation. However, he connects the term “postcolonial” - through its association with “postcolonial criticism” - to the original temporal meaning as the “after” of colonial/colonialism via the inclusion of “History.” He avers that “postcoloniality is not born and nurtured in a panoptic distance from history. The postcolonial exists as an aftermath, as an after - after being worked over by colonialism” (8).

However, the relation of colonialism to its after (i.e., “postcolonial”) appears problematic since the discursive formulation of linear temporality is Eurocentric. Indeed, Ella Shohat and Anne McClintock question the ambiguity of the term “post-colonial” to become “ahistorical and universalizing” and to recenter “global history around the single rubric of European time” such that “colonialism is the determining marker of history.” (Shohat 99; McClintock, “Angel” 86). In this respect, colonialism re-lodges itself as the primary defining moment of historical time, or as McClintock phrases it, “the prestige of history proper” (“Angel” 86). The category of the postcolonial therefore “comes equipped with little evocation of contemporary power equations” that originates in colonialism (Shohat 105). In *Back/Side Entry*, I attempt to undo such “contemporary power equations” that systematically locate the West in a dominant position.

Other postcolonial scholars have also attempted to address the ambivalence that the term “postcolonial” implies in terms of temporal signification. For example, in the “General Introduction” to *The Postcolonial Studies Reader* (1995), Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin caution against a limited and singular deployment of the term. The authors refuse to acknowledge any peremptory celebration of the demise of colonialism since “all post-colonial societies are still subject in one way or another to overt or subtle forms of neo-colonial domination, and independence has not solved this problem” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2).⁷ The proclamation of independence does not necessarily entail a rupture of unequal relations of power, which re-appear as overt or subtle forms of neo-colonial domination. As one postcolonial critic observes, “when-ever postcolonialism identifies itself with the epochal ‘end’ of colonialism, it becomes

7. Even within the radically rooted area of postcolonial inquiry that Subaltern Studies represent, Dipesh Chakrabarty considers the celebration of writing history from below “gratifying but premature” (“Postcoloniality” 1).

falsely utopian or prematurely celebratory” (Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory* 174). Certainly, contemporary global imbalances of power continue former colonial assumptions of social and cultural hierarchy as I show in Chapters 4 and 5. Decolonisation has not guaranteed a de-naturalisation of the power axis or an equal redistribution of wealth and property. However, as Loomba suggests, neither the significance of formal decolonisation nor the persistence of neo-colonial interference can be disavowed (7). The warning above is resonant with the two complex strands of meaning that the term “postcolonial” encapsulates, that is, both as a temporal marker and as an ideological episteme that aims to subvert the “over-determined ‘unity’ of that simplifying, over-arching binary, ‘the West and the Rest’” (Hall, “When was the Post-Colonial?” 249).

Recent reconsiderations take into account the amorphous and indeterminate feature of the term “postcolonial.” Borrowing from Hall’s description of the double engagement of postcolonial critique as both temporal and political, Timothy Brennan notes the contemporary shift in focus of the term:

There has been a good deal of argument about the term *postcolonial* because it suggests that colonies no longer exist (a suggestion that does not bear scrutiny). The term has, however, survived in part because it successfully euphemizes harsher terms such as *imperialism* or *racism* in professionally respectable academic environments, but also because many of its practitioners believe the fight over the independence of sovereign states (over which the colonial struggle has once been fought) was no longer the issue. In an age of globalization the issue was rather about Eurocentric assumptions rather than military occupations. Hence the *post*. (45; emphases in original)

The fluctuation of the term forms the foundational structure of postcolonial scholarship. Brennan's explanation locates it at the intersection of both linear time and geopolitical concerns. I concur with his analysis and deploy "postcolonial" as a tool of radical revision of Eurocentric assumptions, which have privileged certain narratives over others. The term has come to mean a self-conscious "position" constructed around discourses of race, nation, migrancy and culture - discourses that have been instrumental in defining and contesting issues of globalisation. Although it retains the temporal signification as the after of colonialism, I am more interested in the recent use of the term which, as Brennan claims, re-orientates it towards an ideological position of supplanting Eurocentric discourses. Hall observes that the shift in perspective from the "colonial" to the "post-colonial" deconstructs "the here/there cultural binaries for ever" and produces a "decentred, diasporic or 'global' rewriting of earlier, nation-centred imperial grand narratives." ("When was the Post-Colonial?" 247). In my appropriation of the term, it becomes an agential strategy of reading cultural representations under the optic of power relations such that a "global rewriting" of "grand narratives" can be accomplished.

In a recent contribution to the debate, Robert Young makes a useful distinction between "postcoloniality" and "postcolonialism" in his article "What is the Postcolonial?" (2009). He asserts that "whereas postcoloniality describes the condition of the postcolonial, postcolonialism describes its politics—a radical tricontinental politics of transformation" (13). In such a political description, the postcolonial project represents a counter-narrative, which begins from "its own counter-knowledges," and, which "seeks to develop a different paradigm in which identities are no longer starkly oppositional or exclusively singular but defined by their intricate and mutual relations with others" (Young 15). The "different paradigm" that Young illustrates echoes Hall's

assessment of the postcolonial perspective. Although the temporal connotation of the term postcolonial provides the point of departure, Young's essay underscores the immediacy of "social and political transformation on a global scale" that postcolonial politics advocates (23). Like Bhabha and Spivak, his analysis hinges on the attribution of agency within the domain of the "postcolonial" to achieve social transformation. In this context, my use of the term incorporates the complexities of these various perceptions and positions "postcolonial" as a transformational site as mentioned above.

Critiques of postcolonial studies emphasise the ambivalence of the field of postcolonial studies which, in Parry's words, suffers from a "plenitude of signification" so that "'postcolonial" can indicate a historical transition, an achieved epoch, a cultural location, a theoretical stance" ("Institutionalization" 66). Shohat shares Parry's discontent and considers the inapplicability of several postcolonial concepts in transforming existing geo-political relations. Her incisive critique of the term "postcolonial" posits it against Third World, which she asserts, "contains a common project of (linked) resistances to neo/colonialisms" (111). As she explains, "replacing the term "Third World" with the "postcolonial" is a liability" since "the invocation of the "Third World" implies a belief that the shared history of neo/colonialism and internal racism form sufficient ground for alliances" (111). In addition, the several internal divisions that exist between post/colonial societies like Britain, France, Australia, India and Algeria contribute to making the "postcolonial" a universalising category "which neutralizes significant geopolitical differences" and, lead to a naturalisation of cultural binaries – "the effacement of perspective" (103).⁸ In my work therefore, I attend to the several defined

8. Other notable scholars, like Shohat, are critical of the all-encompassing "mobile metaphor" of postcolonialism that precludes cultural/national differences, the historic specificity of the word "postcolonial" or colonial/neo-colonial linkages (Mishra and Hodge 377). See also McClintock, "Angel" (86); Alva, "Reconsideration" (270) and Parry, "Institutionalization" (67).

positions of postcolonial subjects. For instance, in Chapter 2, I carefully delineate the diasporic and the migrant view in order to avoid an “effacement of perspective” of either subjectivity.

The most vigorous contestation of postcolonial positionality appears in Arif Dirlik’s essay “The Postcolonial Aura” (1994). Reviewing the provenance of the term “postcolonial” from the earlier intellectual tradition of Third world and its association with postmodernism, he locates the emergence of postcolonial criticism in First World universities (330). The First World location of the postcolonial critic becomes a position of privilege from which s/he addresses the global (dis)order of power (343). The language of postcolonial criticism derives from Western conceptual frameworks of post-structuralism and even though it attempts to disrupt the discourse of Western universalism, it inevitably stages a return to “universalistic epistemological pretensions” (342). Dirlik’s indictment of the location and language of the postcolonial scholar references the African writer Kwame Anthony Appiah’s scathing critique of the “comprador intelligentsia,” which he reformulates as “the intelligentsia of global capitalism.” (356). Appiah describes postcolonial critics as a “relatively small, Western-style, Western-trained group of writers and thinkers, who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery” (149). Dirlik substantially elaborates Appiah’s critique and alleges that postcolonial criticism is complicit in maintaining the circuits of world capitalism. For him, the “critical orientation” that informs the postcolonial perspective remains “silent on the relationship of the idea of postcolonialism to its context in contemporary capitalism” since postcolonial critics disallow “a foundational role to capitalism in history” (331).

Dirlik’s “polemical contribution,” as Hall puts it, to the debates concerning the conceptual framework of postcolonial studies continues to inform the work of later

critics (“When was the Post-Colonial?” 243). For instance, Loomba and Hall defend the domain of postcolonial inquiry by registering a call for higher standards of discrimination when considering the impact of economic systems and a rethinking of the local and the global (Loomba 250; Hall “When was the Post-Colonial?” 257). The question of the First World location of the conception and dissemination of postcolonial knowledge underlines precisely the inequities of global capitalism. Although postcolonial parameters are dependent upon capitalist structures directly or in an indirect way (as they are products of Western academy), there are indications of serious intellectual reflection on the privileged position of the postcolonial critic.

Contemporary postcolonial theorists are beginning to address the problem of their own social class. In an examination of Dirlik’s suturing of global capitalism to postcolonial scholarship, Lazarus notes that the gap between the privileged class position of postcolonial scholars and those they represent is increasingly becoming a central area of concern in postcolonial criticism (6). Further, postcolonial criticism has become increasingly aware of its own implication in global politics. Recent research in postcolonial studies bears testimony to the significance of auto-critique and self-reflexivity. For instance, in an attempt to continually re-write and re-orient the field, Spivak focuses on Hindu nationalism in India as “the implicit collaboration of the postcolonial in the service of *neo*-colonialism” (“A Critique” 361). Re-routings of postcolonial theory are thus profoundly impelled by the circuits of mobility that globalisation enforces and their simultaneous critique and complicity with newer forms of hegemony.

The debates and issues outlined above signal the pressing exigency made from the contributions in the area of postcolonial studies in terms of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic positions. Yet, Dirlik’s critique, especially, does not direct postcolonial

theory towards an impending conclusion. Instead, it steers the field towards sophisticated (re)engagement with the politics of location, culture and transnational exchange. Such re-orientations of postcolonial scholarship serve to align it with other areas of critical inquiry such as globalisation theory and critical race studies. In the context of such intersections, a crucial queer/postcolonial nexus guarantees the increasing evolution of contemporary postcolonial thought by opening it to alternative paradigms, which remain substantially omitted in its diverse formulations. The indeterminacy that informs postcolonial theorising provides the precise means through which the encounter with queer studies can overlap. In my view, it is legitimate to call for a strategic coalition between postcolonial and queer studies since a re-mapping of nation, diaspora, local, global and culture through the optic of unconventional sexual and gender arrangements destabilises the multiple binary divisions that function as rigid regulatory regimes. In several ways, both postcolonial and queer scholarship work to destabilise the relations between the periphery and the centre and the marginal and the dominant and, subvert boundaries of gender/sex/nation. Therefore, a cross-disciplinary alliance appears not only productive but ought to become, in the contemporary moment, the *raison d'être* of such theories that aim to achieve a radical political and social transformation.

If the term “postcolonial” has assumed complex and shifting meanings, “queer” has likewise become an embattled site. Following a parallel and similar trajectory to postcolonial inquiry, queer studies recurrently scrutinise the subversive potential of queerness and address the faultlines of queer discourse even though it implies exposing the limitations of queer formations. Although the category of “queer” evolved through a careful mediation and subsequent incorporation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender identities, it differs from its predecessor - the lesbian and gay liberation movement - by undermining the efficacy of positing “homosexual,” “gay,” or “lesbian”

identity as “minority” identity/-ies in opposition to the dominant. Rather, the anti-foundationalist and anti-assimilationist work of queer scholars like Butler, develops the position of “constitutedness” of all identity categories thus making the interface between the margins and the dominant specifically relational and interdependent. This critical shift in perspective from oppositional (inclusive or exclusionary) to relational (discursive and contingent) demarcates queer scholarship from earlier social and political movements of emancipation and informs my theoretical posture in the thesis. Annamarie Jagose considers this shift one of the most significant achievements of queer theory, which sets up “queer” as an effective strategy of resistance to the dominant discourse of gender and/or sexual normativity. She asserts that the queer project is “critical of all those versions of identity, community and politics that are believed to evolve naturally.” In addition, “by refusing to crystallise in any specific form, queer maintains a relation of resistance to whatever constitutes the normal” (99).

In terms of etymological provenance, the word “queer,” as William Sayers shows, dates from the early sixteenth century when Scottish and Irish lexicons utilised “queer” and “cuar” to signify “twisted,” “perverse” and “wrongheaded” (16). Concurring with the early-modern origin of the term “queer,” George Chauncey resists the tendency to view queer as a continuation of other terms like gay or lesbian since “gay” and “queer” do not have a neat and arranged history of replacement. He avers that “queer” predates “gay” and that “by the 1910s and 1920s, men who identified themselves as different from other men primarily on the basis of their homosexual interest rather than their womanlike gender status usually called themselves “queer”” (101). Chauncey’s careful chronological consideration of the terms functions as a reminder that “gay” and “queer” cannot fold into each other and a conflation results in a significant theoretical oversight, which runs the risk of homogenising difference. The key

import of the term ‘queer’ is a conceptual shift in the theoretical project of same-sex, non-normative and alternative frameworks.⁹ Queer exposes the political inadequacy of a unified and singular lesbian or gay identity proposed by earlier les/bi/gay liberation models. In this thesis, I systematically critique the occlusion of difference within former same-sex paradigms that privilege homonormative white subjects, disregarding differences of non-normative, non-Western positions.

In her contribution to one of the first anthologies on lesbian and gay theories, Butler clearly discusses her reservations regarding the use of the term “gay” in general and “lesbian” in particular. She explains: “I am skeptical about how the “I” is determined as it operates under the title of the lesbian sign, and I am no more comfortable with its homophobic determination than with those normative definitions offered by other members of the “ gay or lesbian community” (“Imitation” 308). Lisa Duggan likewise contends that in queer modes of thought, “the rhetoric of difference replaces the more assimilationist liberal emphasis on similarity to other groups” (“Making” 15). Indeed, queer theory critiques a monolithic determination of identity by charting a complex relationship between identity models and (hetero)normative operations of power. The occlusion of difference, as I make visible throughout this thesis, operates not only through the erasure of non-white/non-Western identities, but also through an almost exclusive and concerted focus on male narratives.

Further, as a critical term, “queer” re-appropriates a historically paralysing insult used in homophobic vocabulary in English. Butler explains that queer operates “as one

9. Crucially, the word ‘queer’ also designated lesbians or women who were sexually attracted to women in the early twentieth century. In her 1920s classic of lesbian fiction, *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), Radclyffe Hall used the word to signify both habits and gestures that signify gender non-conformity and emotions that define same-sex desire. Stephen Gordon, a seven-year old girl at the time, dresses up and acts like a boy which makes the maid Collins remark that Stephen “is a queer kid, always dressing herself up and playacting—it’s funny” (20). In the first half of the twentieth century, the term queer was ambivalent and could be interpreted in various ways.

linguistic practice whose purpose has been the shaming of the subject it names” and thus forms a common bond with homophobia (*Bodies* 226). However, a repeated invocation and reiteration of the word queer by anti-homophobic and queer subjects themselves “decenters the presentist view of the subject as the exclusive origin or owner of what is said” (*Bodies* 227). It is precisely through a relentless repetition of the term that it comes to evacuate its meaning as a slur and (re)signify affirmatively, thereby “accumulating and dissimulating ... [the] historicity of force” (*Bodies* 227). As a positive set of meanings, queer has therefore become a political tool to oppose and contest its own homophobic history of derogatory use. This re-appropriation of the term further points out to its future use, which inevitably depends on its ever-expanding meaning/s and limitless engagement/s with its plural trajectory that I chart in my analysis.

Like the term “postcolonial,” “queer” opens up possibilities for a multiplicity of significations, which further renders it provisional and indeterminate. There are numerous instances where the ambivalence of the term leads to plural interpretations.¹⁰ Teresa de Lauretis coined the term “queer theory” in 1991 to transgress the normative theorising of sexuality that locates heterosexuality as the natural institution. She suggests that the category of queer recasts and reinvents “the terms of our sexualities, to construct another discursive horizon, another way of thinking the sexual” (iv). As a description of “another discursive horizon,” Sedgwick proposes queer as an “open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning” (*Tendencies* 8). These “excesses of meaning” are apparent in the understanding of the term by earlier scholars of queer theory who defined the field across academic disciplines. Whereas Halperin writes that “it is an identity without essence,” Jagose regards queer as “a term that indexes precisely and specifically cultural formations of the late

10. For a list of contributors to debates in queer theory, see David Ruffolo, *Post-Queer Politics* (1-25, especially 1n1).

1980s and 1990s,” which is “a consequence of the constructionist problematising of any allegedly universal term” (Halperin, *Saint Foucault* 62; Jagose 74). In addition, outside the academy, but tangent to its political programme, “queer” becomes central in the articulation of response to the AIDS epidemic. In his work *Homographesis* (1996), Lee Edelman argues that both AIDS and queer emerge from the discourses that embody a “crisis” of mutation of subjectivity. The death of the subject and the proposition of identity as an ambivalent site are firmly rooted in the post-structuralist and post-modern discourse of AIDS (111-13). Rather than enacting an interpretive foreclosure of queer, my parallel reading of queer and postcolonial practices, like Edelman’s observation, indicates the productive ways in which queerness coheres within the politics of marginalised identities.

Critiques of queer engage with the potential erasure of any concrete or even collective identity categories. The anxiety centres on the self-conscious location of queer as a site of contestation of established and consolidated identity, and, like the postcolonial position, the self-reflexive arrangement of queer that cannot function as an identity since it is a non-identity – a deconstruction of identity itself. Similar to the vexed question of agency in postcolonial studies, critics of queer theory problematise the politics of address, that is, (self-) representational politics. In such criticism, queer is read as an agent in the denial of a differentiated identity, which is necessary for political equality. The disavowal of any identity devalues the specificity of lesbian and gay identities, which are often mobilised in discourses of civil rights. Reflecting upon the lesbian and queer tropes of identity, Bonnie Zimmerman deplores the role of “sexual despecification,” to borrow a term from Halperin, in enacting the erasure of lesbian feminism: “Hasn’t lesbian visibility been too long and hard fought-for to lose in the amorphic notion of ‘queer’?” (Halperin, *Saint Foucault* 65; Zimmerman 46). In a way,

Zimmerman's account repeats Loomba's rhetorical question with respect to postcolonial subjects: "Is the notion of the decentred subject the latest strategy of Western colonialism?" (248). A pulverisation of the specificity of lesbian and gay subjectivity evidently resurrects the homo/hetero binary. Nevertheless, political mobilisation of lesbian and gay identities runs the risk of essentialising, even naturalising, sites of identity. An appeal to definitional clarity in debates that concern identity categories such as lesbian and/or gay sexuality indeed appears to be a persuasive position. However, Jagose observes that the formation of knowledge does not necessarily guarantee "some truth beyond analysis" (103). Queer, therefore, constitutes a political tool of analysis that defines identity by referencing the process through which identity achieves its status as natural. Although the deployment of queer can be neither absolute nor uncontested, its wider project of antihomophobic inquiry functions as a political foundation through which disparate positions can be articulated.

Interestingly, Sedgwick's appreciation of queer as "excesses of meaning" recalls Parry's critique of the "plenitude of signification" of postcolonial studies. However, such "excesses of meaning" or "plenitude of signification" materialise from a rich pluridisciplinary and parallel trajectory of queer and postcolonial studies whereby a shared critical vocabulary becomes an indispensable development. The ambivalence of both the fields notwithstanding, a serious commitment to a coalitional politics that attends to further sophisticated analyses of subject position/s necessitates a critical interruption of both the projects. The body of critical literature that emerged from postcolonial/queer intersections following the publication of Hawley's anthology provokes a "productive crisis" of both theories, to use a helpful insight from Spivak (*Post-Colonial Critic* 110-11). A productive crisis revises notional paradigms by indicating strategies for broader definitions of political solidarity. Early convergences of

theories of gender/sexuality and race/postcolonialism indeed recognise the affirmative potential of such theoretical interruptions. The editors of the Special Issue of *Diacritics* (1994) on boundary crossings between queer and postcolonial analyses emphasise the import of “cross-identification” as a tool “to avoid static conceptions of identity and political alignment” (Butler and Martin 3). As they argue, “to take cross-identification as a site of departure is precisely not to take for granted the pregiven status of the terms that identifications are said to relate” (Butler and Martin 3). Their call for cross-identification through the frames of theoretical boundary crossings clears spaces of representation for a Spivakian productive crisis to uncover the “way in which these fields are mutually implicated in one another” (Butler and Martin 3). In the five chapters that comprise this thesis, I demonstrate that the crossing-over of queer and postcolonial readings provides not only a significant interruption of both critical models, but simultaneously responds to the immediacy of interpreting marginalisation more precisely through multiple optics.

Queer theorists have underscored the urgent need to delve into queer and postcolonial readings as part of a shared analysis. Exemplary of the cross-identificatory interpretive lens, Butler’s assertion of the intractability of questions of race and ethnicity from those of sexuality and gender in *Bodies that Matter* (1993) signals a discursive aperture through which alliances may be forged. According to her, whilst the race/ethnicity axis does not serve as a substitute for the sexuality/gender grid, their articulation is not exclusive to that of the other. Rather, what appears “as separable categories, are ... the conditions of articulation for each other” since “what counts as “ethnicity” frames and eroticizes sexuality, or can itself be a sexual marking” (*Bodies* 168). Further, as an instance of the intersection of categories of queer and race, she explains that:

though there are clearly good historical reasons for keeping “race” and “sexuality” and “sexual difference” as separate analytic spheres, there are also quite pressing and significant historical reasons for asking how and where we might read not only their convergence, but the sites at which the one cannot be constituted save through the other. (*Bodies* 168)

The relevance of the quotation above relies more on a mutual impact of interstitial categories than on a competitive account of marginalisation. Although race, sexuality and sexual difference cannot be redacted into a unique, monolithic rubric, a critical inquiry of their coexistence and implication becomes a serious concern. A queer/postcolonial reading therefore enables an engagement with, in de Lauretis’s words, “the specificity and partiality of our respective histories, as well as the stakes of some common struggles” (xi).

Within conventional descriptions of Western lesbian and gay sexualities, the binary hetero-homo distinction remains the privileged signifier in terms of identity and identification. Queer identificatory practices that complicate such binary discourses become instrumental in reconfiguring queerness within the framework of transnational relationships. These non-normative identifications unhinge tropes of linear development within lesbian and gay narratives whereby, as Jon Binnie suggests, “‘the homosexual’, is supplanted by the ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’, followed by the ‘queer’ as the most developed form of sexual dissident subjectivity and politics” (77). Further, Sedgwick notes that such elaborations of queerness operate “along dimensions that can’t be subsumed under gender and sexuality at all: the ways that race, ethnicity, postcolonial nationality criss-cross with these and other identity-constituting, identity-fracturing discourses, for example” (*Tendencies* 9). If, as Sedgwick declares, queerness criss-crosses with other “identity-fracturing discourses” such as nation, race and ethnicity, a viable critique of

universalising discourses of Western formations of identity can be envisaged. Defending the resistance of queer theory to develop into a “normative” discipline, Hawley rightly asserts the “possible utility” of queer paradigms to approach “sexualities that are less obviously binary than those in cultures in which “gay” and “lesbian” make compelling (political, public, and private) sense” (5). I suggest that it is precisely in the detailed exploration of the “possible utility” of insights from queer theory that South Asian same-sex representations can become intelligible. In this sense, Vanita’s use of the title *Queering India* (2002) for her anthology on same-sex love in India epitomises the intersectionality of queer discourses with “postcolonial nationality” that “India” denotes. Clearly, as her collection illustrates, the appropriation of terms such as “homosexually inclined, queer, or alternative sexualities” by Western historians is a “convenient fiction” - one that denies the use of these terms for non-Western same-sex arrangements of the past (*Queering* 4, 4-6). Although the historical recuperation of “indigenous” same-sex terminology is a fundamental task, “this search,” Vanita contends, should not “preclude the use of now-current terms when we describe the past in languages that are now our own” (*Queering* 4).

While I have briefly outlined the diverse course of the use of “queer” in Sedgwick and Vanita’s accounts – perhaps inflected by their variously differentiated positionality within the US academy – I am in fact more impelled by the intersecting ontological grammar of this trajectory. “Queer” in the subtitle of my dissertation appears simultaneously as a development beyond the strict constraints of sexuality and gender and, as a meditation upon the usefulness or, paradoxically even, the inefficiency of language as a signifier of human experience. I employ the indeterminacy of the term “queer” to interrogate and complicate the depiction of non-heteronormativity in representations from South Asia. Although as a noun “queer” references the multiple catego-

ries of identity that cluster around anti-homophobic investigation, my utilisation of queer throughout the thesis signals a potential resignification of postcolonial discourses. In his critical assessment of the term, David Ruffolo explains its *champ sémantique* – “queer” as a verb implies a “radical process of disruption” and as a noun, it functions as “an umbrella term encompassing multiple identities” (3). Similarly, Jarrod Hayes uses “queer” as “a verb to signify a critical practice in which non-normative sexualities infiltrate dominant discourses to loosen their political stronghold (7). Likewise, in my thesis, “queer” serves to disrupt discourses that appropriate models of alternative sexual and gender configuration as Euro-American formations.

By aligning queerness to South Asia, I tender a sharp critique of the hegemonic consolidation of dominant constructs. Extending the equivocal frames of queerness, I shift the focus from les/bi/gay subjects to incorporate those “dimensions that can’t be subsumed under gender and sexuality at all” (Sedgwick, *Tendencies* 9). In my reading of the female characters in Kureishi’s novel in Chapter 2, for instance, I harness the potential of queerness to problematise “identity-fracturing discourses” of nation, ethnicity and race. I claim “queer” as an informative analytical paradigm for understanding non-Western arrangement of genders and sexualities and thus broaden the scope of queerness to become inclusive. Yet, the context provided by postcolonial South Asia in my thesis is precisely critical of the import – as both a Western import and significance – of queer language and its epistemological conventions. In Chapters 1 and 4, I discuss in detail this ambivalence of queer vocabulary in relation to postcolonial societies where colonial intervention assures a mediated interpellation of languages. Despite the integration of the critical lexicon of queer theory, I continue to be aware of its limitations in postcolonial contexts. Further, I use queer concepts heuristically,

questioning their legitimacy when required, rather than suggesting an uncritical assimilation.

QUEER CATACHRESIS AND NEW VOCABULARIES

Examples of queer and postcolonial intersection begin to proliferate at the turn of the millennium when scholars explicitly note the interconnections between both theories. For instance, reviewing Spivak's contribution to subaltern studies in terms of the gendered subaltern, the French queer theorist Marie-Hélène Bourcier concludes, "ce que dit Spivak des "subalternes" ... vaudrait pour les "subalternes" des minorités sexuelles." - "Spivak's theorisation of the gendered subaltern ... can be extended to the sexual subaltern" (209; my translation). Even though she does not expound, Bourcier instructively alludes to a shared analytical network of postcolonial and queer terminology. The theoretical vocabulary developed by Spivak reaches beyond the specific breadth of postcolonial studies into critical theories that challenge systems of domination. The Spivakian notion of catachresis wherein master words like "woman" or the "worker" point to no literal referents serves to denaturalise enduring normative narratives of gender or class. The "disenfranchised" are often made to fit their own categories by a process of "transformation through definition" (*Post-Colonial Critic* 104). In a similar way, heteronormative and heterosexist ideologies actively invest in the persistent marginalisation of queer subjectivity. As several queer critiques have argued, the category of heterosexuality relies upon the exclusion of homosexuality through a process of naturalisation and normalisation of reproductive heterosexuality. However, these normative sites refer to arbitrary signification since the "natural" is itself coded as an ideological construct. Spivak's encouragement of the negotiation of the postcolonial

condition through a careful deconstructive strategy is particularly valuable in order to underwrite analogous histories of systemic binaries and processes of othering.

Within literary conventions, catachresis refers to the deliberate or unintentional misuse of a word or concept. As Spivak shows from dictionary definition, catachresis indicates the “originary “abuse” constitutive of language-production, where both concept and metaphor are “wrested from their proper meaning”” (*Outside* 298). However, borrowing from Jacques Derrida’s seminal formulation of incomplete or partial meaning as integral to all linguistic frames, Spivak emphasises the insufficiency of all systems of signification by focusing on metaphors that are arbitrarily attached to their meaning. She further problematises the use of catachresis in postcolonial criticism via a careful (re)reading of the Marxist notion of value. A deconstructive interpretation of relations of hierarchy/subordination functions by “reversing, displacing, and seizing the apparatus of value-coding” (*Outside* 63). A catachrestical re-presentation of Western discourses of identity, woman, worker and nation implies metaphors or concepts without proper meanings in the postcolonial world. Agency then is located within a marginal space of representation through “reversing, displacing, and seizing” the process of othering, which is a “space that one cannot not want to inhabit and yet must criticize” (*Outside* 64). Bhabha identifies Spivak’s space of margins as the “catachrestic space” which “perverts its embedded context” (*Location* 183-84). Further, in terms of political mobilization, as Stephen Morton suggests, Spivak’s concept of catachresis, that founds deconstructive interpretive strategy, “guards against the universal claims of Marxism, national liberation movements or western feminism to speak for all the oppressed” (35). Such “universal claims,” I suggest, are in no manner confined to feminist or national debates. Spivak’s conceptualisation of catachresis proves equally

productive when reread in conjunction with queer discourses that aim to decentre heterocentric regimes.

Implicating the Spivakian idea of catachresis in a reading of same-sex practices in South Asia affords evidence for nuanced utilisation of identity categories such as lesbian, gay or bisexual. In her essay on the debates concerning the terminology of sexuality, Vanita provides a brilliant account of the complex dynamic involved in defining “sexuality-based categories” in India (*Gandhi’s Tiger* 60-76, 65). Faulting Foucault’s establishment of the originary moment of “homosexual” identity in nineteenth-century West, she asserts the usefulness of identitarian categories like “lesbian” or “homosexual,” which albeit words in English, also “appear in Hindi and Urdu texts in the early twentieth century” (*Gandhi’s Tiger* 65). The appropriation of English-language words in texts in other Indian languages, I contend, creates a catachrestical effect on the import of allegedly Western terms themselves. Deliberately appropriating words like “lesbian” or “homosexual” in a South Asian framework contributes to a gesture of “seizing the apparatus of value-coding” in the Spivakian sense. The sites of “gay,” “lesbian” or “bisexual” identity become a metaphor without a literal referent because they become mobilised in contexts where Western imaginary assumptions of the traditional structure of South Asian society preclude references to modern categories of homosexuality. I extend Vanita’s analysis and suggest that sites of same-sex identification become further complicated in South Asia through narratives of third sex/third gender, transgender (kothis, panthis, hijras, to name but a few) and, men who have sex with men (MSM) that coevally intersect with lesbian and gay identities. As I show in Chapters 1 and 4, discourses of men who identify solely in terms of sexual acts and others who adopt a “gay” identity criss-cross within the South Asian context. In a connected reading, I draw upon the arbitrary association of the term “Anglo-Indian”

with the concept of hybridity in competing versions of colonial and postcolonial history in the last Chapter. These interesting crossings posit a challenge to predictably ready-made paradigms of identity in conventional Western discourse.

Throughout *Back/Side Entry*, I deploy a catachrestical reading of master words such as “nation,” “race,” “sex,” “gender,” “religion,” “ethnicity” and “sexuality” in order to show that the meaning of these concepts is partial and in process. One such instance is my analysis of the institution of marriage in South Asia in Chapter 4. Building upon the consideration of ambivalence in the work of Butler and Bhabha, I deconstruct the heterosexual prerogative of marriage in contrast to its parody in homosexual subculture. I demonstrate that Butler’s thorough critique of heterosexuality-as-origin and homosexuality-as-copy and Bhabha’s subversive concept of colonial mimicry interconnect to offer a nuanced understanding of queer marital arrangement in R. Raj Rao’s novel *The Boyfriend*. With respect to identitarian politics, I argue that an imitation, a copy or parody can effectively deconstruct the legitimacy of the heteronormative regime of marriage. A deliberate “misuse” of the concept of marriage in queer subculture challenges the limits of the label of originality attached to heterosexual marriage. As a problematic naturalisation of heterosexuality, marriage is, I propose, an apparatus that controls queer subjectivity in postcolonial India.

Beginning with the publication of *Queer Transixions of Race, Nation, and Gender*, a special issue of *Social Text* 52-53 (1997), a significant body of literature developed around the intersecting matrices of sexuality, gender, race, nation, language, ethnicity, religion and other markers of identity in the last decade. Terry Goldie identifies the emergent field as “queerly postcolonial” – a terrain that maps the “serious crossover between queer theory and the postcolonial” (23, 20). Anjali Arondekar explicitly defines the objective of this “serious crossover”: “our goal as queer scholars

and teachers must then be to make sexuality co-constitutive with writing on labor, race and colonialism” (“Border/Line” 249). In similar regard, in their attempt to reinvigorate the field of queer studies, the editors of the special issue *What’s Queer about Queer Studies Now?* of *Social Text* 84-85 (2005) implement the Spivakian catachrestical approach to develop “a firm understanding of queer as a political metaphor without a fixed referent” (1). Written by “a generation of younger queer scholars,” the essays in the issue rethink the potential of queer critiques to cut across disciplinary boundaries into contemporary discourses of globalisation and geo-political power relations (Eng, Halberstam, Muñoz 1). Calling for “a renewed queer studies,” they “insist that considerations of empire, race, migration, geography, subaltern communities, activism, and class are central to the continuing critique of queerness, sexuality, sexual subcultures, desire, and recognition” (Eng, Halberstam, Muñoz 1-2). My project is deeply resonant with the insights of this “renewed” branch of queer theorisation.

Such expansions of queer studies animate the ongoing debates in critical theory and compel a critical engagement with hegemonic global sexed/gendered hierarchies. In his study of queer Asian masculinity in the US, David Eng elucidates the aims of these developments as crucial to “examining the numerous ways in which articulations of national subjectivity depend intimately on racializing, gendering, and sexualizing strategies” (*Racial Castration* 3). Simultaneously, I would argue, these intersectionalities seek to include queer arrangements of the Third World with a view to destabilise the West/rest binary. In my thesis, a renewed queer perspective thus pays rigorous attention to both racial/ethnic queerness in the West and the articulation of queerness in South Asia. The formulation of queerness in the postcolonial context of South Asia becomes a contentious issue since, as Sara Salih explains in the editorial of the special issue of *Wasafiri* 22 (2007) on queer/postcolonial crossings, “the self-styled ‘local’

values of the post-colony are pitted against what are regarded as the permissive sexual mores of the west” (1). My research therefore attends to the manifold dangers of a homophobic reading of the postcolonial nation that equates same-sex practices with a decadent west. In this context, it contributes to the emerging critique of normative and normativising frontiers within queer theory in the West and the assumption that alternative sexualities are an occidental import in South Asia.

The burgeoning convergence of postcolonial and queer theoretical sites reshapes critical paradigms in ways that are valuable to a sophisticated comprehension of transnationalised subjectivities. For instance, Martin Manalansan contends that “renewed queer studies” simultaneously question the ready availability of “the universal gay/lesbian subject” and identify “the ways in which gay and lesbian cultures in specific localities inflect and influence the growth of alternative sex and gender identities and practices” (8). In fact, complex negotiations of queer subjectivity become visible when considered in relation to national/diasporic movements. Additionally, I would suggest, newer vocabularies that make racial, gendered, sexual, diasporic and transnational formations and, national and nationalistic belonging clearly intelligible come to surface. In this regard, the new critical grammar foregrounds the pertinence of inter-theoretical methodology while indicating the inadequacy of former exclusive models of analyses. The critiques that materialise from the relational consideration of queer and transnational frameworks implicate queer discourses in novel formations that confront other pervasive structures of racial, class or national privilege. Demanding supplementary scrutiny from queer theorists, these emerging vocabularies produce sophisticated autocritiques of the queer project. I would claim that they serve as agents of queer counter-vigilance that safeguards queer politics against becoming yet another normative regime.

Recent intersection of queer and globalisation studies offers a prime example of queer counter-vigilance. The co-optation of the queer subject in the global consumer industry (Pink Dollar, Pink Pound and Pink Capital) animates the trenchant critiques against the absence of class analysis in queer studies. Queer theorists uncover the implication of heteropatriarchal regimes in the sustenance of transnational flow of goods that affect queer consumers as well. The gradual integration of the queer subject in consumer capitalism exemplifies the strain of a certain kind of normative rehearsal that has been termed homonormativity. Invoking Warner's conceptualisation of heteronormativity as a set of practices that explicitly promotes "heterosexual ideology," Duggan defines homonormativity as an outcome of liberal assimilation of the queer subject such that a "depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" shores up the norms of heterosexual ideology (Warner xvi; Duggan, *Incredible* 179). The concept of homonormativity has indeed renewed critical interest in the subversive potential of queer politics, which is seen to embody a Eurocentric and class bias. It has generated a proliferation of critical terms with respect to global(ised) queer identities that emerge from the complicity of queer practices with corporate capital in order to produce commodified identities such as "global McPink" or "McQueer" or "generic "McDonaldized" lives" (Binnie 77; Braziel 112; Manalansan 9). The new conceptual vocabularies resist the homogenisation of queerness and allow a self-assessment of queer models. Readings of diasporic and Third World practices within this context, as I show in my thesis, appear particularly apposite in multiplying the contestations of uniform models of queerness.

Analysing the homonormative swing of mainstream lesbian and gay normalisation of identities, Eng and Puar underline the numerous ways in which queer subjects become instrumental in producing particular "regulatory regimes of queerness" (Puar

23). At the heart of their critique is the strategy of queer counter-vigilance against neo-liberal impulses to recruit queer subjects in the post-9/11 War on Terror and assimilate queer politics in the domestic sphere of family and genealogy. Reflecting upon the initial subversive potential of queer scholarship and alternative forms of kinship/affiliation, Puar and Eng register increasing disaffection with contemporary queer hypervisibility, which bolsters American/Western “sexual exceptionalism” as the newest form of commodity export (Puar 3). Whilst Puar critiques this idea of US “national homosexuality” or “homonationalism” through which queer subjects are implicated in an imperialist agenda, Eng charts the emergence of “queer liberalism” that is “the basis for the liberal inclusion of particular gay and lesbian U.S. citizen-subjects”—a process which “relies upon the logic of colorblindness” (Puar 2; Eng, *Feeling* 3.). Drawing on Puar’s view of biopolitics, Jin Haritaworn denounces the deployment of racism and imperialism in the formation of “gay citizenship” (“Loyal Repetitions”). Similar evaluations of ethnocentric queerness note the assimilation of the gay subject in nationalist/imperialist rhetoric. For instance, noting the role of Dutch politicians in pushing for sexual reform in Romania, Jon Binnie exposes Nordic and Dutch nationalisms whereby “the internationalization of lesbian and gay rights activism” becomes a “part of a civilizing mission of modernity” (76). In another example of what they term “gay imperialism,” the authors Haritaworn, Tamsila Tauqir and Esra Erdem raise concerns about the “global context of violent Islamophobia” and its circulation in representations of queerness in European countries (71). Related assessments appear equally critical of the Eurocentric appropriation of queerness in the Israel/Palestine context in which Israel appears as the “gay-friendly” refuge in the Middle East (Adi Kuntsman, “Queerness as Europeanness”). These emerging critiques of the west/rest dichotomy clear spaces of representation for queer of colour and queer dias-

poric analysis. Concurrently, they point to the significance of narrating alternative queer modalities that originate from postcolonial Third World(s).

Emblematic of the thrust of postcolonial/queer crossings in contemporary critical theory, the queer of colour and queer diasporic critique proliferate instances of multi-focal assessment of sexual, gender, racial and trans/national discourses. Roderick Ferguson constructs a queer of colour analysis in order to recognise and interrogate the “unimagined alliances” of ostensibly disparate cultural formations such as Marxism and liberal ideology as they converge in the maintenance of heteronorms (3). Highlighting the significance of the “intersecting saliency of race, gender, sexuality, and class in forming social practices,” Ferguson asserts that queer of colour critique endeavours to “debunk the idea that race, class, gender, and sexuality are discrete formations, apparently insulated from one another” (4). Although Ferguson’s discussion focuses on the particularities of the US, queer of colour critiques prove useful in other, larger postcolonial and racialised contexts as well. For instance, Adi Kuntsman and Esperanza Miyake’s collection *Out of Place: Interrogating Silences in Queerness/Raciality* (2008) applies a queer of colour analysis to transnational practices including variously distinct subjects such as bio-surveillance in the First World and the nationalist/class affiliations in the Third World. Other insightful studies examine the imbrication of racial dichotomy in the production of homosexuality in popular culture in the US, the implication of orientalist metaphors in sexual orientation, the cross-racial/cross-sexual alliance of queers and terror and, the “ascendancy of whiteness” in Western queer discourse (Sommerville 39-76; Ahmed *Queer Phenomenology* 112-20; Puar 24-32). In challenging the operations of “ideologies of discreteness,” to borrow from Ferguson, queer of colour analysis works to highlight compelling interconnections between capitalist

structures, national boundaries, racialised hierarchies and heteronormative configurations (4).

Theorisations of queer diasporas complements the empirical investigation that queer of colour critique initiates. Even though it constitutes “an unruly body of inquiry,” to use a phrase by Eithne Luibhéid, queer diasporic critique engages queer politics in the indispensable self-criticism of its own sites of privilege by indicating the homonormative whiteness of liberal queer formations (169). At the same time, it generates a vigorous critique of heteronormative representations that are explicitly (re)articulated by national/nationalist narratives in the conventional diasporic imagination. Starting with the publication of Cindy Patton and Benigno Sánchez-Eppler’s collection *Queer Diasporas* (2000), notable queer diasporic scholars dispute ethnocentric assumptions of queer migration as a narrative of emancipation while concurrently exposing the intense investment of heteropatriarchal diasporic narratives in the effacement of queer and marginalised subjectivity from the space of “home” (Manalansan 13; Braziel 106-07; Gopinath, *Impossible Desires* 16-20). Further, queer diasporic analyses, as Braziel suggests, “challenge the singularity of queer nation,” which emerged in New York in the 1990s and risked becoming “gay globalization, a commodified and exported discourse of sexual identity” subtended by “capitalist imperialism” (114). A critique of the queer nation is particularly vital in queer diasporic formulations that oppose the centrality of US domination in discourses of globalisation.

The range of queer diasporic critique incorporates a wide array of studies that explore the circulation of transnational capital and labour. For example, the critical analysis of David Eng in the domain of psychic impact on transnational adoptees in the US confronts the “conservative impulse of (hetero)sexuality and diaspora” (“Transnational Adoption” 32). He posits the radical forms of alternative kinship that queer

diasporas illustrate in contradistinction to the “politics of colorblindness” that neoliberal mobilisation of multiculturalism embodies (*Feeling* 9). Indexing other modes of familial identification by “providing alternative knowledges and possibilities,” queer diasporas, Eng points out, become a “critical methodology, a reading practice that responds to queer liberalism and its racialization of intimacy” (*Feeling* 13).

Queer diasporic critique as a reading practice is particularly enabling when alternative arrangements of the Third World are read in conjunction with national(ist) narratives of Western exceptionalism in the field of sexual emancipation. Further, a queer diasporic lens reveals transnational similarities and discontinuities of queer practices. Thus, in Chapter 4, I deploy insights from Manalansan’s analysis of queer Filipino diasporic gay language to produce a nuanced account of language appropriation in queer subcultures in India. A turn to queer diasporic reading practices therefore opens up spaces for comparative analysis that expand geographical boundaries to “other” postcolonial sites.

In her exegesis of queer diasporic critique, Gopinath explores the divergences and intersections of queer diasporic analyses with queer of colour critique (“Bollywood Spectacles” 158-59). A key difference between the two approaches is the over-arching importance of US racial, gender and sexual categories as “a primary site of reference” in queer of colour analyses. On the other hand, “a queer diasporic analysis pays greater attention to the intimate connection between disparate diasporic and national locations as they converge in the production of “home” space” (“Bollywood Spectacles” 159). In Gopinath’s work, the elaboration of a queer South Asian diaspora therefore allows the transnational articulation of queerness in which US specificity does not function as “a primary site of reference.” Instead, the inclusion of alternative configurations from South Asia “marks a different economy of desire that escapes legibility within both

normative South Asian contexts and homonormative Euro-American contexts” (Gopinath, *Impossible Desires* 13). Her evaluation of telling instances of intersection of corporate capital, globalisation and Hindu-nationalist diasporic configuration exemplifies the complex ways in which heteronormative diasporas function within the logic of global capitalism (*Impossible Desires* 7-11). In proposing the illegibility of the woman’s body/desire because of the nexus of transnational circulation of culture, national identity and global capital, she combines queer diasporic critique with feminist theorisation. Borrowing from her analysis, I employ a queer diasporic critique in Chapters 2 and 3 to locate the erasure of queer female diasporic subjectivity in Kureishi and Dhalla’s narratives. Like Eng’s work, Gopinath’s critique is useful in comprehending several differentiated geographical contexts. In addition, as I point out in Chapter 3, her caution against the effacement of queer female subjectivity in traditional narrations of diaspora serves as an invitation to productively exploit the concept of queer diasporas in order to critique gay male perspectives.

As self-reflexive sites of theoretical examination, queer of colour analysis and queer diasporas, like queer theory, admit a critique that emanates from within. Extending Gopinath’s reading of the elision of queer female subjectivity in diasporic contexts, Meg Wesling shifts the focus in discussions of queer diaspora to female trafficking engendered by the global sex trade. She argues against the emancipatory narrative of queer diasporic migration, which runs the risk of becoming another normative site through “the claim for the mobile transgressivity of queerness as its own diasporic category” (34). As I affirm in Chapter 3, Wesling’s feminist disruption of the celebration of queer diasporas is a reminder of the gendered privilege of the male queer diasporic subject. Her analysis recalls Eng’s point in relation to the complicity of gay male Asian American subjectivity in maintaining patriarchal divisions of transnational labour

(*Racial Castration* 220-24). In a similar vein, Puar resists the facile assumption of conflating queer of colour or queer immigrant communities as subversive of the racial/national binaries. For her, such an untenable position obscures certain “conservative proclivities” within queer diasporic and immigrant communities that are internally differentiated along myriad axes of identification (23). Identifying the complicities of queerness, diasporic, of colour or otherwise, in larger projects of universalising normativity does not result in the “failure of the radical, resistant or oppositional potential of queernesses, but can be an *enabling acknowledgement*” (24; emphasis added). Indeed, Wesling, Eng and Puar’s demanding critiques raise specific concerns about the notion of transgression by concentrating on its relation to other forms of privilege and discrimination. I suggest throughout this thesis that they function as strategies of queer counter-vigilance. These self-critical strategies prevent the occlusion of queerness within normative structures.

The five Chapters that follow are organised around broad themes of adolescence and modernity (Chapter 1), growing up in the UK (Chapter 2), the inter-relation of queer migrancy and the cultural export Bollywood (Chapter 3), postcolonial India and queer negotiations of the national fabric (Chapter 4) and, finally, the historical fiction of the Raj (Chapter 5). Chapter 1 focuses on two important novels that mark the coming of age of South Asian queer fiction. Written in the last decade of the twentieth century, Shyam Selvadurai’s first novel *Funny Boy* (1994) and P. Parivaraj’s only novel *Shiva and Arun* (1998) place the question of same-sex desire firmly at the centre of their narratives. As a theoretical framework, I deploy Dipesh Chakrabarty’s influential critique of Euro-American appropriation of the category of “modernity” in *Provincializing Europe* (2000) to engage with the implication of questions of postcolonial modernity in the materialization of South Asian queer subjectivity. I complicate Chakrabarty’s

account by arguing that queer South Asian adolescence, as it appears in the novels, subverts Western definitions of modernity and tradition that systematically reproduce a Eurocentric bias. Moreover, borrowing from sophisticated queer readings of adolescence, I demonstrate the significance of deploying the twin-approach of postcolonial and queer analyses. I contend that the novels provide a complex terrain of queer representation whereby non-normative desire in adolescence and adulthood in the South Asian context prompts an interrogation of the category of modernity in postcolonial geography. In other words, I suggest that both the novels raise concerns over the status of postcolonial modernity through a process of alignment with questions of queer adolescence in South Asia. Debates about class, ethnicity, religion and caste that stage the “crisis of postcolonial modernity,” as I term it, significantly frame the embodiment of queer identity.

As the first English-language novels from Sri Lanka and India that engage with the issue of queerness, *Funny Boy* and *Shiva and Arun* re-invigorate South Asian fiction with newer themes of sexual orientation. They appear as defining milestones in English fiction from the subcontinent. Following Eve K. Sedgwick’s conception of “homo/heterosexual definitional panic” in relation to novels written in the 1890s in the West, I argue that Selvadurai and Parivaraj re-position this “definitional panic” in a postcolonial framework (*Between Men* 167). The narrative of identity-in-crisis, as the protagonists of the novels struggle with their respective closets, signals a larger crisis of postcolonial definitions. Although written in English, both novels address the inaccessibility and inadequacy of the English language to fully comprehend and articulate the queer South Asian experience. The adolescent characters attempt to devise a critical vocabulary for their queerness that remains beyond the control of English. The birth of queer subjectivity in South Asia appears directly linked to the language of the coloniser

and Western constructs of identity classification. However, the novels reconsider Western practices of identity formation and suggest that identity constructs can serve the interests of homophobic discourses. Therefore, the emergence of a South Asian subjectivity based on same-sex desire cautiously delineates itself from Western homophobic practices. My reading of the novels is reflective of a significant shift in contemporary South Asian attitudes to master narratives of “equal rights” that originate in the West. I suggest that Selvadurai and Parivaraj’s works negotiate Western constructs such as modernity and homosexuality in order to provide a material outline for the birth of the queer South Asian subject. Their negotiation reveals a complex intersection of globalising discourses and postcolonial spaces whereby occidental constructs appear not only restrictive for queer subjectivity but, through the compelling association of homophobia, Western practices appear in direct contrast to queer formations.

In the second Chapter, I offer a queerly postcolonial reading of the British-Pakistani writer Hanif Kureishi’s first novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990). As a canonical figure of English literature, Kureishi’s *oeuvre* emblematises, in several ways, the popularity of postcolonial South Asian representations, which also appears in the works of authors like V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Anita Desai and Arundhati Roy, to name but a few. Addressing the absence of a twin critical approach of postcolonial and queer formulations, I suggest that issues of race, diaspora, sexuality, gender and ethnic/national identification and affiliation closely interconnect in the novel. I contend that critical analyses that read grids of racial and sexual identification in isolation miss the significant reciprocal impact of these colliding categories. Seeking to redress this critical oversight, I problematise the perspective of assessing Kureishi’s legacy in South Asian literature.

The Buddha of Suburbia is significant in its depiction of racial, ethnic and queer identification in postcolonial Britain. Using the bisexuality of the protagonist Karim Amir as a point of departure and developing my argument of queering postcolonial sites in the thesis, my reading of Kureishi's text hinges on a deliberate crossing of Karim's postcolonial and queer identities. I deploy Butler's conceptualisation of disidentification and Muñoz's rewriting of Butler's formula in the context of identity performance by queers of colour to interrupt readings of Karim's subjectivity that systematically invest the saturated site of postcolonial hybridity with reference to his British Asian inheritance. Labouring his ambivalent attachment and ultimate refusal to choose between female or male sexual objects, I deliberately juxtapose Kureishi's sexual irresoluteness with the narrative of his incomplete identification with neither of the bi-cultural/bi-national constituents. I contend that his inability to identify with either his English or Indian affiliations closely interconnects to the wilful disidentification with national or diasporic formations. Although an intentional search for identity frames his journey from Britain to the US and the movement from adolescence to adulthood, I suggest that this exploration leads to disaffection with the in-between identity that he allegedly espouses. Employing Judith Halberstam's paradigm of queer spatial temporality in *Queer Time* (2005), I complicate the normative genre of Bildungsroman that critics often attribute to Kureishi's novel. Halberstam's conceptualisation is particularly helpful in disqualifying heteronormative narratives of temporal movement.

In the last section of Chapter 2, I attempt to locate queerness in the diasporic accounts of female subjectivity in *The Buddha*. This portion of the Chapter is indebted to Gopinath's larger project in *Impossible Desires*, which focuses on queer female diasporic identity and its erasure in patrilineal, normative accounts of diaspora. Similar to the subsequent Chapter where I elaborate on Gopinath's queer diasporic critique, I place

a reading of the female characters of the novel at the centre of Karim's sexual/cultural disidentification and recover the feminine bonds that are repeatedly erased in conventional narratives of diasporic articulation. The systematic occlusion of queer female experience of migration is an enduring feature of numerous diasporic texts. With valuable inputs from Gopinath, I contend that Kureishi's female diasporic characters enable a destabilisation of gender (and even sexual) hierarchies and, concurrently, undermine national affiliation along provisional identifications with Britain, India or Pakistan.

Exposing the analogous relation of racial and sexual positions in gay male diasporic subjectivity in Chapter 3, I examine Ghalib Shiraz Dhalla's first novel *Ode to Lata* (2003) under the lens of queer diaspora that Gopinath formulates. I argue that Dhalla's narrative illustrates not only the elision of queer female experience but, simultaneously, posits queerness against stereotypes of racialised "black" identities. I suggest that an articulation of queer identity in the South Asian diasporic context is dependent upon and competes with race as a conflictual site. The location of diasporic queerness is coterminous with the space of racial binary for the "brown" gay male, who must conform to homonormativity more than his white counterpart in the US (Puar xxvi). As I show throughout *Back/Side Entry*, the consolidation of queer subjectivity is regularly achieved through a process of coalescing with the dominant position. In Ali's case, the marginalisation of female subjectivity and the reinforcement of the white/black racial division become central to the articulation of his queerness.

Dhalla's novel explicitly relies on queer diasporic practices/memory of reading Bollywood as a specifically "queer" cultural export. Bollywood songs are invested with queer readings such that an alternative space for alternative sexualities in migrant communities can emerge. However, South Asian queer identities interact with race in a

complex matrix as they recirculate the inherited racial superiority of “whiteness,” which Bollywood reinforces through its recourse to light-skinned female stars. Although Ali’s attachment to Bollywood replaces the diasporic narrative of belonging to a geographical location by an affiliation to an imaginary cultural homeland, it concedes to the systematic reproduction of racial and gender binaries. Dhalla rehearses Bollywood’s uncritical obsession with dominant paradigms of beauty to construct Ali’s queer identity and, akin to Bollywood, this identity becomes a site of privilege when considered in conjunction with the stereotypical images of race hierarchies that it generates. Therefore, I foreground the significance of South Asian popular and folk culture in offering enabling critiques of racial binaries when aligned to female queerness. In an attempt to complicate Ali’s male queer diasporic identity, I focus on the elision of female queer subjectivity in (queer) imaginaries of home.

The penultimate Chapter further elaborates the discussion on South Asian queer identity as it relates to the state of the postcolonial nation. Where the preceding Chapter focuses on the conception of queer diasporic subjectivity and its implication in questions of race, this Chapter extends the analysis of queer identity in South Asia by paying particular attention to the ways in which it engages with postcolonial fractures of the heteropatriarchal nation such as class, caste, language and religion among other divisions. I read the inextricable connection between homosexuality and nation as a defining feature of R. Raj Rao’s novel *The Boyfriend*, which is set in Bombay (Mumbai) in the early 1990s, and which diasporic accounts celebrate as the first work of queer fiction from India. I work contrary to the logic of romantic idealisation that would position the postcolonial nation against repressive homophobic statutes of colonialism. Instead, by exposing the critical fissures of post-independent India in terms of multiple binary divisions, I explore the impossibility of a union based on same-sex and cross-caste love

that emerges from the novel. My reading suggests that the postcolonial nation is complicit with the former colonial project in marginalising and policing queerness. The national and, more significantly, the nationalist framework of postcolonial India prolong the colonial production of normative gender and sexuality. In such a structural duplication of the social norm, reproductive heterosexuality attains legitimacy as the unique, natural choice for the postcolonial nation.

If race serves as the central organising principle of queer diasporic identity in *Ode to Lata*, class and caste represent the key issue of Rao's narrative. The dominant narrative hinges on cross-class and cross-caste love between Yudi, a journalist in his forties and, his young lover Milind, a dalit (untouchable) boy from an economically underprivileged background. Therefore, my discussion of *The Boyfriend* reflects the significance of reading the intersectional dimension of class, caste and non-normative sexuality in order to formulate a nuanced understanding of queerness in the postcolonial perspective. I argue that Yudi and Milind's same-sex union disrupts entrenched narratives of class and caste, even though the novel ends on their partial separation as Milind resigns to the wishes of his parents for a heterosexual marriage. Queer love interrogates the category of the postcolonial and negotiates a space for queer identity. Combining the analyses of mimicry and imitative structure by Bhabha and Butler, I demonstrate that the novel undermines the "natural" status of heterosexual marriage by aligning it with the mock marriage between Milind and Yudi. Their homosexual union is significant when considered in relation to marriage laws in India whereby ceremonies and customs act as agents of validation (Vanita, *Love's Rite* 68). Furthermore, I underline those examples of queer practices that challenge the legitimating impulse of nationalist and heteronormative discourses in India. One such instance is the queer resignification of Hindu myths whereby the text rewrites dominant Hindu national identity through an

appropriation of its cultural narratives. In yet another example, I highlight the linguistic strategy of the gay male subculture in Bombay to convey sexually ambivalent meanings.

I conclude the discussion of Rao's text by positing it against Mehta's film *Fire*, which became a site of contentious debates upon its release in 1996. In contrast to Rao's novel, Mehta's film provoked nationalist ire especially for its explicit lesbian content. The comparison between the two works makes evident the (Hindu) nationalist concerns of cultural purity, which partially explains the aggressiveness of the attacks on Mehta as an outsider due to her non-resident status in India. However, similar to my overall observation in the thesis that points to the gender privilege of the male protagonists, I proclaim that themes of gay male love and lesbian desire locate two distinct positions of representation, eliciting strikingly different responses. The nationalist agenda of labeling homosexuality a Western cultural import participates equally in securing and reinforcing gender hierarchy in India. My assessment of the critical reception of *Fire* and *The Boyfriend* reflects this convergence within the Hindu/postcolonial nation.

In the final Chapter, I engage with the colonial encounter in South Asia, which often appears as the primal scene in the field of colonial discourse analysis and post-colonial studies. I shift the critical focus of queer research towards an examination of colonial relations between men in order to address the issue of same-sex interracial desire in the colonial period. Through a reading of two significant texts, Leslie de Noronha's fictional narrative of colonial and postcolonial India, *The Dew Drop Inn* (1994), and Selvadurai's second novel set in colonial Sri Lanka, *Cinnamon Gardens* (1999), I provide a critical framework to comprehend the novels' contestations of certain predominant literary tropes of fiction of the Raj. In the process, they work against the master narrative of European imperialism, which evacuates South Asian

subjectivity even while attempting to portray it. Read against the vast literary output that placed India at the centre of fictional accounts of the British Empire, Noronha and Selvadurai's texts function as a reverse literary response, written from the South Asian perspective. By considering such South Asian narratives in relation to their British predecessors that include works by Rudyard Kipling, E.M. Forster and Paul Scott, I attempt to recover the queer South Asian subject as an agential formation rather than an object of inter-cultural desire. Simultaneously, the articulation and disarticulation of same-sex desire for the South Asian subject within colonial parameters point to the absence of sophisticated depictions of South Asians in imperialist/historical fiction. I establish the significance of Noronha and Selvadurai's response to male same-sex interracial desire during the Raj by tracing the recent interactions between queer and postcolonial scholarship. Borrowing from the theoretical framework of Christopher Lane and Joseph Bristow, I extend the analysis of colonial discourse and same-sex desire to incorporate postcolonial narratives that represent alternative sexualities in the colonial context.

In my reading of *The Dew Drop Inn* and *Cinnamon Gardens*, I move beyond the interpretation of colonialism as it appears in imperialist and historical fiction of the Raj. Rather, I delineate the postcolonial South Asian response to same-sex interracial desire, which like British colonialism itself, is neither self-evident nor singular. The contrast in the articulation or repression of queerness and the dissimilar relation to the colonial paradigm in the novels constitute the different ways in which postcolonial authors engage with colonialism. Although both the novels symbolically place the colonial law that prohibits homosexuality at the centre of their narrative tension, they employ alternative strategies to evoke and resolve the question of internalised homophobia that results from it. Where Selvadurai's text moves from homophobic culpability to a

gradual acceptance of queer identity, Noronha's narrative appends racial and genealogical signifiers onto homosexual guilt and ends in the rape and suicide of one of its central characters. Similarly, the authors draw upon and rework different literary tropes of British Anglo-Indian fiction. Noronha rereads the colonial obsession with rape as a key signifier of inter-cultural relations but adapts it to the enunciation of same-sex desire. Selvadurai reassesses Forster's invocation of friendship across the colonial divide in *A Passage to India* (1924). Additionally, I contend that Selvadurai's text reworks Sedgwick's seminal model of triangulated desire in the colonial setting. The novel locates the South Asian queer as a desiring subject, which defeats the colonial project of locating South Asian subjects solely as objects of desire. Crucially, such an arrangement brings the colonised female to the centre of the homoerotic crisis so that Selvadurai's protagonist chooses to remain with his wife instead of abandoning her. The novels instantiate the ways in which queer interracial desire intersects with earlier histories of colonialism. Referencing one of the key arguments of my thesis, I close the Chapter by suggesting that Noronha and Selvadurai's texts are critical to understand how the colonial past shapes the postcolonial present.

Back/Side Entry contributes to the growing number of studies that have only begun to map the queerness of South Asian cultural representations. Reflective of the progress of inter-disciplinary investigation in the academy, it harnesses the responsive energies of postcolonial and queer studies to intervene in the politics of the location of queerness. Re-positioning debates in both the theoretical domains of postcolonial and queer scholarship, it locates same-sex narratives from South Asia as crucial formulations in challenging Western annexation of queerness and the absence of antihomophobic inquiry in postcolonial frames. In this political conception, the dichotomy of the West and the rest appears a routine but tired assumption. Instead of providing a defini-

tive representation of South Asian queer fiction, I hope that my thesis impels further debates, discords and critical responses.

Chapter One

Growing Love: Queer Adolescence and the Crisis of Postcolonial Modernity in Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* and P. Parivaraj's *Shiva and Arun*

Parivaraj's *Shiva and Arun*

Rakesh Satyal's debut novel *Blue Boy* (2009) draws upon the popular representation of the Hindu deity Krishna as a blue-tinged child due to the dark hue of his skin shade. Kiran Sharma, the young Indian protagonist of Satyal's story set in the US, re-memorialises Krishna's visual image for his diasporic parents by posing as a reincarnation of the god and covering his face in blue tones. Kiran's masquerade as Krishna provides a space that allows him to express, comprehend and construct his non-normative gendered position without social reprimand. The queer sacred legitimates his fluid gender identity that his parents attempt to suppress and the story elegantly folds into the Indian American boy's embrace of Hindu rituals that he loathes throughout the novel.

Kiran's narrative is significant in terms of establishing the site of childhood and adolescence as an agential category. It provides a critical point of departure for a queer reading of adolescence that this Chapter offers. His drag-act as the blue divinity references the numerous accounts of gender crossings in Hindu writings in general. The child's appropriation of the multifarious Krishna myths signals the expansive queer interpretive frames that inform the domain of religious narratives in South Asia. In one such instance in *The Mahabharata*, Krishna transforms into a woman and spends the night with Prince Aravan. Further, within Hindu tradition, Krishna often embodies the double manifestation of the celestial as well as the human. He is represented as the

“supreme divine principle” (Pattanaik 11), “God with a capital G” (Doniger 25), and concomitantly, as the ideal child who exemplifies the imaginative spontaneity of childhood - the child that Kiran strives to become through the invocation of the myth. However, the child-god narrative disrupts conventional kinship structures through non-biological/adoptive filiation since foster parents raise Krishna. In addition, the romantic dalliance of child Krishna with adult maidens, especially Radha, contests the official representation of children as subjects without desire. The ideal child therefore appears as an already queer child who lies beyond normative regimes of representation that relegate childhood to “a carefully controlled embodiment of noncomplication” (Stockton 5). As a result, Kiran’s “childish” fictionalisation of Krishna disputes the enduring Eurocentric assumption that the sacred, the traditional or the mythological belong to the category of the non-modern and the non-political. Instead, the religious frame in Satyal’s book functions as the locus of queer agency that the non-normative child articulates.

This Chapter stages the fraught encounter between queer adolescence, adulthood and modernity in Shyam Selvadurai’s first novel *Funny Boy* (1994) and P. Parivaraj’s sole novel *Shiva and Arun* (1998). Whereas Selvadurai’s work engages with the narrative of unconventional childhood and adolescence, Parivaraj’s story addresses the question of queer adolescence and its continuation as well as disruption in adulthood. Set in Sri Lanka in the late 1970s, *Funny Boy* recounts the gay childhood and adolescence of Arjie Chelvaratnam, the son of an affluent Tamil family. The narrative comprises of six stories, which focus on Arjie’s relationship with a particular character that is represented as “subaltern in terms of race, sexuality or gender” (Rao, “Because Most People” 118). Documenting the Tamil/ Sinhala interethnic rifts, the novel culminates in the 1983 riots that force the Chelvaratnam family to seek refuge in Canada. Parivaraj’s

work narrates the queer experience of two adolescent boys in a small town of South India and frames their choices of acceptance/confrontation of sexuality as coming-out stories. It relates the differing trajectories of the protagonists, Shiva and Arun, in comprehending non-normative sexual desire. Although Selvadurai's novel has received much critical attention, Parivaraj's book has been largely neglected by scholarly analyses. I suggest that the two narratives are significant in the manifold ways in which the materialisation of queer subjectivity in South Asia forms a vexed relationship to the category of the modern. In this regard, gay adolescence literalises as a metaphor such that the novels mark the "queer" coming of age of postcolonial South Asian fiction. Deploying Dipesh Chakrabarty's seminal critique of modernity as a Eurocentric concept in *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2000), I contend that representations of non-normative desire in adolescence and adulthood in the South Asian context, as depicted in the novels, inevitably encompass a complex debate about the status of modernity in postcolonial spaces. Modernity refers to those elements of temporal distinctions, which conventionally appear in opposition to the past, the old and the traditional. I argue that examining South Asian adolescence through the lens of queerness subverts durable Western definitions of modernity and tradition that systematically reproduce a Eurocentric bias. Both the novels explore questions of modernity whereby queer adolescence and adulthood in South Asia appear inextricably interlocked with the experience of postcolonial modernity. Aligning queerness to postcolonial sites reveals a complex resignification of class, caste, ethnicity and religion and therefore, in my reading of Selvadurai and Parivaraj, I attempt to dispute the category of modernity itself.

In his influential critique of historicism, Chakrabarty decentres the "first in Europe, then elsewhere" structure of global historical time" (7). He argues against the

European and imitative, postcolonial rehearsed ideas of political modernity based on “stagist, historicist distinctions between the premodern or the nonmodern and the modern” (9). Addressing the absences and inadequacy of the European master narrative of universalism to engage meaningfully with the particularities of modernity in India, his project of “provincializing” Europe envisages a contestation of the category of the modern:

To attempt to provincialize this “Europe” is to see the modern as inevitably contested, to write over the given and privileged narratives of citizenship other narratives of human connections that draw sustenance from dreamed-up pasts and futures where collectivities are defined neither by the rituals of citizenship nor by the nightmare of “tradition” that “modernity” creates. (46)

The embedded binaries of tradition/modernity, old/new and non-modern/modern acquire renewed sustenance through an assumed linear notion of time and history, which configures Europe/the West at the centre of time and modernity. In this Eurocentric reading of History, the West impropriates the discourse of newness by positioning Western events like the French Revolution, the secularisation of religion, the Industrial Revolution and the recent fall of the Berlin Wall, to name but a few, as key factors in the development of political modernity in the world. Such universalising assumptions of Europe as the originary social, institutional and economic formation simultaneously imbricate the postcolonial Third World in teleological narratives of development and progress, and function as “a measure of the cultural distance ... between the West and the non-West” (7). In this arrangement, the Third World often follows the political/social/scientific advancement that Europe and the West initiate. Chakrabarty’s project contests the association of epithets such as non-modern, developing, non-secular

and traditional to define aspects of “political modernity” with specific reference to South Asia. By seeking to decentre Europe, it provides a “plural history of power” through “radically questioning the nature of historical time” such that South Asian discursive praxes are not made to signify Europe’s “earlier” phases of development (15).

Considered in relation to global queer paradigms, Chakrabarty’s challenge to Euro-American “modernity” bears critical significance in terms of temporal distinctions that delineate the West as a progressive/modern site of homosexual emancipation because of its visible queer movements. In such readings, the Third World/non-West embodies, as Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé and Martin Manalansan IV observe, “a premodern, pre-political, non-Euro-American queerness” that must follow Western identity categories “in order to attain political consciousness, subjectivity, and global modernity” (5-6). Further, the deployment of queerness as a marker of Western modernity is documented and critiqued by Cindy Patton in her informed analysis of lesbian and gay rights in Taiwan. She explains how queer human rights discourse becomes complicit with a masculinist agenda of nationalism (195-200). Given the persistence of the discourse whereby non-Western discursive formations appear non-modern,¹ Chakrabarty’s displacement of the Western “stagist” conception of historical time as uncritical linear movement becomes particularly apposite to comprehend the emerging queer discourse in South Asia that does not necessarily emanate from Euro-American queerness. I contend that Selvadurai and Parivaraj utilise queer South Asian adolescence as a focal point to disrupt Eurocentric formulations of tradition and modernity. The protagonists of *Funny Boy* and *Shiva and Arun* appear as sexual subjects and thus challenge the

1. In similar regard, Purnima Bose analyses the collusion of capitalism, the cosmetic industry and American feminism in coercing the purportedly oppressed women of Afghanistan into what she terms as “imperial modernity” (“Humanitarian Intervention”).

conventional Western view of “oriental” boys as available objects of desire even though in Selvadurai’s narrative neo-colonial forms of sexual exploitation become visible. In this framework, queer adolescence symbolically represents the shift towards self-definition of the young and modern decolonised nations.

A growing cohort of queer scholars is now re-examining and disputing the Western narrative of historical time as organised on the principle of linearity. Gayatri Gopinath, for instance, develops the notion of a queer South Asian diaspora “as a conceptual apparatus that poses a critique of modernity and its various narratives of progress” thus unsettling the colonial construction of Third World sexualities as “anterior, pre-modern and in need of Western political development” (*Impossible Desires* 12). Similarly, Heather Love explicitly links queerness to Chakrabarty’s study, noting that since queer identities often appear as “a backward race” and “modernity’s backward children”, queer theorists must “take exception to idea of a linear, triumphalist view of history” (3-7).² Also, Judith Halberstam’s work on queer temporality demonstrates that the “paradigmatic markers of life experience—namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death” function as a heteronormative regime, indubitably informed by strict classification of bio-temporality – a temporality that queer time throws into disarray (2). Finally, Kathryn Bond Stockton’s recent analysis of childhood and “its intimate relations with queerness” interrupts “the vertical, forward-motion metaphor of growing up” in twentieth-century literature (11). Borrowing from these sophisticated queer readings, I suggest that the novels provide a complex terrain of non-normative representation whereby same-sex desire in adolescence in the South Asian context prompts an interrogation of the category of modernity in postcolonial geography.

2. Angus Gordon’s critique of the narrative structure of coming-out stories echoes, in many ways, Love’s focus on early texts of homosexual desire. Analysing ‘closetedness’ as a significant component of coming-out accounts, Gordon challenges the “temporal logic” of being ‘out’ as “one of total and unequivocal liberation” (316).

Selvadurai and Parivaraj's narratives raise concerns over the status of postcolonial modernity through a process of interrogation of queer adolescence in South Asia. Adolescence as a category of identity between childhood and the adult stage is, as Jeffrey P. Dennis remarks, "a product of modernity" because it appeared during the capitalist formation of the early twentieth century (4). In fiction, queer identity construction specifically hinges on teenage representations that produce the oft-celebrated genre of coming-out narratives since "most texts describe a boy in his *early teens* from a middle class home" (Saxey 40, emphasis added). Although working within the parameters of the Western coming-out story, *Funny Boy* and *Shiva and Arun* rework the narrative of adolescent identity-in-crisis from the South Asian perspective. As the protagonists struggle with their respective closets, the novels signal a larger crisis of postcolonial definition of modernity, which refuses to be subsumed under Western classification of modern/non-modern binary, and simultaneously documents the difficulty of articulating queer subjectivity in the multiply-severed contexts of language, regional and ethnic identity, class and religion. If the novels represent the birth of modern queer subjectivity in South Asia, then this emergence carefully distances itself from any Eurocentric discourse.

The dates of publication of *Funny Boy* and *Shiva and Arun* illustrate one of the several ways in which questions of postcolonial modernity coalesce with queer subjectivity. Written in the last decade of the twentieth century, the novels become a defining moment in queer fiction from South Asia. Although Vikram Seth's novel *A Suitable Boy* (1994) figures the theme of covert homosexual liaison between the characters Maan and Firoz, *Funny Boy* and *Shiva and Arun* were the first English-language novels about Sri Lanka and India to feature openly gay male protagonists. Considered as a "work of the future" (Prakrti, qtd. in Lesk 31), *Funny Boy*, like Parivaraj's novel, places the issue

of homosexual desire firmly within the field of postcolonial literature in English. In this regard, the authors re-orientate South Asian fiction for the new/modern twenty-first century by conjoining it with concerns of sexual orientation. In terms of Anglo-American literature, Eve K. Sedgwick's discussion of *Billy Budd* (1891) and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) locates the "historical moment" at the turn of the twentieth century when "a modern homosexual identity and a modern problematic of sexual orientation could be said to date" (*Between Men* 91). Selvadurai and Parivaraj rearrange this "modern problematic of sexual orientation" in a postcolonial configuration. Their novels re-enact the spectacle of the "turn-of-the-century male homo/heterosexual definitional panic" in South Asian fiction (167).

The coming-out narrative is closely linked to a definitional panic in both the novels. For all the three protagonists, the realisation of their homosexuality (identity-in-crisis) is embodied as a crisis of postcolonial modernity in terms of language. Arjie, Shiva and Arun attempt to formulate a critical vocabulary for their queerness. Although written in English, Selvadurai and Parivaraj's queer fiction signals the inability of English as a language to articulate the several positioned South Asian queer subjectivity. A similar postcolonial crisis of language occurs in Deepa Mehta's English-language film *Fire* (1996) where the two protagonists falter to find a word for lesbianism in their mother tongue. Similarly, when asked by his brother Chitti whether he is a "homo," Arun responds: "That's a foreign brand name Chitti. I don't like it, but o.k. it's one way to describe me" (Parivaraj 152). Although spoken in English, the conversation between the brothers becomes symptomatic of the expropriation of English as an alien, non-Indian language. "Foreign brand name" also points to the commodification of "gay" identities in Western capitalist systems, which the South Asian queer subject runs the risk of replicating. Therefore, Arun's response mediates a careful distance between local

and global constructions of queer identity. The absence of a more appropriate term for his homosexuality prompts Arun to define himself as “a man who loves men” (152). Shiva and his friend Abdullah arrive at the same conclusion about their sexual preference. They define themselves in contrast to the Western construct of a homosexual identity as men “*who loved men*” (116, italics in original). The urgency of describing his queerness becomes even more importunate when Arun’s father confronts him on the question of marriage. Connecting homosexuality to effeminacy and paedophilia, the patriarch calls him a *chamma chacka* and disowns him (149). As a literal translation, *chamma chacka* implies that Arun is an effeminate man who has a penchant for cross-dressing. Again, Arun’s retort – “I just don’t want to get married because my sexual preference is for men not women” (150) – invariably affirms the critical significance of self-definition.

The ending of both the novels enacts the historical contingency of postcolonial South Asia whereby punitive legal measures remain in place against homosexual activity. Shiva’s marriage, imposed upon him by his father, ultimately leads to his suicide in *Shiva and Arun* and Arjie’s imminent emigration to Canada, expedited due to the interethnic riots at the end of *Funny Boy*, results in his separation from his boy-lover Shehan. In his examination of Selvadurai’s narrative therefore, Andrew Lesk laments the unavailability of a Western-style identity politics of homosexuality in Sri Lanka. For him, “despite its cultural Westernization, [Sri Lanka] does not favour the liberating sexual alternates” (35). In addition, Arjie’s cross-gender identification and alliances with the ethnic and racial others of Sri Lankan society throughout the novel appear flawed since they fail to re-conceptualise the nation to include homosexuality. As he argues, a certain “sense of Western modernity and its attendant emancipatory trappings is ... most underdeveloped, and so it remains difficult to imagine how subaltern cross-

identifications might work” (36). He adds that “clearly such sympathetic relationships, in re-forming an existing postcolonial body politic, would be welcome—if the expression of homosexuality as homosexuality could even publicly exist in 1980s Sri Lanka as a recent identity construction” (36, italics in original). Lesk’s trenchant critique of Sri Lanka epitomises an orientalising tendency to make Euro-America the central point of reference in queer practices. In his crucial work on Arab sexuality titled *Desiring Arabs* (2007), Joseph Massad rightly cautions against reading purportedly “Eastern” sexuality through the conceptual frames of Western categorisation, what he terms the “internalization of Western sexual ontology” (40).³ Although Massad’s text disallows agential Middle Eastern sexuality, it opens up critical re-evaluation of existing paradigms of sexuality. Certainly, a discussion of the Third World involves a consideration of global exchanges, or, as Edward Said puts it, “obviously we cannot discuss the non-Western world as disjunct from developments in the West” (*Culture and Imperialism* 325). However, Lesk’s argument implicitly legitimates patronising assumptions built on a systematic dichotomy of the “progressive” West and the “underdeveloped” (both economically and culturally) Third World.⁴

In contrast, Gopinath’s reading of *Funny Boy* rightly denounces the claim of equating the West with queer emancipation:

the mapping of homoeroticism onto the national space of Sri Lanka also challenges the implicit imperialist assumptions underlying conventional coming out narratives that locate the Third World as a site of sexual op-

3. Neville Hoard also notes the racial and imperial inflections on the category of the “modern” homosexual. He argues that it is not “possible to understand the initial theories of modern male homosexual identity in the West without looking at the imperial and neo-imperial contexts of such productions” (133).

4. Greg A. Mullins’s reflection on US human rights discourses works as a counter-critique of Lesk’s discussion. Mullins connects novels like *Funny Boy* to the significance of including homosexuality in framing US policies on asylum. Unlike Lesk, Mullins places postcolonial Third World at the centre of internal US politics (145).

pression that must be left behind in order to realize a liberated gay subjectivity (*Impossible Desires* 176).

Lesk's argument therefore does not adequately engage with the specificity of the queer subject in postcolonial South Asia. By fixing the terms of modernity as a Western prerogative, it forecloses the possibility of a queer discourse arising from South Asia. It exemplifies certain *hauteur* apparent in the teleological developmental trope of globalising queer discourses whereby non-Western/postcolonial societies *must* reproduce Euro-American (frequently imperialising) categories of modern sexual subjectivity.

Although Lesk's critique serves to highlight the political inscription of global (Western) and local (South Asian) sites, it implicitly raises questions about postcolonial modernity and its relation to queerness in both the novels. Queer adolescence becomes central to what I term the crisis of postcolonial modernity since concern about identity and identification that underline both same-sex narratives and the "in-between" period of adolescence interpellates the Eurocentric binary of tradition/modernity in several ways. In other words, questions of caste, class, ethnicity, religion and language become intertwined with the representation of South Asian queer adolescence so that the identity crises of the protagonists mimic and inevitably problematise the status of modernity in postcolonial spaces.

Following the convention of coming-out accounts, *Funny Boy* and *Shiva and Arun* frame the narratives within the distinctive component of exploration of the gender binary that differentiates the queer story from other non-queer fiction. Simultaneously, they depart from these Western models through an explicit cross-gender identification/solidarity, often absent in the former. For instance, in Edmund White's much-acclaimed work *A Boy's Own Story* (1982), the narrator's early realisation of his unconventional behaviour as a "sissy" serves as a key signifier of the narrator's homo-

sexuality (7). As an identifiable physical trait therefore, effeminacy is policed and reprimanded and becomes central in the struggle to “love a man but not to be a homosexual” at the end of White’s novel (238). In her critical investigation of coming-out fiction, Esther Saxey ascribes this suppression of effeminacy to “femme-phobia” or centrality of the “plot of concealment and revelation” whereby “it is common for a text to present a protagonist who isn’t overtly feminine or camp” (46). In this respect, White’s narrator embodies a particular misogyny, especially regarding his mother, that several scholars attribute to gay male representations. However, both Shiva in *Shiva and Arun* and Arjie in *Funny Boy* deflect from the privilege of their masculine gender to produce a bond with other-gendered subjects of shared oppression. In a patriarchal family, Shiva’s sister Shanti is “more than a friend—she was his confidant” and Shiva is the sole person who is willing to help Shanti in the household chores when their mother is ill (21). Shiva, Shanti and their mother constitute a triad, resisting the father’s demand to send Shiva to a Sanskrit school in order to become a Hindu priest like him and his elder son, Govinda (22). For Arjie, cross-gender identification centres on the transgression of the gender binary, when he visits his grandparents with his siblings and cousins each weekend. While the boys play cricket in the front garden, Arjie “seemed to have gravitated naturally” to the girls’ territory near the kitchen as it promises “the potential for the free play of fantasy” (3). This feminine space enables him to enact the roles of the “much-beleaguered heroine of these tales” of Cinderella or Thumbelina (4)

Arjie’s cross-gender identification secures its completion in the game of “bride-bride” when he dresses up in “the clothes of the bride” (4). His transformation into a bride represents identification with the real of the feminine and the move beyond conventional gender identities. It marks a transgressive strategy to dismantle the rigid masculine/feminine binary:

I was able to leave the constraints of myself and ascend into another, more brilliant, more beautiful self, a self to whom this day was dedicated, and around whom the world, represented by my cousins putting flowers in my hair, draping the palu, seemed to revolve. It was a self magnified, like the goddesses of the Sinhalese and Tamil cinema, larger than life; and like them ... I was an icon, a graceful, benevolent, perfect being upon whom the adoring eyes of the world rested. (4-5)

His makeover as the “graceful, benevolent, perfect being” exemplifies what Butler calls “the gay appropriation of the feminine” which “works to multiply possible sites of application of the term, to reveal the arbitrary relation between the signifier and the signified, and to destabilize and mobilize the sign” (*Gender Trouble* 156). As Gopinath comments, “Arjie’s performance of queer femininity radically reconfigures hegemonic nationalist and diasporic logic, which depends on the figure of the woman as a stable signifier of “tradition”” (*Impossible Desires* 174). By appropriating the traditional accoutrement of the bride, Arjie’s queer performance unsettles the relation between “tradition” and “the figure of the woman.” His juxtaposition of the masculine (“constraints of myself”) and the feminine (the “more brilliant, more beautiful self”) aims to discredit the heterosexist impulse of interpreting gender as a continuation of the sexed body. Furthermore, his claim that he “was able to leave the constraints of myself” displays an awareness of the expectations of the social norm. The norm regulates his gender performance in strict accordance with his biological sex and thus demands a masculine identification from him. However, his metamorphosis into a female celebrity explodes the coherence of the norm so that he is not, as Butler argues in another context, “in any way produced by the norm, and the norm is other, elsewhere” (*Undoing Gender* 69).

Arjie's hyperfeminine performance as the bride in the game is significant for the several ways in which it repositions the heteronormatively paired status of genders. He asserts that "in the hierarchy of bride-bride, the person with the least importance, less even than the priest and the page boys, was the groom" (6). The marginalisation of the groom patently undermines the very character of a heterosexual marriage based on the gender binary. In her analysis of the game, Gopinath contends that "the apparent non-performativity of masculinity" in the game "references both the unimportance of the groom and the hyperbolic femininity embodied by the figure of the bride, as well as the potentiality of a female same-sex eroticism that dispenses with the groom altogether" (*Impossible Desires* 171). Arjie's performance of the wedding sans groom thus challenges the very basis of heteronormativity in which the bride and the groom are the only possibilities of union. As I argue in Chapter 4, queer rehearsals of heterosexual unions counteract the fundamental cis-gender arrangements that underpin the institution of marriage. In addition, the girls' territory, which is "confined to the back garden and the kitchen porch," subverts the traditional spatial symbolic of gender roles since it stages the denaturalisation of the masculine/feminine axis (3). Sharanya Jayawickrama argues that it "becomes the site of a potentially radical imagining of gender identity and affiliation as Arjie's cross-dressing transforms it into a space where boys play brides" (127-128). Arjie's queer investment in the girls' territory renders it open to alternative possibilities of gender identification whereby sex and gender are not enscripted as identical categories and sex does not pre-define gender or gender identification

Selvadurai's representation of Arjie's participation in female spaces addresses the systematic disregard of affirmative narratives about effeminate boys in Western coming-out literature. Ken Corbett avers that "the existence of homosexual boys has until now either been silenced or stigmatized. Bullies identify sissies. Psychiatrists

identify sissy-boy syndromes” (108). Even within gay studies, Sedgwick identifies the stigmatised position of the effeminate boy as “the haunting abject of gay thought itself” (*Tendencies* 157). As a participant of the girls’ territory, Arjie bears the pejorative nickname of “girlie-boy”, given by his brother Diggy and becomes the object of repeated ridicule when forced to play cricket with the boys (25). However, Selvadurai empowers his protagonist with an intellect for acute analysis since Arjie is aware of Diggy’s opposition to their mother’s orders to include Arjie in the game. He decides to exploit the contradiction between Diggy’s wish and his mother’s stipulation to his advantage. When his name appears in the draw of the batsman, he refuses to be persuaded by Diggy to let their elder cousin bat first. His insistence on batting provokes Diggy’s violent temper and he is chased by Diggy across the field. For him, this incident “forever closed any possibility of entering the boys’ world again” and signals his re-entry into the girls’ territory (28).

Arjie’s successful attempt to obtain re-admission into the female world signifies an affirmative representation of the stigmatised effeminate boy. In his definition of “girlyboy”, Corbett states that ““girlyboy” captures the possibility that there may be forms of gender within homosexuality that contradict and *move beyond* the conventional categories of masculinity and femininity” (109-10, emphasis added). Arjie’s definite farewell to the boys’ world is such a “move beyond” the constraints of fixed gender identity whereby the adults compel him to identify with the ostensibly masculine site of cricket. Concurrently, his rejection of the sport emblematises a specific critique of colonial legacy in South Asia of which cricket, the English language and the education system are the most visible signifiers. Certainly then, the incident instantiates Arjie’s articulation of queer agency that operates by filling up the vacant space between authority and its execution.

The novels disrupt the traditional assumption of a naturalised link between heterosexuality and patriarchy through an implicit construction of queerness in opposition to the expectation of the father. Patriarchy fixes the terms in which sexual desire can be expressed and guarantees the continuation of heterosexuality through discourses and institutions such as marriage, reproduction, family and inheritance (see Halberstam 1-10). In other words, heteropatriarchy and heteronormalisation invariably function in tandem to deny the existence of a queer subject since “heterosexuality is integral to patriarchy” (Hennessy 24).⁵ This denial becomes more obvious when the queer subject is in a direct relation of subordination, such as the adolescent, so that the adult father appears as the key signifier of oppressive heteropatriarchy, embodying the threat to the non-normative identification of the queer teenager. The adolescents therefore construct their identity in an oppositional relation to their father. For instance, Shiva does not know “what his father really thought or felt about him” and therefore avoids him “because he would ask questions that always seemed difficult for a young person to answer” (Parivaraj 43, 20). He does not wish to follow the paternal occupation of being a priest but wants to go to college instead. For him, working as a priest is “not a real job” and, as mentioned earlier, with the support of his mother and Shanti, he defeats his father’s plans (46). For him, college entails “the first step out of this house, away from

5. In her analysis of K.J. Dover’s example of homosexuality in ancient Greece, Sedgwick interrogates the validity of the charge of homophobia in all patriarchal structures. She argues that although ancient Greece legitimated male homosexuality, patriarchal organisation of society was not necessarily undermined: “In fact, for the Greeks, the continuum between “men loving men” and “men promoting the interests of men” appears to have been quite seamless” (*Between Men* 4). She thus concludes that “while heterosexuality is necessary for the maintenance of any patriarchy, homophobia, against males at any rate, is not” (4). However, my argument incorporates the functioning of heteropatriarchy as “a social hierarchy overseen by high-status heterosexual men that entitles men to dominate women as well as nonheterosexual and other lower-status men” (Rogers and Garrett 39). Most modern societies, including contemporary South Asia, function on the double bind of heterosexuality and patriarchy, requiring both reproductive biological essentialism and homophobia in their service.

his father's domination" (26). The novel figures this escape from heteropatriarchy as a crucial site of sexual freedom and queer subjectivity. As he reminisces on the events of the "magic Wednesday" when his father grants him permission to study in a local college, Shiva "undid the buttons on his shorts and slowly masturbated himself" (31). Thus, the undermining of paternal authority is symbolically equated to the construction of (homo)sexuality.

Similarly, Arun, the second protagonist of the novel, shares a problematic relationship with his father. Their relationship culminates in an open conflict when Arun refuses to marry according to his father's wishes and openly declares his homosexuality at the point of transition from adolescence to adulthood. As a child, Arun is "at times proud of his father and at times a little embarrassed by things that he did" (89). Like Shiva, he does not follow the paternal profession although his younger brother Chitti "seemed to have no option but to join his father" as a building contractor (121). Arun's decision to continue his studies to become a teacher after his graduation becomes "a point of contention with his father" (121). However, in contrast to Shiva, Arun overtly challenges paternal authority by refusing to marry and moving out of the family home. In addition, the novel sutures subjects of shared oppression in a framework of solidarity through a trenchant critique of the father's wish to impose heterosexuality upon Arun. It ends with the powerful image of the inclusion of queer sexuality in the family structure and the marginalisation of the patriarch. Arun's sister Jyothi and his mother, who can be considered as conventional victims of patriarchy in terms of gender, forge a bond with Arun which contests the power of his father. The bond reconfigures the equation of power between the marginalised and the dominant. When Jyothi's marriage is organised by her father, she acquiesces on the condition that Arun be invited to the wedding: "I've refused to marry him unless I can invite you, and only if you come" (155). When Arun

suggests that his presence would be an embarrassment at the wedding, she replies: “If you don’t want me to get married, then don’t come” (156). In addition, Arun’s mother no longer communicates with their father: “Mother hasn’t talked to Dad since the day Chitti told her about you when you left. She doesn’t speak to him. She goes nowhere with him. Refuses to even give him a glass of water” (156). Although Arun’s decision to embrace his homosexuality disintegrates the family unit, Jyothi’s visit to Arun and their mother’s refusal to participate in the conventional patriarchal labour of serving “a glass of water” to her husband, highlights the exclusion of the patriarch from the family. The penultimate line of the novel further emphasises the importance of the alliance between the oppressed subjects of heteropatriarchy: “She (Jyothi) threw her arms around him and they laughed and laughed” (156). The intimate relation between the brother and the sister that was disrupted due to the patriarch’s wish to exclude queer identity from the family is regained in the gesture of Jyothi’s final embrace of her brother.

In *Funny Boy*, Arjie poses a direct threat to heteropatriarchy by his passion for cross-dressing and the relation with his father is based upon mutual avoidance. For Arjie, his father is “a distant figure (and) had very little effect on our everyday reality” (*Funny Boy* 157). Nevertheless, when the adults discover Arjie’s penchant for becoming the bride, the patriarch’s intervention re-establishes the heteronormative order. R. Raj Rao notes that

although the members of his extended family are not entirely orthodox , they still endorse male supremacy, with the father as the head of the family and bread-winner, and the mother as the wife submissive to his decisions and opinions even if she finds herself in disagreement with them.

(18)

Thus, his father's worry that Arjie may "turn out funny like that Rankotwera boy" and become "the laughing-stock of Colombo" prompts his mother to force Arjie to play cricket with the boys even though she is unable to comprehend her husband's anxiety (14). As Diana Fuss argues, heterosexuality requires "the language and law of ... protection" in order to attain the status of the "compulsory." It "secures its self-identity and shores up its ontological boundaries by protecting itself from what it sees as the continual encroachments of its contaminated Other, homosexuality" (2). The Rankotwera boy appears as the "contaminated other" and for his father, Arjie must be protected against such influences. Thus, he is rather pleased when his friend's son and his new employee Jegan befriends Arjie. For him, the absence of masculine identity, apparent in Arjie's unconventional activities such as playing with dolls and reading can be redressed in the company of a male influence like Jegan. He believes that policing Arjie's gender behaviour with the help of Jegan will favour Arjie's transition towards a normative gendered identity. He tells Jegan that "the main point is that I'm glad you're taking an interest in him. Maybe you'll help him outgrow this phase" (166). Therefore, Arjie's father embodies the threat of patriarchal homophobia in the novel such that queerness can only appear as a temporary chapter in the attainment of heteronormative adulthood.

Patriarchal homophobia manifests its control when Arjie's father withdraws Arjie from St. Gabriel's school and enrolls him in the Queen Victoria Academy, the school that his brother Diggy attends. Explaining his decision, he asserts that "the [Victoria] Academy will force you to become a man" (210). The paternal homophobic fear of Arjie's non-normative identity can only be overcome by calling to aid another "bastion of patriarchy," which is equally a "colonial vestige of the British public school system" (Pennell and Stephens 181). This apparatus of patriarchal control is the colonial-style all-boys school where, as Diggy warns Arjie, "either you take it like a man or the other

boys will look down upon you” (211). Diggy’s comment explicitly points to the hegemonic model of masculinity that the school deploys for the construction of boyhood/manhood of its pupils.⁶ It further deprivileges the natural status of heterosexuality and manliness by positioning them as acquired attributes. If, as Joseph Bristow states, following the Wilde Trials “effeminacy and empire ... stood in violent opposition” (11), then, like cricket, the Victoria Academy signals an uninterrupted link between heteropatriarchal norms and the colonial legacy of masculinity. Although Arjie submits to his father’s wish, the homosocial space of the institution allows him to embark on his first homosexual relationship with his classmate Shehan. The colonial/patriarchal enterprise of “becoming a man” is queered to reclaim the homosocial realm and re-signify it as a homosexual space.

Furthermore, the novel becomes a potent critique of gendered and social hierarchies. Like *Shiva and Arun*, it reinforces the alliance of queer subjects and women and concomitantly includes the other (both racial as well as ethnic) and the financially dispossessed. By placing Arjie at the centre of such associations, the novel effectively challenges the dominant order from a queer perspective. Arjie’s bond with Radha Aunty and his mother highlights the identification of the queer subject with the subjects of patriarchal subordination. The second story of the novel centres on Radha Aunty and her aborted attempt to love across the Tamil/Sinhalese ethnic divide. After pursuing her studies in the United States, she returns to Sri Lanka where she commences a romantic

6. The sociologist R.W. Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees [...] the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (77). He further contends that “oppression positions homosexual masculinities at the bottom of a gender hierarchy among men. Gayness, in patriarchal ideology, is the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity” (78). Arjie is certainly at the bottom of this hierarchy. For Diggy, his father and from the point of view of hegemonic masculinity, his “gayness is easily assimilated to femininity” (78).

liaison with a Sinhala boy, Anil. Arjie becomes a witness to the nascent affair between Radha Aunty and Anil as Radha Aunty dissimulates her visits to Anil under the pretence of caring for the young Arjie. As a transgressive subject herself, she becomes an ally to Arjie's transgression of the gender binary: "She painted my eyelids with blue shadow, put rouge on my cheeks, and even darkened a birthmark above my lip" (49-50). Arjie's bond with her enables him to comprehend that romantic love and family operate in an oppositional relation to each other since the Chelvaratnams impose an arranged marriage on Radha Aunty. Similarly, Arjie's identification with his mother develops beyond the "pleasure of watching Amma drape her sari" (15). In the third story of the novel, he witnesses once again the impossibility of a romantic union in the form of the adulterous liaison between his mother and her friend Daryl, a Sri Lankan burgher. Both the stories attest to the centrality of Arjie's observations as a privileged witness of the constraints of a patriarchal structure whereby romantic affection and love outside marriage for women systematically appear subservient to the demands of family. The stories serve to illustrate the radical potential of his later homosexual affair with Shehan, which like Radha Auntie's love, incorporates the vexed ethnic Tamil/Sinhalese divide.

Both Radha Aunty and Daryl Uncle represent the space of the unconventional in the novel. In her seminal analyses of the function of the avunculate for proto-gay children, Sedgwick contends that

because aunts and uncles (in either narrow or extended meanings) are adults whose intimate access to children needn't depend on their own pairing or procreation, it's very common, of course, for some of them to have the office of representing nonconforming or nonreproductive sexualities to children ... the space for nonconformity carved out by the avun-

culate goes beyond the important provision of role models for proto-gay kids. (*Tendencies* 63).

Radha Auntie's interethnic relationship with Anil acts as a template for Arjie's Tamil/Sinhala homosexual affair with Shehan. At the same time, Daryl Uncle's bachelor status signifies the possibility of "nonreproductive sexualities" for Arjie. Thus, Arjie's close relationship with Radha Aunty and Daryl Uncle suggests the construction of a "space for nonconformity" for Arjie.

Selvadurai also avers the urgency of building an alliance between queer subjects and the marginal other by framing Arjie in an emotional bond with Daryl Uncle and Jegan. Recent debates in queer studies recognise the significance of such an "effective coalitional politics" which connects "across categories and sites with ... diverse positionalities and strategies" (Cruz-Malavé and Manalansan 9). Daryl Uncle and Jegan represent the "diverse positionalities" in relation to the hierarchical order of Sri Lankan society. Daryl Uncle remains an outsider in his home country, as he is a burgher whose "ancestors were Dutch" (116). The political upheaval of postcolonial Sri Lanka forced Daryl Uncle to live in Australia as the government imposed Sinhala as the national language. Daryl Uncle's affectionate relationship with Arjie develops through a similar interest in reading, which Arjie's father discredits as a feminine activity (104). The novel critiques Arjie's father's tendency to police Arjie's non-normative behaviour by explicitly substituting the biological father-son relation with that of Daryl Uncle and Arjie. Arjie cannot "help comparing him to my father, who, with his balding head, thin legs, slight paunch, and abrupt way of talking to Amma, cut a poor figure next to him" (116). Arjie's attachment to Daryl Uncle displaces the essential nature of biological affiliation and challenges the primacy of father-son reproductive kinship within heteronormative frames in South Asia.

Crucially, Jegan's relationship with Arjie provides a trenchant commentary on the neo-colonial sexual objectification of South Asian boys for Western tourists. The logic of capitalism and patriarchy interconnects in the novel and constitutes the dominant discourse that consents to sexual exploitation in postcolonial Colombo. Jegan, who is fatherless, is an internal economic migrant who comes to Colombo in search of work and Arjie's father employs him in his hotel because Jegan's father was his friend. As mentioned earlier, Arjie's father understands that Jegan's masculine influence will somehow permit Arjie to overcome what he considers a deficit of masculinity. However, Jegan refuses to condone the paternal position: "I don't think there's anything wrong with him," Jegan said" (166). The paternal insistence on cis-gender identification has an adverse impact as Arjie's bond with Jegan is reinforced after the incident: "Jegan was the first one ever to defend me, and for this I grew even more devoted to him" (166). Moreover, Jegan becomes the agent of protest against the capitalist-heteropatriarchal regime, which denies the existence of a queer subject but endorses paedophilia for monetary gains. When Jegan interrogates Arjie's father about the presence of Western tourists and young local boys from the village in their hotel, Arjie's father reduces the boys to consumer commodities like the "natural resources" of Sri Lanka, thus aligning with the capitalist mode of market economy (171). Jegan's "stern expression" indicates his strong disagreement with his employer and implicitly calls into question the interconnection between global, capitalist and heteropatriarchal systems (171). Arjie's close association with Jegan, Daryl Uncle, Radha Aunty and Amma therefore becomes exemplary of the potential of solidarity between marginalised subjects within dominant regimes.

In contrast to Western coming-out narratives, homosexuality becomes intelligible as one of the discursive sites of identification in its engagement with issues of class,

caste, religion and ethnicity in both the novels. Comparing White's novel to *Funny Boy*, Gopinath suggests that sexuality in the latter is not "privileged as the singular site of radical difference and the narrator's sole claim to alterity," which includes "ethnic identity and forced migration" (*Impossible Desires* 173). The newness/modernity of Parivaraj and Selvadurai's texts lies in the contestation of dominant paradigms of class (master-servant), religion (Hindu-Muslim) and ethnic difference (Tamil-Sinhala) in South Asia since all three protagonists experience their initial homosexual encounters with boys across class, caste and ethnic divide. Shiva's awareness of same-sex desire for his aunt's houseboy, Chinni, Arun's sexual awakening with the servant Krishna, and Arjie's renewed attraction to Shehan point to the interpellation in terms of class, caste and religious difference for the queer subject. Informed materialist critiques of queer politics underscore the immediacy of addressing inequalities of class in queer discourses.

Marxist scholars argue for the inclusion of the category of class in queer debates so that queer formations can truly become agents of transformative criticism (Seidman 139-61; Fraser 107-10). In his critical assessment of the erasure of the dynamics of class in queer studies, Donald Morton argues that "for queer theory, class conflict turns out to be just another set of problems, marginal at best, which have no determinate relation to sexual politics" (475). Similarly, Hennessy deplors "the formation of a gay/queer imaginary in both corporate and academic circles (that) also rests on the suppression of a class analysis" (139). However, the specificity of class, caste, religious and ethnic difference in India and Sri Lanka become central to the queer coming-out narratives in the novels. Same-sex desire and homosexual discovery are systematically structured around the severances of class, caste, religion and ethnicity, which characterise the postcolonial South Asian nations.

Shiva's foremost same-sex experience with Chinni critiques the organisation of a society/nation based on the dichotomy of master-servant and Brahmin-untouchable. As a Brahmin, whose father is a notable priest, Shiva is compelled to understand that Chinni, the untouchable and the servant, does not belong to the realm of humanity. He accompanies his aunt to her friend's home, but she asks him to return since "there is no one in the house" even though Chinni minds the residence (Parivaraj 48). Shiva realises that "Chinni wasn't a proper person or something" (48), however the novel contests the master-servant trope by staging the attraction of Shiva's desire for him. At home, when Chinni asks Shiva if he could bathe with him, Shiva is keenly aware of the inequalities of caste and class that separate them. He wonders, "Why in a so-called free India did people still accept it?" (50). Attempting to pulverise the class barriers and referencing the end of Hanif Kureishi's screenplay *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), Shiva bathes with Chinni and they dry each other, immediately after their mutual ejaculation. Crucially, the emphasis on their same-sex experience in the episode defeats the potency of the master-servant hierarchy and re-arranges their roles in a more egalitarian framework.

Parivaraj connects Shiva's desire for Chinni to the project of dislocating polarised class and caste boundaries. For Shiva, transgressive desire operates as a mode of contesting the dominant/nationalist practice of the strict segregation of castes such that queerness challenges both sexual and social norms. Shiva and Chinni's first experience of oral sex unsettles the impervious distinction between the two castes that occupy the highest and the lowest rung on the caste spectrum in India - the Brahmins and the Untouchables. As I argue in Chapter 4, the disruption of the master/servant and the Brahmin/Untouchable dichotomy functions as a key feature of homosexual relations in fiction that threaten the coherence of a national(ist) narrative. Shiva is aware that "it

was just so contrary to everything a Brahmin learnt” but, “in an instant, the sensation of what was happening overran all the old taboos!” (56). Shiva’s assertion that the “old taboos” were “somehow imposed by the elders and parents” condemns the perpetuation of rigid caste politics through the device of an inter-generational control (50). His repeated caresses of Chinni’s body “from the balls ... around the pubic ‘nest’ and up through the hair that ran in a fine line to Chinni’s throat” defy the existing norms of social segregation (56). Thus, Shiva’s discovery of non-normative sexuality is closely aligned to the refusal to accept imposed constructs of social hierarchy.

Similar to Shiva’s contestation of immobile class categories, Arun’s sexual involvement with the servant Krishna transcends the limitations of the master-servant trope. The name Krishna not only signals the interimplication of queerness and religion as I have shown above, but in the context of the novel, associates the divine with the underprivileged/untouchable class. Arun’s encounter with Krishna explicitly threatens the hierarchy of a structural relation based on authority and subordination. Their first experience commences on the conversation about “handpumping” but mutual masturbation leads to sharing a bed together and falling asleep in an embrace (92). Contrary to Shiva and Chinni’s experience of oral sex, Arun and Krishna reverse the roles of the servant performing fellatio on the master. Arun (the supposed master) lets Krishna’s (the alleged servant’s) sperm flow into his mouth before it runs “out of his mouth and onto the floor” (97). The flow of the bodily fluid in Arun’s mouth suggests the inversion of the master-servant roles whereby the master serv(ic)es the servant. Arun’s subsequent gesture of fetching “two glasses of water” secures the absolute subversion of the master-servant binary (99). It uncovers the fictive character of social hierarchy and affirms the queer subject’s capacity to effectively contest as well as subvert it.

In *Funny Boy*, ethnic difference between Arjie and Shehan Soyza functions as a parallel subtext to Arjie's developing sense of his own queerness. In his assessment of Sri Lankan politics, Tariq Jazeel points to the "racialised polarisation of identity politics" in which Sinhalese and Tamil ethnicities "become the primary markers of identity" (232). In relation to the novel, Minoli Salgado observes a "reinforcement of constructed, essentialised ethnicities," bearing a direct contrast to Arjie's fluid gender identity (122). However, Jayawickrama explains that "as Arjie's emergent consciousness of gendered and ethnicized identity develops, the personal and the political become increasingly inextricable" (124). Arjie and Shehan's same-sex romantic union ironically reflects the dismemberment of the Sri Lankan state based on ethnic division and the last two stories place the question of queer adolescence at the centre of interethnic disharmony. As Stephen O. Murray suggests, "the interethnic dynamics are complex with plenty of erotic attraction across the increasingly widening ethnic chasm" (115).

On the first day of Arjie's arrival at Victoria Academy, a fellow pupil, Salgado, questions Arjie's presence in a Sinhalese class even though he is Tamil. When Arjie explains that he has always attended Sinhalese classes and "didn't even speak Tamil" (216), Salgado dismisses the explanation and commands Arjie to go to the Tamil class. Although Shehan is Sinhalese, he comes to Arjie's rescue by using the rhetoric of the Sinhalese who want Tamils to assimilate: "But Salgado, aren't you always saying that Tamils should learn Sinhalese?" (216). The increasingly violent interethnic disharmony is responsible for the separation of classes in the school. This divide is manifest in the incident that Arjie witnesses where Salgado and his friends corner a Tamil boy in a cubicle of the toilets in the school. Shehan explains to Arjie that the school is divided into two factions, the supporters of Black Tie, the principal who desires both Tamil and Sinhalese pupils to co-exist and the followers of Lokubandara, the vice principal who

wishes for a more “traditional, vernacular education” with emphasis on Buddhist-Sinhala heritage (220). The school becomes a microcosm of the competing ethnic versions of the nation. Shehan’s protection of Arjie at Victoria Academy and Arjie’s eventual homoerotic attraction towards Shehan who “has sex with the head prefect” in the toilets reveals the inability of the nation to control interethnic romance (232). The centrality of queer adolescent romance in the “politics of the school” directly challenges the ethnic polarisation of the nation (220).

Like Arun, Arjie subverts the relation between established hierarchies. Belonging to a Tamil minority, he needs the support of Shehan to survive in the Sinhala-dominated environment of the school. Arjie’s dependence on Shehan at the beginning of their acquaintance results in an adolescent “homoromance,” to borrow a term from Dennis. As their homoromance develops into a sexual relationship (with their first homosexual encounter in the garage of the Chelvaratnam house), it becomes implicitly dependent on a mutual offer of service and help. For instance, Shehan’s long hair often results in unjust punishment by the principal Black Tie. Arjie realises that “powerful people like Black Tie or my father ... got to decide what was right or wrong” (274). Arjie redresses the wrongs done to Shehan by disrupting the balance of power. Black Tie needs Arjie to recite poems at the school prize-giving event. As a Tamil, he appeals to the ethnic solidarity with Arjie. However, Black Tie’s cruelty towards both Shehan and Arjie (punished and beaten when Arjie does not learn the poems properly) makes Arjie wonder about ethnic loyalty:

I thought of Mr. Lokubandara and the way Salgado and his friends has assaulted that Tamil boy. I thought of the way Black Tie had beaten both Shehan and me. Was one better than the other? I didn’t think so. Al-

though I did not like what Mr. Lokubandra stood for, at the same time I felt that Black Tie was no better. (247)

Arjie's resistance to Black Tie's authoritarian management of the school consists of shaming Black Tie in public by consciously mixing up the verses of the poem on the day of the school gathering. For Arjie, the act becomes an attempt to seek justice for the unfair treatment of Shehan at the hands of Black Tie. When questioned by Shehan on the motive behind his act, Arjie replies, "I did it for you ... I couldn't bear to see you suffer anymore" (284). Thus, Arjie's disloyalty to ethnicity and family members who are disappointed at his failed recital reinforces the bond between Shehan and him. Concurrently, it serves to redirect their relation towards reciprocal dependence. Like his earlier act of cross-gender identification, it is constitutive of queer subjective agency, which disrupts imposed ethnic affiliation.

Interethnic divide is represented in terms of interreligious disharmony in *Shiva and Arun*. In recent years, the Hindu/Muslim binary has appeared as the most virulent form of internal division in South Asia and therefore the novel represents this rift by suggesting the impossibility of interreligious friendship. When Shiva invites Abdullah to his house, he is aware that "even the thought that a Muslim might step into the house would be enough to start a major ritual cleaning" (70). However, Shiva's sexual encounter with Abdullah re-enacts as well as critiques the schism of Hindu/Muslim disunity in South Asia. Prior to his sexual liaison with Abdullah, Shiva believes that Abdullah's religion forbids him to have sexual contact with men. When the cousin of Shiva's brother-in-law, Ramu, informs Shiva that Abdullah was involved in a homosexual encounter with him, Shiva is rather surprised: "I thought that being a Muslim he wouldn't be interested" (42). Shiva's comment follows the dictates of the dominant national imaginary to frame questions of sexuality in terms of religion whereby the

Muslim minority must appear as occupying an oppositional position to the Hindu majority even though both communities police homosexuality equally. For instance, both Shiva and Abdullah succumb to the family pressures to marry as adults. However, as the narrative develops, Shiva and Abdullah's sexual union erodes the significance of religious disharmony. Shiva experiences his first anal intercourse with Abdullah and despite the demands of their respective families to adhere to strict religious observance, both Shiva and Abdullah share a "Friday night happiness almost every week since the first time" (73). As Shiva speculates about their love in the future: "it would be an example of communal harmony—the son of a fat, overbearing, tyrannical Hindu pujari, and the son of an equally tyrannical and fanatic Muslim, living openly together as men who loved men" (74). Thus, their doubly forbidden love symbolises a reconciliatory attempt to forge a Hindu/Muslim bond in South Asia.

The various relationships across caste, class, religion and ethnicity in the novels append the site of non-normative sexuality to the social/national category. The interaction of homosexuality with these variables becomes an important analytical framework because of the asymmetrical relations of power. In her work on homosocial bonding, Sedgwick cautions against a complacent reading of "homosexual activity" as a challenge to existing norms. According to her, the inclusion of sexuality to a social relationship does not necessarily guarantee a subversion of the hierarchical arrangement of power because there is not "some sexual charge that can be simply added to a social relationship to "sexualize" it in a constant and predictable direction" (*Between Men* 6). Certainly, the unequal distribution of power in South Asia problematises the relation of sexuality to class, caste or ethnic politics. The lower classes and castes often become victims of coercive sexual activities. For instance, in his semi-autobiography, the Pakistani writer Badruddin Khan reminisces about his adolescent homosexual experi-

ences with lower-status men in Pakistan. He clearly identifies the dynamic of power which secures his superiority over his sexual partners: “the class difference between my sexual objects and me served further to ensure my control of the experimental environment; were there not this difference, I may well have been “used” rather than the “user”” (142). Therefore, Shiva, Arun and Arjie’s bonding across definitional lines of class, caste, religion and ethnicity is radical not because all such pairings are radical *per se*, but rather, because the protagonists contest and subvert the uneven relations of power. The violent repercussions of transgressing the postcolonial interdiction on love across class, caste or religion are often outlined in South Asian cinema and fiction. For example, in Arundhati Roy’s novel *The God of Small Things* (1997), Ammu, the upper-caste woman, and Velutha, the untouchable man, provoke the wrath of Ammu’s family and the violence of the police when they embark on a sexual relationship. Eventually, the police implicates Velutha in a case of murder and in turn kill him. Compared to the spectacle of Velutha’s violent death, Shiva, Arun and Arjie’s disruption of class, caste, religious and ethnic boundaries exemplifies a radical affirmation of queer adolescence, which transgresses stringent social/national norms.

Language also becomes a significant marker in the definition of postcolonial modernity in *Funny Boy*. Black Tie and Mr Lokubandara’s struggle over Tamil/Sinhala education reflects the war of national language in Sri Lanka in the 1970s. The presence of English as the over-arching language of reference in the novel and in Sri Lanka further complicates the linguistic landscape. The language of the coloniser, English, affords privilege and power which is apparent in Amma’s dealing with the police after Uncle Daryl’s disappearance. Amma is able to hide the adulterous nature of her liaison with Uncle Daryl through recourse to English, which immediately signifies her superior status in Sri Lankan society (127). However, English is made to signify a product of

Western import that cannot embody the entirety of the Sri Lankan experience. The appended glossary of Sri Lankan terms at the end of the novel attests to the inadequacy of English in the Sri Lankan context.

Additionally, the repeated use of the adjective “funny” to define Arjie’s homosexuality by the adults refers to the incompleteness of English to incorporate local versions of same-sex desire. Throughout the novel, Arjie’s queerness appears as an attribute suggested by the term “funny” in the title. The persistent refusal to name and classify same-sex experience consolidates the resistance to Western practices of categorisation. Moreover, homophobia literalises as a Western influence and attaches to the Western lexicon in terms of English language. Tanuja, Arjie’s cousin from Canada brings terms of homophobic insult to the game of bride-ride. When Arjie refuses to let her play the bride, she calls him “a pansy,” “a faggot,” and “a sissy” (11). Tanuja’s act of naming (and consequently shaming) Arjie’s queerness symbolises the occidental practice of category formation. The general incomprehension of the insults by the group points to the local development of queer subjectivity in Sri Lanka whereby Arjie and his cousins categorically reject Western discourses of identity classification. Tanuja’s isolation in the group literalises a critique of homophobia that becomes available in the novel through a Western construction of identity sites.

Arjie’s failed performance at the school prize-giving event crucially works as a mockery of an earlier colonial system of education, which extends into the “new” postcolonial nation. Arjie’s “ultimate counter-performance,” as Mita Banerjee observes, involves an assertive refusal to become an agent of colonial mimicry (155). The “post” in postcolonial inevitably suggests the transition from a colonial to a modern independent state. Black Tie, the homophobic principal represents the earlier colonial model of education. Arjie’s refusal to articulate the poems on which Black Tie’s career depends

becomes a critique of a former public-school system that can no longer wield the pressures of ethnic divisions in the modern postcolonial nation. In her critical appreciation of South Asian fiction, Sujala Singh comments on the use of English as a language whereby the postcolonial authors relate their experiences to a global readership. She refers to “a generation of writers who are confident and comfortable enough not just with the language, but with a way of life which comes out of and represents *as well as critiques* an elitist public-school educated world-view” (17, italics in original). Thus, by intentionally muddling the sentences of the English-language poems, which pay a tribute to the colonial situation, Arjie not only complicates the relation between the past and the present, the old and the new, but undermines the continuation of colonial public schools in modern Sri Lanka as well. Furthermore, the crisis of postcolonial modernity “jumbles all differences into a single performance of non-sense: the difference between the colonial and the postcolonial, as well as that between queerness and ‘straight’ sexual orientation” (Banerjee 155-56). Selvadurai demonstrates the agency of queer adolescence to upset the category of the postcolonial by incorporating colonial as well as postcolonial referents in Arjie’s performance. The presence of the old colonial system in modern Sri Lanka, through cricket and the education system, hints at an incomplete decolonisation of South Asia. The modernity of the postcolonial nation defined by independence from a former colonial power becomes increasingly problematic as Arjie’s performance repeatedly references the former colonial situation.

Another significant debate on the status of postcolonial modernity functions around the category of religion in *Shiva and Arun*. Chakrabarty remarks that the hierarchical relationship of a “modern” West and a “nonmodern” South Asia is constructed around the distinction between “the secularized forms of Christianity that mark modernity in the West” and the continual inclusion of “gods and spirits in the domain of the

political” in India (14). Shiva and Abdullah’s life in the novel is certainly dependent upon the demands of their respective religions. However, the novel queers both the religions in the bond that Shiva and Abdullah establish and thus makes a passionate plea for the queer sacred. Compared to *A Boy’s Own Story* where Buddhism folds into a routine narrative of Western appropriation/colonisation of “exotic” spirituality, the constant references to religious frames in Parivaraj’s novel appear as an inclusion of non-normative sexuality within the realm of religion (White 152-54). For example, when Krishna enters Arun’s room, he discovers the posters of male sportsmen juxtaposed with the “print of Lord Krishna and the Milkmaids” (Parivaraj 92). The heterosexual eroticism that is usually associated with Lord Krishna and the milkmaids is queered when considered in relation to the Arun/Krishna sexual liaison. The significance of a “traditional” past to questions of queer identity in the “present” is further reinforced in Abdullah’s struggle to explain the compatibility of Islam to homosexuality: “He had tried to tell his father about famous Muslim leaders and rulers who had both male and female love affairs” (123). By reclaiming a religious past, Abdullah attempts to legitimate his desire for men, just like a “Brahmin gay” would tell his father “that the *Kama Sutra* and the wall engravings at Puri temple were real” (124). The incorporation of supposedly past sexual practices to frame Abdullah’s sexuality reveals the potency of nonmodern, nonsecular forms to affect, in this case affirmatively, modern debates about queer identity.

The birth of modern queer subjectivity in South Asia poses a direct challenge to the concept of family in both the novels. Although family operates as the over-arching signifier in terms of identity, the queer subject’s arbitrary and fluctuating relation to this master structure in South Asia opens up possibilities of resignification of kinship. Arjie’s love for Shehan ultimately leads him to the realisation of an alternative bond

where his sexuality becomes the vector for his “metaphorical exile” from his family: “I was no longer a part of my family in the same way. I now inhabited a world they didn’t understand and into which they couldn’t follow me” (Mullins 161; Selvadurai *Funny Boy* 284-85). Arjie’s self-imposed exclusion from the family becomes an affirmation of the queer subject when considered in contrast to Radha Aunty and Amma’s failures to sever the ties with the family. Radha Aunty ultimately accepts the arranged marriage proposed by her family and Amma returns to “a regular routine” of family. Although Arjie’s exclusion can be considered an example of male privilege, his state of adolescence places him in an inferior relation to the adults, Radha Aunty and Amma.

Shiva’s conflictual relationship with his family becomes paradigmatic of the significance of marriage in South Asia. Whereas Arun leaves his family to live his life on his own terms, Shiva marries according to the wishes of his father. Although Shiva’s marriage serves to re-naturalise the hegemonic heteronormative order, the novel condemns the forced marriage by including the repercussions of such a marriage. Like several Hindu saints who submit to a life of chastity, Shiva refuses to consummate his marriage. Ultimately, in a desperate attempt to resist the dominant order, he commits suicide by “hanging from the puja room beam” (147). If the heteronormative culture secures its legitimacy by mapping a clear life narrative that “charts an obvious transition out of childish dependency through marriage and into adult responsibility through reproduction,” then Shiva’s suicide disrupts this linearity through the final act of resistance (Halberstam 153). By choosing to terminate his life, Shiva, the queer subject discredits the stereotypical assumption of homosexuality as a passing phase. Similarly, in *Funny Boy*, Selvadurai succeeds in interrupting the narrative of transition from adolescence to adulthood. Although modelled on his own experiences in Sri Lanka, Selvadurai does not provide an account of Arjie’s adult life in Canada.

Finally, names in *Shiva and Arun* are significant in the ways in which they serve to interpellate the binary of tradition/modernity. Shiva's name is a reminder of Lord Shiva in Hindu mythology and often appears as a queer figure since he is both man and woman. Parivaraj complicates a facile reading of traditional and modern naming by making Shiva (the repository of queerness in religion) succumb to the pressures of family. Their names enact the compelling versions of postcolonial modernity where both tradition and the modern become contested sites. In contrast to Shiva, the modernity associated with Arun's name is a rehearsed version of Western discourse of "my rights" (Parivaraj 143). He leaves his family and discovers the existence of queer support groups: "I just didn't know such groups even existed" (141). Although his queer identity is affirmed in the novel, his difficulty to find an appropriate term to define same-sex desire represents the fracture of the postcolonial English-speaking subject to express the specificity of South Asian queerness.

In this Chapter, I have argued for a reconsideration of queer adolescence in conjunction with a reading of specific sites of ethnicity, caste, class, religion and language in South Asia. I have also suggested that the birth of queer subjectivity in South Asia raises questions about the definition of modernity in the novels. The difficulty of defining queerness in the South Asian context reinforces the impossibility of postcolonial modernity, which complicates and revises the colonial version of the tradition/modern binary. The inclusion of traditional elements of religion in purportedly modern discourses of homo/hetero, masculine/feminine divisions contests the category of modernity as a coherent and unitary whole. Queer adolescence, as I have shown, disputes the applicability of Western/global constructs to examine queerness in South Asia appropriately. Despite the availability of Western identity categories through the presence of English in South Asia, the novels problematise the emergence of the South Asian queer

subject by a disavowal of the English language. At the same time, the Arjie-Shehan, Shiva-Chinni and Arun-Krishna bonds underscore the importance of local alliances between marginalised subjects.

The novels signal an inclusion of queerness in South Asian fiction in English. As Jazeel argues, in relation to *Funny Boy*, the novels are “an important political intervention” (231). They belong to an emerging body of literature that locates queer South Asian subjectivity as a site of contest and contradictions. The interaction between global queer narratives and local South Asian versions of same-sex desire appear as a fraught relationship. A significant shift in South Asian attitudes to the master discourse of the West is evident in the way these novels negotiate Western constructs such as modernity and sexuality. In the process, they expose the flaws of globalising discourses based on the principle of universalism, which is neither achievable nor desirable.

Chapter Two

Forced Accents: Postcolonial Identities, Queer Practices in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*

In his show *L'autre c'est moi* (2005), the actor and stand-up comic Gad Elmaleh addresses the issue of postcolonial Moroccan accents in mainstream France.¹ He presents the character of a French civil servant of Moroccan origin who, during an important speech in supposedly polished French relapses into the allegedly rugged version of Moroccan French. Despite the comic element apparent in the episode, Elmaleh makes a valid case of inclusion of Third World accents and by extension postcolonial identities in contemporary France. The civil servant symbolises the evolving ethnic and national identity of France which must incorporate “multiple and incongruous accents,” to borrow a phrase from Benita Parry, that originate from the Maghreb (“Signs” 13). By presenting the civil servant alongside other white French characters like the “blond guy” in the show, Elmaleh shows how postcolonial France has become a mosaic of ethnicities that have an equal claim to the French Republic. Like Hanif Kureishi in Britain, Elmaleh belongs to a growing number of artists in Europe who place the purportedly peripheral world of ethnic minorities at the centre of their work such that the appropriation of stereotypes, what I term “forced accents,” challenges the dominant representation of marginal subjects. For Elmaleh, this task involves negotiating his Jewish and Moroccan heritage and for Kureishi it means engaging with the South Asian diaspora of Britain.

1. *L'autre c'est moi* can be translated as *I am the Other*.

This Chapter offers a queer/postcolonial assessment of Kureishi's first novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) - a reading that does not privilege a specific theoretical overture of racial and/or sexuality analysis over the other.² Although, as Kenneth Kaleta points out in his biography of Kureishi, both Kureishi's first film, *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) and his debut novel have received the majority of critical attention from his entire oeuvre, several interpretations pay significant attention to the racial and ethnic frames of *Buddha*, often overlooking issues relating to sexuality and vice-versa (42). Positioning Kureishi's earlier fiction as an examination of questions of race and ethnicity, scholarly discussions have prioritised consideration of sexuality in his later works. Ruvani Ranasinha typifies such an approach since she asserts that Kureishi's pre-1997 novels locate race as a key concern whilst post-1997 sexuality and intimate relationships become more central (19). This would place *Buddha* and Kureishi's second novel *The Black Album* (1995) in a peculiar position as both were written prior to the purported shift and themes of race and sexuality are not only vital but also deftly interwoven within the narrative. Therefore, this Chapter demonstrates how questions pertaining to race, class, sexuality, gender and national and ethnicity cannot be considered in isolation in *Buddha*.

Despite a rich body of critical work on *Buddha*, numerous scholars privilege analyses of race and ethnicity over sexuality and the implicit link between the two parameters.³ Such critiques from a postcolonial perspective make only token comments

2. Hereafter abbreviated *Buddha* in the text.

3. See, for example, Emilienne Baneth-Nouailhetas, "Karim/Kim: Mutations kiplingiennes dans *The Buddha of Suburbia*" (1997); Ronald Shusterman, "Neither/Nor: Non-Binary Logic and the Question of Knowledge in *The Buddha of Suburbia*" (1998); Anuradha Dingwaney Needham, *Using the Master's Tools: Resistance and the Literature of the African and South-Asian Diasporas* (2000); Asha Sen, "Re-Writing History: Hanif Kureishi and the Politics of Black Britain" (2000); Jean-Jacques Weber, "The Absent Character of Gene in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*" (2001); Anthony Ilona, "Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*" (2003); Bruce King, "Abdul-

on queer politics in Kureishi's work. For example, Nahem Yousaf and Ruth Maxey emphasise the almost definitive importance of ethnicity (of both Kureishi and his characters), home, diaspora and what Yousaf terms the "brown man's burden" (14).⁴ Yet, the relevance of Kureishi's work lies in its extraordinary staging of the interimplication of postcolonial and queer paradigms. Vinay Swami remarks that "the intersection of the "political" and "sexual" orientations of Kureishi's characters" is central to an understanding of his works" (143). In disregarding such fruitful crossings, both Yousaf and Maxey gloss over non-heteronormative contexts as they interact with postcolonial identities. In another instance, John Clement Ball provides a postcolonial and postmodern view of Kureishi's London where "the tables can be turned on the racialized hierarchies of labour that obtained in imperial space" (16). However, he fails to address the interface of homoerotic desire within these "racialized hierarchies" in the main character Karim and his friend Charlie's relationship in the novel.

Materialising from the non-intersectionality of postcolonial and queer interpretive frames, such oversights in critical scholarship invariably limit the understanding of mutually overlapping sites of identification and identity formation. Using the work of Judith Butler and José Esteban Muñoz about the "minoritarian politics" of disidentification "that is not monocausal or monothematic," my appraisal of Kureishi's novel seeks to disrupt readings of South Asian diasporic literature that often invest the much-saturated site of postcolonial hybridity (Muñoz 8). Whilst the first segment of the

razak Gurnah and Hanif Kureishi: Failed Revolutions"(2005) and, Brian Finney, *English Fiction since 1984: Narrating a Nation* (2006). Notable exceptions include Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Hanif Kureishi: Contemporary World Writers* (2001) and Wendy O'Shea-Meddour "The Politics of Imagining the Other in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*" (2008).

4. Both Yousaf and Maxey nevertheless underline the importance of class in structuring the identity of Kureishi's characters. See, Nahem Yousaf, "Hanif Kureishi and the Brown Man's Burden" (1996) and, Ruth Maxey, "'Life in the Diaspora is Often Held in a Strange Suspension': First-Generation Self-Fashioning in Hanif Kureishi's Narratives of Home and Return" (2006).

Chapter focuses on disidentificatory articulations of nation, belonging, sexuality and accents of Karim Amir, the allegedly central character in *Buddha*, the last section shifts the critical lens to the female characters who have, as Wendy O’Shea-Meddour remarks, “been edged out of the critical limelight” (33). Deploying Gayatri Gopinath’s critique of patrilineal diasporic subjectivity, I turn to the queer female identity and its effacement in conventional accounts of diaspora. Like in Chapter 3, where I attend to the several modes of silencing female queerness in diasporas, I place a reading of the various female personages of the novel at the centre of Karim’s sexual/cultural disidentification and recover the feminine bonds that are repeatedly erased in conventional narratives of diasporic articulation. I gesture towards the pivotal role of the queer feminine as an enabling feature of Kureishi’s text that destabilises monolithic identities constructed around ethnicity, sexuality, race and nation.

My queer reading of South Asian texts throughout this thesis in general and *Buddha* in particular unsettles an almost monolithic presence of postcolonial hybridity and ethnicity as the sole and originary markers of identity. In the last Chapter, I argued that sexuality as a site of identification functions as only one of the signifiers of identity formation that factors religion, language and ethnicity as equally significant parameters. As a parallel, I suggest that British Asian identification in Kureishi’s novel must be considered in explicit relation to the larger context of Karim’s non-normative sexual identification. The postcolonial critic Stuart Hall mobilises the category of postcolonial through a call to a “new politics of representation,” asserting that:

a great deal of black politics, constructed, addressed and developed directly in relation to questions of race and ethnicity, has been predicated on the assumption that the categories of gender and sexuality would stay the same and remain fixed and secured. What the new politics of repre-

sentation does is to put that into question, crossing the questions of racism irrevocably with questions of sexuality. (“New Ethnicities” 445)

Following Hall, I underline the relevance of the multiplicity of identificatory sites, especially in the context of Third World diasporic subjectivity.⁵ Like Kureishi, artists of colour like Elmaleh in France and Ravinder Randhawa in Britain adhere to the “new politics of representation” as their work signals queer inflections of postcolonial identities. Elmaleh gained popularity for his role as a Moroccan transvestite/ clandestine immigrant in France in the film *Chouchou (The Darling)*, (2003). Randhawa’s novel *A Wicked Old Lady* (1987) presents a British-Asian gay punk named Bahadur who resists attempts to anglicise his name and has an open relationship with his partner Anton. Unlike the other Asian characters of the novel who struggle to reconcile their Indian and British identities, Bahadur is comfortable with his multiple identity markers of Indian, gay and punk.

Of all of Kureishi’s texts, *Buddha* presents the largest array of fully realised characters who negotiate their multiple identifications of gender, sexuality and national belonging. Written during the Thatcherite era of British politics, which witnessed a strong resurgence in (hetero)nationalism, Kureishi’s characters focus on non-heterosexual sexuality that faced systematic opposition from the conservative policies of the time.⁶ The characters of Karim, Charlie, Jamila, Jeeta and Changez in the novel are central to comprehend the interactions of non-normative gender and sexual arrangements with matrices of ethnicity and race. These characters highlight the criss-

5. Homi Bhabha makes a similar affirmation by focalising on the intersecting subject positions of “race, gender, generation, institutional location, geographical locale, sexual orientation” as the several differentiated pointers of “claim to identity in the modern world” (*Location* 1).

6. The New Right legislated against the alleged promiscuity of gay culture and passed Clause 28 of the Local Government Act in 1988, which forbade the promotion of homosexuality in Britain.

crossing lines of gender, sexual and national *dis*-affiliations in Kureishi's work even though, as mentioned above, critics invariably direct their attention to Karim's development from adolescent to adult. Their potential to disrupt normative discourses of sexuality and gender contextualises a larger postcolonial construct of positing a threat to dominant narratives of nation, ethnicity and belonging.

In his article on Kureishi and Abdulrazak Gurnah, Bruce King disputes the validity of the rubric "postcolonial" as applied to their work since, he contends, the main concern of the two authors is about "life in England" (89). Certainly, King's argument positions the term postcolonial in an evaluative rather than descriptive grid. Appositely, Hall observes that the idea of reserving the term "for the colonies of the periphery" exclusively is not particularly helpful, as "one of the principal values of the term 'post-colonial' has been to direct our attention to the many ways in which colonisation was never simply external to the societies of the imperial metropolis" ("When was the Post-Colonial" 246). The presence of South Asian immigrants in Kureishi's work is precisely what makes Britain a postcolonial society. The first sentence of *Buddha*: "My name is Karim Amir, and I am an Englishman born and bred, almost," points to the inclusion of non-western cultures (signalled by the name Karim Amir) within postcolonial Britain (3). Kaleta reminds that the novel first appeared as a short story and Kureishi made various amendments to its title from *The Streets of my Heart* to *The Streets of the Heart* and the final version *The Buddha of Suburbia*. These changes, as Kaleta remarks, reflect Kureishi's desire to locate matters of race and "London's Anglo-Asian hybrid" at the centre of his narrative (66). The centrality of hybrid cultural identities in Kureishi's works evidently positions him as a postcolonial artist. Additionally, he engages with the postcolonial aspect of Britain in his political writings as well. Similar to Hall's notion of the "new politics of representation," he asserts that there is a "new

way of being British” and it is “the British, the white British, who have to learn that being British isn’t what it was.” (“Rainbow Sign” 55). Karim’s sense of being ‘almost’ English hints at the manifold modes of national allegiance whereby members of different ethnic backgrounds can claim to be a part of Britain.

However, Kureishi’s engagement with postcolonial identities in Britain operates in a complex matrix of race and non-normative sexualities. He provocatively inflects the category of the postcolonial with varying combinations of gender and sexual identifications. Karim’s bisexuality in the novel challenges, in several ways, a unique construction of identity based solely on ethnicity. In this regard, Bart Moore-Gilbert indicates that the homosexuality of the “Oriental” male “plays ironically ... off the figure of the colonized male subject as over-sexed, even a potential rapist of white women, which is an enduring trope in metropolitan literature of empire, from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* to Scott’s *The Raj Quartet*” (123-24). Thus, by introducing non-normative sexual orientations in his texts, Kureishi disputes the colonial discourse on sexuality of the “natives” and engages the politics of representation of ethnic minorities in postcolonial Britain in a new direction.

In her analysis of regulatory regimes of social construction, Butler emphasises the need to read the dominant norms of heterosexuality and race along parallel lines. She contends that “it is crucial to rethink the scene of reproduction and, hence, of sexing practices not only as ones through which a heterosexual imperative is inculcated, but as ones through which boundaries of racial distinction are secured as well as contested” (*Bodies* 18). She adds that disidentification locates identification as an impossible ideal: “Identifications are never fully and finally made; they are incessantly reconstituted and, as such, are subject to the volatile logic of iterability” (105). Certainly, both the racialised and the non-heterosexual subject are constituted by the dominant regimes of race

and heterosexuality. In order to contest the regulatory regime that defines their identities, both subjects must undergo a process of “disidentification” with those regulatory norms by which their difference is materialised and made intelligible. With regard to the affirmative mobilisation of sexual difference, she explains that:

although the political discourses that mobilize identity categories tend to cultivate identifications in the service of a political goal, it may be that the persistence of *disidentification* is equally crucial to the rearticulation of democratic contestation. Indeed, it may be precisely through practices which underscore disidentification with those regulatory norms by which sexual difference is materialized that both feminist and queer politics are mobilized. (*Bodies* 4)

Butler’s concept of disidentification illustrates the mobilisation of queer resistance to the gender/sex binary. However, as her work demonstrates, it is equally applicable to the destabilisation of dominant racial configurations. In noting the significance of race to the queer paradigm, she states that “the social regulation of race emerges not simply as another, fully separable, domain of power from sexual difference or sexuality, but that its “addition” subverts the monolithic workings of the heterosexual imperative” (*Bodies* 18).

Extending Butler’s conceptualisation, José Muñoz offers an “agential” reading of performance by queers of colour who invest the hegemonic space of the dominant. In his formulation, disidentification signifies “the survival strategies [that] the minoritarian subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes” those “subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship” (Muñoz 4). This version of identity performance locates subjectivity in the interstices between discourses of essentialism and constructivism in order to

produce “identities-in-difference” (6).⁷ Although disidentificatory practices emerge from the historicised accounts of anti-assimilationist discourse, they depart from this rhetoric for strategic political reasons. As an enabling mode of production and reception, disidentification unhinges the dominant/marginalised binary through a process of “decoding mass, high, or any other cultural field from the perspective of a minority subject who is disempowered in such a representational hierarchy” (25). As an interpretive framework, it functions as a “paradigm of oppositional reception” of dominant-hegemonic representations (26).

Following Butler and Muñoz’s lead, I suggest that Karim’s bisexuality and bi-cultural heritage become the pivotal points in the over-arching signification of identity as a complex site of disidentification and dis-affiliation. Karim fails to identify with either the heterosexualised norm or the cultural stereotype of a dual British-Asian identity that is often explained as cultural hybridity. However, by explicitly associating Karim’s identity formation to processes of disidentification, I seek to make visible the complexity of “minoritarian positionalities,” to borrow a phrase from Muñoz (8). I contend that Karim’s identity appears legible through a generalised process of the intersection of racial and sexual disidentifications throughout the novel. The political implications of agency and resistance that both Butler and Muñoz privilege in their accounts operate in several ways along lines of disidentification, and perceptibly constitute non-heteronormative configuration of desire and racialising frames for almost all characters.

7. Muñoz’s argument evidently rewrites the Spivakian notion of “strategic essentialism” from a queer of colour perspective. The term “identities-in-difference” that he borrows from Third world feminism is particularly useful as a subject-position within the politics of location and representation, which Spivak enumerates variously in her writings.

In *Buddha*, Karim constructs his identity in relation to his subject position as a cultural hybrid of British and South Asian heritage - English mother, Margaret and Indian father, Haroon - and as a bisexual teenager. Although Karim's father would like him to "go out with anyone, as long as they were not boys or Indians," he feels "it would be heart-breaking to have to choose one [men] or the other [women], like having to decide between the Beatles and the Rolling Stones" (55, 73). Anuradha Dingwaney Needham rightly points out that in terms of desire, "for Karim, as for Kureishi, it's a refusal of an either/or logic in favor of both/and" (127). Although, Karim is in constant denial of his Indian self as his tastes in music and dress reveal, he does accept his Indian origins at the funeral of his father's friend, Anwar. He agrees that the Indians are his people "in some way" and "feels ashamed and incomplete at the same time" (212). As he has never been to India, he feels the burden of creating an (Indian) identity, of constructing it in parallel to his English culture: "So, if I wanted the additional personality bonus of an Indian past, I would have to create it" (213).

The construction of his cultural identity works in parallel to his sexual desire for both men and women throughout the novel. His sexual encounters with Charlie, Jamila and Eleanor attest to the process of creating a sexual identity similar to the construction of his incomplete Indian identity. Rebecca Fine Romanow argues that Karim's exploration of "polysexuality" is linked to his subversion of normativity as "he rejects accepted sexual transgressions, seeing them as another form of social constructs from which he wishes to turn away" (96). However, I suggest that his rejection of 'accepted sexual transgressions' of homosexuality remains incomplete, just like his non-existent Indian (dis)identity. For instance, he rejects his first love Charlie when he sees him in New York trying to sell his Englishness and realises that "he had moved beyond him [Charlie]" (255). In addition, once he loses his love, Eleanor, to the theatre director Pyke, he

understands that sexual desire and ethnicity are inter-related. Although he thinks of himself as a “part of England,” he knows that like Gene, Eleanor’s former West Indian lover, the English “hated him” (217). There is, however, an element of ambivalence in Karim’s attitude to England. He knows that despite Britain’s rejection of ethnic minorities as a part of the national culture, “we [the non-whites] [still] pursued English roses as we pursued England” (217). He acknowledges that he was a “part of England and yet proudly stood outside it” (217). His ambivalence towards both Indian and English cultures and Charlie, Jamila and Eleanor (he chooses none at the end of the novel), suggests an irresolvable crisis of allegiance, a disidentification with either national/cultural formations or the heterosexual/homosexual binary.

Karim’s ambivalence towards national or cultural allegiance is certainly an attempt to escape dominant cultural stereotypes. For example, he is called “wog” and “nigger” (40), “Paki” (53), “Shitface and Curryface” (63) and “Creamy Jeans” (65). Eva, Haroon’s partner, and her son, Charlie, consider both Haroon and Karim “exotic” beings. Charlie asks Karim if he does “that meditation stuff every morning” (14). Shadwell, the theatre director who offers him his first acting role, takes the dehumanising exotic trope further by casting him as Mowgli in his version of *The Jungle Book*. Brian Finney argues that Shadwell’s “use of the children’s classic of colonial discourse and his direction of Karim uncover a nostalgia for colonialism that relies on a belief in an essentialist form of identity” (132). Karim is made to “wear a loin-cloth and brown make-up,” so that he resembles an “authentic” Indian (147). Although he speaks with an accent from Orpington, he is forced to speak in an “authentic” Indian accent since Shadwell claims that Karim has “been cast for authenticity and not for experience” (147). Shadwell’s quest for authenticity certainly enacts the racial/cultural stereotyping that Karim resists through the mode of disaffiliation to both Indian and British cultures.

The failure of the apparently liberal positions to offer a satisfactory politics of representation of non-white identities reinforces in many ways Karim's disidentification with national/cultural allegiance. There are two instances in the novel where liberal attitudes to ethnic minorities betray complicity with mainstream racist structures. In his exchange with Shadwell, Karim looks for support from Terry, "an active Trotskyite" (147). Terry, who usually talks of "inequality, imperialism, white supremacy," prefers not to challenge Shadwell's views and stands "there in his tracksuit waiting to slide hissing across the floor" (147-8). In another instance, Karim's friend Helen comforts Haroon by including him in the national fabric of Britain, but only in a patronising rhetoric whereby the established power dynamic of white/non-white remains intact. She says: "but this is your home ... We like you being here. You benefit our country with your traditions" (74). Significantly, she separates 'you' and 'our country' in the last sentence, rendering visible Haroon's exclusion. For Helen, the immigrants are welcome as long as they 'benefit' the country. Moore-Gilbert rightly observes that "implicit in Helen's attitudes is a conception of multiculturalism which accepts difference only *in relation to* a centre, the normative cultural authority of which remains essentially undisturbed" (138, emphasis in original). The 'normative cultural authority' in Helen's speech remains the white Briton who decides which type of difference is acceptable to 'our country' - in the case of the Indians; it is their 'traditions.'

The equivocal attitude towards national and cultural identification that Karim develops in the novel results from his British and South Asian heritage. By acknowledging his partial Indian identity and aiming to construct it, Karim cathects the model of the cultural hybrid, an oft-celebrated paradigm in postcolonial scholarship and by critics of Kureishi's work. However, I argue that Karim's search for his identity reflects disaffection with the idea of an in-between identity that fails to consider the complex means

through which his cultural and sexual identifications/disidentifications interact with each other and operate. At the end of the novel, Karim struggles “to locate myself” (284). The restlessness vis à vis the constructions of his multiple identities (he endeavours to be both British and South Asian, homosexual and heterosexual, enacts the part of Mowgli and the persona of Changez, Jamila’s Indian husband) is a constant reminder of the limitations of postcolonial hybridity as a useful analytical frame. Through a critique of this paradigm therefore, I would propose that Karim’s cultural in-betweenness and the in-between (bi)sexuality produce a complex matrix of hybridity that can be fully comprehended in conjunction with disidentificatory survival practices.

In his influential account of hybridity, Bhabha focuses on the processes of identification and cultural practices that underscore the significance of hybridisation of colonial and postcolonial cultures. The “third space” (often of the diaspora) represents the in-between space, which can translate and negotiate differences of self and other. According to Bhabha, the third space is the “precondition to the articulation of cultural difference” which can effectively assimilate the contraries (*Location* 38). Borrowing from Frantz Fanon’s writings on colonial ambivalence, he invests the site of the cultural third space with the agency to transform traditional and existing equations of hierarchy between cultures into an international culture. In terms of the “productive capacities” of the third space, he writes that:

the theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualizing an *international* culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s *hybridity*. To that end we should remember that it is the ‘inter’- the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between* space – that carries the burden of the meaning of

culture. It makes it possible to begin envisaging national, anti-nationalist histories of the ‘people’. And by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the other of our selves. (*Location* 38-39, italics in original)

Certainly, the third space of cultural hybridity is a potent conceptualisation of agency. However, it displays a “universalising tendency” and glosses over how “subjectivities are shaped by questions of class, gender and context” (Loomba 179). Moreover, it is also problematic since it fails to consider the different mechanisms in which varying sexual identifications interact with configurations of culture and how individuals construct or negotiate their identity when non-normative sexual identifications inflect their understanding of themselves.

Both Karim and Changez inhabit the third space in the novel. However, the recent immigrant Changez cannot be made to occupy the same space as the British-born Karim who also has the heritage of a British mother. Spivak disputes Bhabha’s formulation of the third space by separating the diasporic formations of the First World and the subaltern in the Third (see, “Subaltern” 271-313). The difference between Karim and Changez is precisely the distinct third spaces they claim in the novel. In terms of the metaphor of space, Karim articulates his identification with Indian culture through an impersonation of Changez’s third space. For his second performance as an actor he plays the character of Changez, accentuating the stereotype of “an immigrant fresh from a small Indian town,” and making the audience laugh at “the sexual ambition and humiliation of an Indian in England” (220). As a mockery of Changez and the stereotypical Indian immigrant, Karim’s impersonation of Changez and the desired comic effect defeat any reading of Karim and Changez as inhabiting the same cultural space of hybridity. Rather, the scene highlights the underlying differences within the third space.

Moreover, Changez himself occupies a problematic position since even though he is an Indian Muslim his national affiliation overrides his religious identification. When Karim prompts him to react to his wife Jamila's lesbianism, he responds with an uncharacteristic approval: "Whatever Jamila does is all right by me ... I have no prejudice except against Pakistanis, which is normal" (273). The mutually exclusive spaces in Changez's (and by extension, the immigrants') imagination do not signify monolithic identity even when such spaces interact with the First World. For instance, Changez fails to understand why the National Front activists attacked him in South London calling him "a Paki, not realizing he was Indian" (224). The collapse of the exclusive categories of Pakistani and Indian in the dominant imagination can be seen in the way the ethnic slur "Paki" encapsulates different nationalities of Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani in a single term. Kureishi further affirms these differentiations in an essay on the Asian community in Bradford. As he argues, "This was not one large community with a shared outlook, common beliefs and an established form of life ... It was diverse, disparate, strikingly various" ("Bradford" 64).

One of the key instances of the internal differentiation of the cultural third space is the exchange between Tracey and Karim in *Buddha*. Both participate in the acting classes under the direction of Pyke where they are considered "officially black," even though Karim thinks of himself as "more beige than anything" (167). The six actors in Pyke's group have to choose a character from their life and present it. When Karim chooses to play Charlie's character, Pyke actively discourages him as Karim can only present someone from his background, "someone black" (170). Although Pyke represents the liberal multicultural position (his theatre group involves ethnic minorities—Karim and Tracey, and sexual minorities—Richard), his position exposes the inability to successfully chart a politics of representation of the internal differentiations within

communities. Karim finally decides to portray Anwar as the Muslim patriarch who arranges the marriage of his daughter and, who counts “on being given a life-transfusion by a son” but is disappointed at the turn of events when his son-in-law, Changez, refuses to manage his family shop (170). Tracey’s appeal to Karim reveals the internal differentiation of the diasporic space: “Your picture is what white people already think of us. That we’re funny, with strange habits and weird customs. To the white man we’re already people without humanity” (180). As “a politically mature British-African woman,” Tracey reveals the critical import of what Kobena Mercer terms the “burden of representation” (Spivak, “Burden” 293; Mercer 61). However, it is significant that Karim is presenting a South Asian character to an audience and as Muñoz’s disidentificatory subject, he “tactically works on, with, and against a cultural form” of homogeneous blackness (12). For Tracey, Karim presents black people “as being irrational, ridiculous, as being hysterical” and therefore cannot adequately wield “the burden of representation.” Karim, on the other hand, insists that he does not present “black’ people but ‘Indian’ people and simply ‘one old Indian man’” (180).

Karim’s disidentification with blackness suggests the diversity of experience amongst people of colour and the different cultural specificities of lived realities. As Karim’s brother Allie suggests, “the blacks have a history of slavery” which distinguishes them from the South Asians (267). Mercer critiques the myth of the black community as a “monolithic, self-identical and undifferentiated entity essentially defined by race (and nothing but race)” (71). Karim’s differentiation of black and Indian ethnicities points to the deconstruction of the myth of racial homogeneity. His arguments interrogate the concept of political blackness as an all-encompassing category. In positing ‘black’ and ‘Indian’ as distinct ethnic paradigms, Karim calls into question the concept of uniform cultural hybridity. Critiquing the indiscriminate collapsing of black

and Asian ethnicities in Britain, Tariq Modood questions the availability of blackness to Asians: “Is ‘blackness’ really available to Asians when some of the most thoughtful ... contributions to the development of ‘blackness’ are not about downgrading the cultural content but about increasing the reference to African roots and the Atlantic experience?” (170). Karim moves beyond the concept of black political identity by introducing the black/Asian distinction within British culture, thereby complicating the black/white binary.

The distinct sphere of representation that black and Asian ethnicities inhabit is constitutive of pervasive prejudice against black people within South Asian communities. For instance, Bali Rai paints a compelling picture of South Asian prejudice against people of Afro-Caribbean origin in his novel, *The Last Taboo* (2006), where the protagonist Simran has to confront questions of honour and ostracism in her liaison with the ‘black’ boy Tyrone. Similarly, in Hari Kunzru’s novel *The Impressionist* (2003), the half-Indian, half-white protagonist Pran Nath cannot comprehend why his girlfriend Astarte chooses the black lover Sweets over him. He sees Sweets kissing Astarte but can only perceive the ‘blackness’ as a taint on the white girl. For him, Sweets is simply “*black*. Black as night, as tar, coal, pitch, liquorice, and the suits of funeral directors” (399, italics in original). Cinematic productions from South Asian directors have also highlighted the communal prejudice of South Asians towards people of African origins. While Mira Nair’s film *Mississippi Masala* (1991) makes the racial divide between South Asian and black communities its central concern, Gurinder Chadha’s film *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993) frames black/Asian love in Britain as a threat of miscegenation. In the subsequent Chapter, I explore the racialising narratives of South Asian diasporas. Karim’s refusal to identify with blackness is partly an acknowledgement of his racial bias. However, Kureishi points to alliances with other minorities, especially the Carib-

bean minorities, as a tool to overcome the prejudice. The presence of the “absent character” (to borrow a phrase from Jean-Jacques Weber) of Gene, Eleanor’s former West Indian boyfriend, becomes central in the understanding of the bond between South Asian and Afro-Caribbean cultures (8). As Eleanor leaves Karim for Pyke, Karim can reflect upon the bond that unites the two jilted lovers: “Sweet Gene, her black lover, London’s best mime, who emptied bed-pans in a hospital soaps, killed himself because everyday, by a look, a remark, an attitude, the English told him they hated him” (227). A transition from Gene to his own marginalised position, as he thinks of Helen’s racist father Hairy Back’s remarks, makes Karim realise [of] the common history of exclusion that they share. This transition is signalled by the use of the collective pronoun ‘we’: “We pursued English roses as we pursued England” (227). The alliance that Karim makes with Gene helps him to overcome the loss of Eleanor and think about different non-white ethnicities as they “proudly” stand “outside” Britain (227).⁸ His understanding of his cultural marginalisation within English culture prepares the ground for the search of his ‘incomplete’ Indian identity that commences at Anwar’s funeral.

In his performance as Mowgli, what Berhold Schoene calls “ethnic drag,” Karim subverts the stereotype of the authentic Indian because he repeats his Indian identity through slippages in the cockney accent (121). Like Muñoz’s reading of the figure of “terrorist drag” and my assessment of Arjie’s performance in Chapter 1, Karim disidentifies with the dominant script of Indian accent that he must follow. The failure to perform Mowgli’s Indianness convincingly in order to conform to the stereotype of *the* authentic Indian accent, what I call “forced accents” in the title, produces a “hiatus in iterability” in the Butlerian sense (*Bodies* 220). It is precisely through this ‘hiatus’ that

8. A remarkable example of cross-racial feminist coalition can be traced in Randhawa’s novel *A Wicked Old Woman*. The community of Greenham women in the novel involves South Asian and African Caribbean women.

Karim can subvert the assumption of a monolithic Indian accent and identity. In the construction of his subjectivity, Karim plays what Pyke terms the “not-me,” the “not-self” (219). The process of not identifying (disidentification) with the dominant modes of identification helps Karim to recognise the provisionality of his multiple identities of the not-Indian, not-English, not-homosexual. This process of disidentification serves as a corollary to Karim’s ambivalence towards all bonds of national/cultural or sexual affiliations. Through a mediated performance of disaffiliation and disidentification, Karim potentially moves beyond the English/Indian divide of his identity. After his performance as Changez in Pyke’s play, Karim’s discussion with his mother about his national belonging is a prime example of his new empowered subject-position of ‘not-me’: “‘What about me?’ Mum said. ‘Who gave birth to you? You’re an Englishman, I’m glad to say.’ ‘I don’t care,’ I said. ‘I’m an actor. It’s a job’” (232). The contrast between the opening lines of the novel and this exchange clearly indicates that Karim has moved away from the strict regulations of his national identity. His words, ‘I don’t care’ point to the disidentification with either his English or Indian selves.

Karim’s sexual identity reflects the multiple possibilities of sexual orientation offered by pop music, which follows the same trajectory of identification and disidentification with sexual norms as his national/cultural disidentification. The bisexual David Bowie with his mixing of *uber*-masculine and feminine genres serves as a role model for Karim who often acknowledges the influence of Bowie on his sartorial style. Kureishi reserves a privileged place for Bowie and pop music in his other writings as well. Praising the avant-gardisme of Bowie’s music, Kureishi states that “throughout the 1970s he’d extended English pop music: he’d established ‘glam rock’, worn dresses and make-up, claimed to be gay, and written clever, knowing songs” (“Boy in the Bedroom” 211). Kureishi’s active interest in pop music resulted in his co-authorship of *The*

Faber Book of Pop (1995) with Jon Savage. The title of his second novel, *The Black Album*, is indebted to a song from the queer artist Prince. Like Bowie, Prince transcends the dichotomies of man/woman and simultaneously transgresses racial boundaries as well. Shahid rightly summarises the persona of Prince in *The Black Album* thus: “He’s half black and half white, half man, half woman, half size, feminine and macho too” (25). For Karim, pop music, similar to the multiple identifications of Prince, signals a site of plural identities that dispel racial, national, gender or sexual norms and provides a platform for sexual experimentation with both men and women.⁹ Interestingly, pop music also links him to his allegedly partial Indian identity. Marked by the passage of pop icons to India in search of Oriental mysticism, the seventies gave rise to particularised versions of romantic idealisation of India in the form of hippie culture. For instance, George Harrison learnt the sitar from the Indian maestro Ravi Shankar during this era. As an expression of dissatisfaction with the apparent loss of spirituality in the West, the hippie movement popularised sexual experimentation, which went hand in hand with spiritual awakening under a guru. Karim identifies with the hippie culture and even starts calling his father ‘God’ (75, 21). “Buddha” in the title of the novel references the stereotype of spirituality associated with Indians that Karim’s father appropriates.

Crucially, Karim’s willing identification with the hippie culture and its attendant sexual experimentation, like his Indian affiliation, remains an incomplete identification.

9. Although the influence of pop music is a key trope of Kureishi’s writings, privileging this form against other popular types of music, notably Bollywood, reinforces the East/West dichotomy based on vexed interpretations of value. Ranasinha asserts that pop music lends a “distinctive metropolitan, hip quality” to Kureishi’s works as compared to the Bollywood culture informing Rushdie’s novels (15). Western music serves as a resource bank for Kureishi; nevertheless, there are certain references to Bollywood in *Buddha* and the Pakistani singer Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan in *The Black Album*. Changez, for instance, identifies with the Bollywood actor Shashi Kapoor who played the lead role of Rafi in Kureishi’s second film *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1987).

For Karim, Charlie symbolises the experience of sexual possibilities. However, on witnessing Charlie become a sexual instrument in New York, Karim rejects the culture of sexual experimentation: “And it was at this moment, as she [Charlie’s sexual partner] blew out a candle, lubricated it and forced it up his arse, that I realized I didn’t love Charlie any more ... I’d moved beyond him’ (255). Besides, Kureishi critiques the hippie culture and its search for Eastern spirituality in the figure of Haroon, the Buddha in the novel. The authenticity of Indian spirituality and culture in the Western imaginary is exposed as spurious since Haroon practices his Indian accent in the confines of his room (21). Karim knows that his father’s ‘authentic’ spirituality is a posture to sell ‘exoticism’ to the English since he is a “renegade Muslim masquerading as a Buddhist” (16).

Similarly, the authenticity of Karim’s “forced” Indian accent functions as a fictional construct. In the discussion between Shadwell and Karim, Shadwell asks him to “do” and practise the Indian accent for the play (147). Shadwell even accentuates Karim’s Indianness by covering him in “shit-brown cream” as Karim is not black enough to fit the stereotype of the Indian Mowgli (146). At the performance, like Arjie in *Funny Boy*, Karim refuses to conform to the dominant version of his identity. He makes “the audience laugh by suddenly relapsing into cockney at odd times” (158). In this moment of mockery/mimicry (in the sense of the “partial presence” of the mimic man as Bhabha would put it), Karim reveals the inauthenticity of the Indian accent and by extension Indian culture/identity. Schoene observes that Karim’s performance becomes “some kind of farcical ethnic drag act” and “the credibility of the stereotype collapses due to Shadwell’s overemphasis on accuracy, and with it evaporates the very idea of originary ethnic authenticity” (121). Likewise, Finney remarks that “by relapsing into his native cockney, [Karim] makes the audience aware of the inauthenticity of

the stereotypical Indian accent he has been forced to adopt” (133). A similar moment of resisting cultural stereotyping appears in Elmaleh’s disidentificatory relapse into Moroccan accent in French in his show *L’autre c’est moi*. The accents that Karim and Elmaleh enact are instances of “forced accents” which reflect upon the identities they are made to adopt to satisfy conventional stereotypes of their ethnicities.

Karim’s equivocal attitude and resistance to sexual dichotomy can be understood as a refusal of the (hetero)normative modes of time, especially definitions of adulthood. Extending my examination of how queer teenagers challenge conventional heterosexist narratives of linear temporality in the last Chapter, I suggest that Karim’s non-normative adolescence problematises issues of growing up. Karim, as Romanow remarks, “lives out an unscripted adolescence which functions against the normative timeline of birth-adolescence-marriage-reproduction-inheritance” (71). At the beginning of the novel Karim is “looking for trouble, any kind of movement, action and sexual interest” (3). However, the notion of ‘any kind of movement’ for Karim departs from a fixed temporal trajectory of adolescence to adulthood. At the end of the novel, the transformation of adolescence into adulthood is still provisional. His sexuality remains unfixed as a mere sexual interest in both men and women, even though he rejects both Charlie and Eleanor. The tentative disposition of his identity becomes clearer in one of the last sentences of the novel: “Perhaps in the future I would live more deeply” (284). The use of ‘perhaps’ and ‘the future’ suggests a deferral of adulthood and a fixed identity to a vague time later, thus retaining his in-between status of the teenager. This suspension of adulthood exemplifies what Judith Halberstam terms “queer time,” which develops “at least in part, in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction” (1). By refusing to fix a time for responsible adulthood, Karim’s prolonged adolescence, in Halberstam’s words, “challenges the conventional binary

formulation of a life narrative divided by a clear break between youth and adulthood” (153). This evidently becomes a critique of heteronormative life narratives, which chart “an obvious transition out of childish dependency through marriage and into adult responsibility through reproduction” (Halberstam 153). An example of the heteronormative life narrative is the linear progression of Haroon and Eva’s relationship in the novel. At the end of the narrative Haroon hints at the “natural” outcome of their involvement: “We met, fell in love, and now we’re getting married. In two months’ time” (283). In his symbolic rejection of Charlie and Eleanor, Karim departs from a heteronormative temporality, which becomes intelligible through a linear movement of meeting, falling in love and getting married.

Karim’s extended adolescence and his non-heteronormative identification disrupt the continuity of the childhood/adolescence/adulthood trope of growing up heteronormatively that defines the literary genre of the *bildungsroman*. Kureishi’s use of “queer time” in the form of Karim’s stretched-out adolescence effectively resists the racialised encoding of youth as well. Following Eric Lott’s work on racial cross-dressing and its implication for American whiteness, Halberstam expounds that “a strict binary between adolescence and adulthood has also been racially coded” whereby blackness is often posited “as a state of “arrested adolescence” through which white masculinity must pass on its way to adulthood” (176). For Charlie, the transition from adolescence to adulthood passes through a homosexual phase in his sexual encounters with Karim. Karim notes this progression in Charlie’s life in New York: “It was as if, without me there to celebrate it all, Charlie’s progress had little meaning” (250-1). Charlie accomplishes his transition into adulthood by earning a livelihood and returning to the sexual dynamics of heterosexuality with his new girlfriend Frankie. For him, heterosexuality represents the “whole way” whereby his relationship to Karim becomes

a partial, incomplete version of heterosexuality amounting to the Freudian construct of homosexuality as pathological immaturity (252). Karim's rejection of Charlie suggests not only a position outside the realm of sexual experimentation but also, a refusal of heterosexual norms that valorise homosexuality as a passing phase of adolescence. By unsettling the youth/adulthood divide Karim's queer temporality opposes "the racialized epistemology of youth" evident in Charlie's formulation of heterosexuality being 'the whole way' (Halberstam 176).

Structurally, Kureishi invokes the literary convention of the *bildungsroman* in *Buddha* in order to challenge it. The genre of the *bildungsroman*, emblematised in Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre* (1847), presents the growth of a character into maturity over the course of the story. However, the narrative structure of Kureishi's novel deliberately defeats any attempt to read a final closure of Karim's account. It invariably mirrors Karim's ambivalence towards any cultural/national or sexual affiliation. The novel breaks down the trope of developmental maturity and instead functions as a counter-*bildungsroman*. Finney notes that Kureishi's use of the genre is "ambiguous as the novel both evokes and yet frustrates the conventions of this genre" (125). In similar regard, Steven Connor remarks that Kureishi "simultaneously summons and rebuffs the *Bildungsroman* with its typical equations between the self and society, the growth of the individual and the cementing of social meaning" (94). Likewise, Susheila Nasta reads the narrative non-closure of the novel as a disruption of "the seamless pattern of social integration typical of the genre" (195). Indeed, at the end of the novel, Karim's sense of his identity remains provisional as at its beginning when he considers himself "going somewhere" (3). The multi-defined identity space that Karim inhabits makes it difficult to contain him within the narrative structure of the *bildungsroman*,

which requires the development of the protagonist towards societal inclusion. Karim's variously crossing lines of identity remain unintelligible in the framework of the genre.

Other characters in *Buddha* share Karim's ambivalence towards cultural/national and sexual formations. Although Kureishi develops them as fully developed characters, scholarly discussions, as I pointed above, pay insufficiently nuanced attention to their disaffiliatory practices that reflect and reinforce Karim's provisional selfhood. As mentioned earlier, Changez occupies a problematic third space of the Indian husband without much authority over his bisexual wife. In accepting to "mother" his wife's daughter Leila Kollontai, Changez decouples the heteronormative imperative of marriage and reproduction as compulsory biological sites. Additionally, he questions the myth of romantic love and sexual activity within the institution of marriage. He continues to love Jamila even though she refuses any sexual contact with him. He even suffers the humiliation of hearing Jamila and her lover Simon making love (223). In an attempt to obtain sexual gratification, he befriends the Japanese prostitute Shinko and actively encourages Shinko to become friends with Jamila. At the end of the novel Changez, Jamila, Simon, Jamila's lesbian lover Joanna and the baby Leila all share the same house such that the commune they represent involves varying sexual desires and non-nuclear patterns of family. In these unconventional modes of alternative kinship, Changez, the *mari complaisant*, loves Jamila "more than he loved himself," as Karim puts it (275). I concur with Robert Lee's reading of Changez: "if Changez is denied conjugal rights with Jamila ... and made to talk Peter Sellers 'Indian', he still achieves his own kind of dignity" (79).

By presenting the conventional stereotype of an Indian immigrant in his role as Changez, Karim reclaims his partial Indian identity. However, this impersonation of Changez in Pyke's play makes Changez an object of comic ridicule. Karim realises that

the imitation is “worth doing,” since it “had meaning” and “added up the elements of my life” (217). The deployment of ironic humour in the episode resists any simplistic interpretive closure. Whereas, at one level, it recalls the stereotype of the Indian immigrant through the accent and his sexual humiliation in the West, at the other, it offers Karim the opportunity to reclaim the routine depiction of Indians within dominant frames in order to mock the alleged authenticity of Indianness. Butler’s explanation of the affirmative resignification of the term “queer,” when reclaimed by queer self-representation, is particularly valuable in this context. She explains that the historically “paralyzing slur” associated with queer is made to re-function in a new set of meanings because it draws upon the same historical force by which it is stigmatised: “The interpellations echoes past interpellations, and binds the speakers, as if they spoke in unison across time. In this sense, it is always an imaginary chorus that taunts “queer!”” (*Bodies* 225-26). Karim’s presentation of the stereotypical Indian immigrant, then, re-appropriates the authority by which it is constructed and proliferated. Similarly, the British-Asian television series *Goodness Gracious Me!* subverts the stereotype of Indian families by investing (and in the process re-appropriating) the very site of the stereotype.

In her critique of phallogocentric economy in the field of psychoanalysis, Luce Irigaray articulates the agential strategy of mimicry such that by assuming “the feminine role deliberately,” women can “convert a form of subordination into an affirmation” (76). In this scheme of what she terms “disruptive excess,” the “playful repetition” of the feminine empowers the female subject to undermine the “masculine logic” in order to “recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it” (78, 76). Although, Irigaray’s conceptualisation invokes the relations within a patriarchal structure, I would argue that it offers modes of reflexive

positioning for marginalised cultural subjectivities as well. Karim's "playful repetition" of Indianness perceptibly over-plays the stereotype to challenge it, without being 'reduced' to it.

Changez's representation as the stereotypical migrant from India is not confined to providing comic relief in the novel. He embodies Hall's idea of "the always-already diasporic" space of the postcolonial world ("When was the Post-Colonial" 250). His admiration for English literature locates him in a complex position of cultural hybridity. The site of English literary studies in India is a fraught one. Gauri Viswanathan has demonstrated that during the colonial era the advent of English literature in India served the humanistic functions of "the development of the aesthetic sense or the disciplines of ethical thinking" (3). However, English studies became a mask for colonial annexation and the legitimization of the Empire because these functions were also "considered essential to the processes of sociopolitical control by the guardians of the same tradition" (Viswanathan 3). Following Viswanathan's account, Loomba also locates English literature in an ideological framework whereby "in the colonial context 'the English book' (the Western text, whether religious like the Bible, or literary like Shakespeare) is made to symbolise English authority itself" (89).

Changez's enthusiasm for English literature suggests the continuation of English authority, which the 'Western text' symbolises in (post)colonial India. However, his love of "classics" - as he terms it - denounces the failure of the colonial project in successfully reproducing the literary tradition. In his first conversation with Karim, Changez asks him if he likes classics as well. Karim answers: "You don't mean that Greek shit? Virgil or Dante or homo or something" (83). Changez immediately replies, "P.G. Wodehouse and Conan Doyle for me! Can you take me to Sherlock Holmes's house in Baker Street?" (83). Although Changez's conflation of popular and high

literature suggests the ambivalence of the mimic man (as Bhabha would put it) who can only partially repeat the norms of the master-discourse, his imperfect replication in turn renders the textual authority of classic English literature and by extension colonial power incomplete and partial as they become hybridised in the context.

Crucially, the characters of Jamila and Jeeta, like Changez, contest the hegemonic stereotyping of their positions and, in their representable complexity instantiate disidentificatory practices. As I discuss in detail in the following Chapter, the articulation of a queer South Asian male subjectivity within the diaspora regularly erases female same-sex homoeroticism and sexual desire. Resting upon the oft-undisputed privilege of the masculine gender, the queer male position risks being “complicit with dominant nationalist and diasporic discourses” in the “elision of queer female diasporic subjectivity” (Gopinath, *Impossible Desires* 19).¹⁰ Throughout this thesis therefore, I pay close attention to those mechanisms that marginalise, occlude or efface the experience of queer female identifications. In Kureishi’s work, South Asian women appear particularly significant in imploding the stereotypical role as non-sexual subjects. The respective disidentifications of Jamila and Jeeta function as a critique of Karim’s gendered privilege within the diaspora and, thus considered in relation to Karim, they provide an alternative possibility of diasporic (dis)affiliation that disrupts the father-son bond in conventional accounts of migration.

Although, in his novels, Kureishi privileges the male diasporic genealogy (Haroon-Karim in *Buddha*), South Asian women dispute the patriarchal power structure that they inevitably inhabit. Tania in *My Beautiful Laundrette* and Zulma in *The Black Album*, for instance, effectively undercut the stereotype of the submissive South Asian

10. Nasta offers further evidence of the devaluation of female writers from South Asia. In her analysis of Kureishi and Randhawa she argues that female novelists from the diaspora were often sidelined because they “did not fit the fashionable trends of a neo-orientalist exoticism” (183).

woman. In her assessment of *Buddha*, Susie Thomas observes that female characters appear “invariably stronger and adaptable than the males” (79). Indeed, Jamila’s character is deftly contrasted with Karim’s such that her political maturity is accentuated by Karim’s struggle to locate his own male subjectivity. Ranasinha asserts that there is “an underlying tension” between Jamila’s engagement with anti-racism and Karim’s resistance to collective politics (63). However, I contend that both Jamila and Karim represent two different ways of theorising and representing difference, not necessarily antithetical to each other. Instead, Jamila’s disidentification with the disempowered South Asian female subjectivity reinforces Karim’s disaffiliatory practices and simultaneously deprivileges Karim’s gendered position. Influenced by her readings of Simone de Beauvoir and Angela Davies, Jamila develops a feminist and anti-racist view of society whereby her ideas of representation of ethnic minorities reveal an anxiety about self-representation. In her criticism of Karim’s performance as Mowgli in Shadwell’s play, she argues for a “positive” representation of South Asians. She finds the play “completely neo-fascist” with Karim “just pandering to prejudices” and “clichés about Indians” (157). While her activist position seems to condone Hall’s notion of a “counter-position of a ‘positive’ black imagery,” Karim’s subversion of the stereotype of the Indian accent suggests another way of responding to cultural prejudice (“New Ethnicities” 442). Both positions become equally relevant to contest the ideological construction of non-white categories. Karim’s close bond with Jamila throughout the novel symbolises the inseparable nature of their respective political positions that operate through disidentificatory practices.

Whereas Jamila agrees to marry according to the wishes of her father, Karim often uses his male privilege to live the life of his choice. However, she resists the demands of marriage by refusing sexual contact with her husband, Changez. Parallel to

Karim's shifting identities, she continues to have sexual relations outside of marriage with Simon and later in the novel shares a lesbian relationship with Joanna. She deconstructs the idea of romantic love by insisting on the sexual aspect of her liaisons with Simon and Joanna. As she explains to Changez, "it's passion, I suppose, and it's wonderful" (277). Kureishi's depiction of Jamila critiques the stereotype of the voiceless South Asian woman as victim by presenting her as an active desiring subject. In so doing, Kureishi places Jamila as a contender "for the title most frequently associated with Karim: "herald of hybridity"" since like Karim, "she explores a number of complex subject positions." (O'Shea-Meddour 34).

Although Jeeta probably represents a milder radical position than her daughter, Jamila, she likewise resists the demands imposed by her position as a South Asian wife. Moving beyond the domestic space of the South Asian woman, she manages the convenience store with only minimal support from her husband Anwar. Kaleta notes a striking difference between the "British-born Jamila and her Pakistani mother, Jeeta." (199). However, I would suggest that an emphasis on the British/Pakistani divide between Jamila and Jeeta runs the risk of essentialising these discursively constituted and often intersecting sites. Certainly, the different spheres that Jeeta and Jamila inhabit reflect the generational gap that separates them and yet, the bond that the mother and daughter share lies beyond the confines of the British/Pakistani divide. Jamila's marriage to Changez is a compromise that deepens this bond. Explaining the reason for her decision, Jamila states, "I'd have walked out there and then. I'd have got the Council to take me into care. Anything. I'd have lived with friends, done a runner. Except for my mother. He [Anwar] takes it out on her. He abuses her" (58). Jamila's negotiation of her identity is intractable from her consideration of how her father treats Jeeta.

Underlining the significance of recovering female diasporic affiliations, I suggest that my reading of Jeeta/Jamila bond not only deflects scholarly attention from the male genealogy of diasporas but reads conventional disempowered female spaces as vibrant sites of agency as well. For instance, Jeeta becomes increasingly keen on the various possibilities of her life due to the critical influence that Jamila exercises on her mother. Karim attests to Jeeta's struggle to run the shop and observes that "it was as if Jamila had educated her in possibility, the child being an example to the parent" (172). Jeeta's character evolves into an affirmation of the South Asian woman migrant when compared to the silent and often submissive character of Margaret, Karim's white British mother. As the novel progresses, Anwar becomes disillusioned with the idea of living in Britain. However, Jeeta refuses to return to Bombay since she is aware that the romantic idea of going back is only a fictional construct, which is often related to the male prerogative of (dis)locating families at their will (172).

Anwar's recourse to Muslim absolutism as an answer to widespread social marginalisation functions as a contrast to Jeeta's spirit of enterprise. While Anwar degenerates into a state of megalomania, Jeeta gains control of the shop and manages it better: "Princess Jeeta was becoming stronger and more wilful as Anwar declined" (208). Even though she is a Muslim, she starts to stock pork products and alcohol in the shop. She even coaxes Changez to work in the shop, something that Anwar was unable to achieve. She anticipates the representation of other female immigrants in contemporary British fiction- template for other non-stereotypical female characters like Nazneen in Monica Ali's novel *Brick Lane* (2003). Karim's refusal to adhere to a neat categorisation of a hyphenated British-Indian is thus reinforced by Changez's occupation of a problematic third space, Jamila's imposition of her lesbian sexuality as a corollary to her ethnic identity and Jeeta's resistance to the normative perception of a South Asian

wife. The intersecting lines of the narrative that bring the characters together point to the pluralising trajectory of all identity formations and identifications. The idea of identity as a unique, fossilised and ‘natural’ category systematically declines through the disidentification of Kureishi’s characters from the stereotypes into which they are forced.

This Chapter has demonstrated that *Buddha* undermines any notion of a stable and fixed identity. A reading of the interrelationship between queer and postcolonial identities/politics can be useful in understanding the contingency of all identity categories. It can open the site of the postcolonial to newer territories whereby racial and sexual categories exist not as opposite or separate critical domains but as mutually benefitting and crossing matrices. In this context, Karim’s cultural in-betweenness becomes interesting precisely because it connects to his sexual in-betweenness. His ambivalence towards his Indian or British cultures, when considered in parallel to his ambivalence towards all sexual bonds, effectively displaces the logic of unified identificatory practices. This disidentification, as I have shown in this Chapter, unsettles the notion of a singular subjecthood for all the characters in the novel. The complex trajectories of identification and disidentification with stereotypes of the characters point to the very impossibility of identification itself. What Karim achieves at the end of the novel is not a fully formed subjectivity, but an identity that is continuously evolving and being endlessly (re)constructed.

My reading of Kureishi’s text has departed from the over-saturated site of post-colonial hybridity in order to offer a critically nuanced interpretation of identity categories that cannot simply be subsumed under a single rubric of the subordinated “other”. The disaffiliatory strategies of Karim, Changez, Jamila and Jeeta that I have analysed above gesture towards the absence of critiques that consider disidentification as a

strategy of survival in queer of colour articulations. Simultaneously, I have sought to highlight the notable androcentrism of normative diasporic frames that elide female subjectivity. In so doing, I have attempted to recuperate feminine intergenerational, genealogical alliances within diasporas that are not reined in by disabling discourses about South Asian women.

Chapter Three

Bollywood Homes: Queer Diasporic Identity in Ghalib

Shiraz Dhalla's *Ode to Lata*

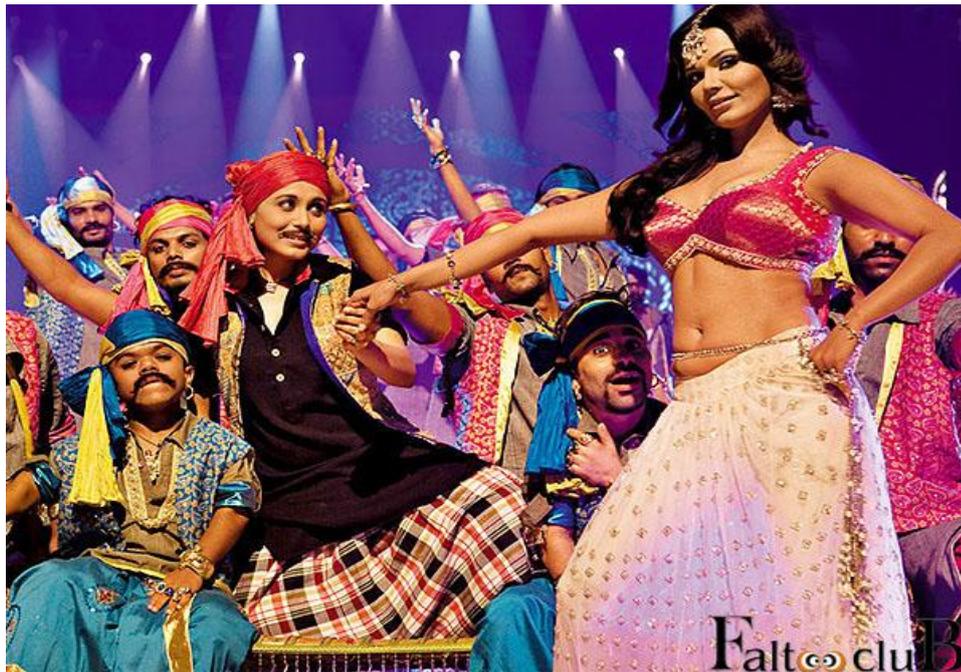
In the song “Bhangra, Bistar” (“Bhangra and Bed”) from the Bollywood film *Dil Bole Hadippa! (Heart Says Hurrah*, dir. Anurag Singh, 2009), Shanno Amritsari (item girl Rakhi Sawant) engages in an amorous dance sequence with Veera Kaur (actress Rani Mukherjee) who is attired in Punjabi male gear with a moustache (see image below).¹ As an explicit reference to female homoeroticism in all-female traditional songs of North India and Pakistan, the lyrics frame the visual images of Shanno and Veera in queer articulations of femininity. Even though it appears as a brief interlude in the overarching narrative of heterosexual coupling in the film, “Bhangra, Bistar” nonetheless foregrounds an alternative narrative of queer pleasure between the two actresses. Borrowing from simultaneous conventions of Punjabi folk music and female homosocial spaces in certain Bollywood videos,² it invokes as well as continues the possibility of articulating queer female desire within South Asian cultural practices.

Veera and Shanno's vivacious performance invariably speaks to the critical ways in which female homosocial desire becomes legible in Bollywood where women as sexual subjects often get lodged into narratives of vamps and prostitutes. As Shohini Ghosh observes, “masquerade ... allows female protagonists to escape narrative con-

1. The prolific Hindi-language film industry in Bombay/Mumbai is often called Bollywood. The term “item girl” alludes to female performers in song and dance numbers. Often, they do not play the role of the leading actress in a Bollywood film. In the 1980s, Helen was the most popular item girl.

2. One of the most famous songs in terms of queer female pleasure is “Didi Tera Devar Deevana” (“Sister, your Brother-in-Law is Crazy”) from the film *Hum Apke Hai Kaun (Who Am I to You?*, dir. Sooraj Barjatya, 1994).

straints and indulge in excess, badness, abandon, and revelry” (211). In one particularly bold instance, Veera reclines on Shanno’s almost half-bare breasts as the two bodies engulf in a tight embrace. Additionally, the song stands apart from the routine standardisation of racialised beauty in Indian films that systematically privilege light skin as culturally desirable. Veera explicitly locates him/herself as the non-*gora* (non-white) who does not need the English language in order to court Shanno. In this regard, the song offers an enabling critique of entrenched racial binaries when aligned to female queer representation. Queerness thus doubly transgresses cultural norms in South Asian cultural practices that deny female sexuality and reinforce global/Euro-American paradigms of beauty.



Veera Kaur’s hyperbolic masculinity in “*Dil Bole Haddipa!*” (*Heart Says Hurrah*, dir. Anurag Singh, 2009).

Extending my discussion of “Bhangra, Bistar,” this Chapter aims to open constructions of queerness to a new dimension. It proposes that queer cultural practices

need to be understood in a broader context whereby the effects of local, global, diasporic, racial and transnational affiliation of queer subjects can be adequately articulated. Complementing my reading of queer diasporic disidentificatory practices in the previous Chapter, I examine the analogous relation of racial and sexual position of gay male diasporic subjectivity in Ghalib Shiraz Dhalla's first novel *Ode to Lata* (2002) in this Chapter. I argue that Dhalla's narrative is significant in the several ways in which it disputes conventional conceptions of diaspora as theorised from a heteronormative perspective by challenging existing dominant paradigms of home. South Asian queer diasporic subjectivity recasts the vexed site of home as the repository of same-sex desire. However, the articulation of the queer diasporic male identity is dependent upon the simultaneous construction of embedded racial binaries and the elision of female sexual subjectivity. Although through explicit appropriation of film songs the novel highlights queer diasporic practices/memory of reading Bollywood as a specifically "queer" cultural export,³ I suggest that Dhalla rehearses Bollywood's uncritical obsession with Euro-American conceptions of beauty to construct the protagonist Ali's queer identity. Ali's queerness therefore becomes a site of privilege when considered in conjunction with the stereotypical images of race and gendered hierarchies that it generates.

As a theoretical framework, I develop Gayatri Gopinath's formulation of the "queer diasporic frame of analysis" that signals towards "alternative forms of collectivity and communal belonging that redefine "home" as national, communal, or domestic space outside a logic of blood, purity, authenticity, and patrilineal descent." (*Bollywood Spectacles* 158). Combining insights from studies of diaspora and queer theory in order to unravel the interconnection between diasporic formations and queer cultural

3. Dhalla's novel was adapted for screen in 2009 with the same title.

practices, I place the queer diasporic subject at the centre of discourses on queerness, diaspora, race and home. Such an approach undermines the rigid hierarchy that locates non-white queer subjects in peripheral boundaries and simultaneously addresses the absence of ‘race’ as a useful category of analysis in postcolonial studies. By placing queer cultural practices such as Bollywood at the heart of diasporic narratives of home, history and belonging, this Chapter offers a new perspective on both queerness and traditional heteronormative frames of diaspora. As Gopinath suggests, “suturing “queer” to “diaspora” points to those desires, practices, and subjectivities that are rendered impossible and unimaginable within conventional diasporic and nationalist imaginaries” (“Bollywood Spectacles” 158). In this Chapter, I engage with those alternative forms of belonging and desire that suture together queer cultural practices to diasporic identities.

In *Ode to Lata*, Dhalla places the queer diasporic subject at the centre of issues of migration, home and diaspora. The novel is significant in the ways in which it represents the homosexuality of its protagonist, Ali, and highlights competing claims to his Indian, Muslim, Kenyan Asian, diasporic identity in his new home Los Angeles. It parallels Ali’s loss of and longing for home with his yearning for his lost lover, Richard. The alternating appearance of Richard and Kenya in the various Chapters attests to the impossibility of their separation in Ali’s consciousness and suggests a nostalgic framework of longing for Richard and belonging to Kenya. Although Ali attempts to construct his American identity and feel comfortable in it by regulating his life to the rhythms of American television series like *Melrose Place*, the constant eruptions of his Kenyan past and his Indian culture create a sense of loss, nostalgia and longing. The migration that was allegedly intended to “assure my fame and glamour” becomes a difficult reality to wield as his loss of Kenya and Indian upbringing reflects, in compounded ways, in the loss of Richard (3). By introducing the principal theme of Ali’s

“insatiable hunger for Richard” at the outset, Dhalla explicitly connects queer desire to issues of migration and identity (1).

Dhalla’s novel rewrites conventional accounts of home in diasporic imagination from the perspective of the queerness of its protagonist. In relation to the multiple definitions of home in diasporic discourses, Avtar Brah points out that “‘home’ is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination” (188). Similarly, in his exegetical account of the migrant writer, Salman Rushdie claims that the urgency to reclaim a past often leads the writer to “create fictions” of imaginary homelands (10). Richard and Kenya (the purported home for Ali) concurrently appear as such fictive constructs in the story. Ali’s idealised image of Richard mirrors his variously redemptive interpretation of his homeland Kenya that he seeks to escape on his visit to the country.

The construction of the imaginary geographical homeland of Kenya illustrates a mnemonic process, which becomes both parallel and similar to Ali’s desire for Richard. Although the longing for Richard shapes the main narrative of the novel, Kenya simultaneously appears as an imaginary location to which Ali returns as he constructs fictions of his past. At the beginning of the novel, for Ali, “the image of the Kenyan flag with its brilliant red and green colors” fades in comparison to the “impregnable promise of benevolence” exemplified by the American flag (2). However, as the novel progresses, Kenya becomes a fiction that like Richard, unfolds within the confines of his imaginary belonging. The scent of Richard’s deodorant, which connects Ali to him, is strikingly similar to the “distinct perfume of Kenya” which he longs for in his dreams (5). The nostalgia for Kenya is charted in fictional reconstructions whereby he recreates the Kenyan railway and his attachment to it. Similar to all the sexual encounters with strangers who do not succeed in satiating his desire for Richard, the move to Los Angeles invariably fails to efface Ali’s desire for Kenya: “I had freedom in geography only to be

forever captured by the memories of the home I left behind. In my dreams, I still ride the railway” (4). Again, when his mother brings him savouries from Kenya he can only relate to them through a phantasmatic framework. Redrawing the lines of the past and the present, he remembers, “vaguely some of the last times I enjoyed some of these dishes in a land so far away, I had only been able to dream about it for years” (89). Memories of the Kenyan railway, the events of his childhood where he learns how to make ‘ice popsicles’ with his grandfather and the Islamic rituals at his father’s death become instances of a mythical return to his Kenyan home (4, 63, 73). Although these events once existed in the realm of reality, the nostalgic invocation of these events effectively locates them within the boundaries of his imagination.

Like Kenya, Richard and Ali’s relationship functions as a nostalgic past since it terminated six years ago. Ali’s yearning for the absent lover makes him recreate a vision of Richard that resembles more his imagination than the ‘real’ Richard. For instance, when Richard finally meets him after his many importunate calls, Ali still registers a feeling of loss and realises that he is incapable of consummating his passion for Richard. Even though Richard is present with him, Ali is aware of “the *image* of him hungrily taking from others what he refused me” (39, my emphasis). Richard’s infidelity prompts Ali to reconstruct a romanticised past which idolises Richard as the “aesthetic perfection” (31). In this idealised image of Richard, the “scent of his deodorant ... at the counter of some supermarket” evokes more contentment than “intimate brushes against his body and caresses that titillated but never quenched” (39). The nostalgia for Richard and Ali’s desire to recommence their past relationship figures as Rushdie’s ‘imaginary homeland’ that he seeks to reclaim. The compulsive obsession with Richard can only be satiated by the intimacy between them in the realm of dreams: “And in my sleep, he came again. And most of the time we were both silent. He held me close, and nestled

within him, I felt safe and assured again” (48). On his visit to see Richard at the hospital, he realises that his image of Richard is a result of fictive construction. As he observes, “six years had gone by and I was there still standing at his bedside in some hospital because he might have literally fucked his life away, while I had spent nights with little more than my fantasies of him” (51-2).

For Ali, home represents an intractable link to non-normative desire. Homecoming in the novel resignifies the way in which home functions as a site of heteronormativity that obliterates queerness. The concept of home is a contested terrain in scholarship on diaspora. Home, family, homeland, community and nation are considered as problematic sites, which reproduce dominant structures and reinforce their mutual legitimacy. Following Benedict Anderson’s work on the interconnectedness of home, family, community and the nation, feminist critiques of the nation examine the position of women in discourses of family and home. McClintock and Grewal, for instance, assert the centrality of women as emblems of national identity through their role in home and family (McClintock 354, Grewal 7). Within lesbian and gay discourses home typically functions in opposition to queerness, which must be left behind in order to enjoy an emancipated queer sexuality. Migration (away from home) therefore becomes a vital component of queerness. Ali’s migration to Los Angeles can be considered as a move away towards a progressive “queerer” West. In this scheme, Kenya, by contrast, appears a “home” of compulsory heteronormativity. The subculture of gay bars and infinite sexual encounters in Los Angeles can easily be understood as an expression of Ali’s repressed queer identity. However, Ali’s brief return to Kenya and his constant nostalgic longing problematise any neat assessment of ‘home’ as a suppressor of queerness. On his visit to Kenya, Ali meets his bisexual lover Nawaz in the hope of sexual gratifi-

cation. Although Nawaz is awaiting his marriage, Ali feels “a desire so urgent, it was acutely painful” and the “familiar rush pulsating through my body” (94).

In her work on queer migrations, Anne-Marie Fortier challenges the “tendency to oppose queerness and the childhood home, where the latter is a space where queerness does not fit” (116). Similarly, Gopinath provides an elucidatory account of the function of home in queer diasporic texts. She explains that:

Queer diasporic texts evoke “home” spaces that are permanently and already ruptured, rent by colliding discourses around class, sexuality, and ethnic identity. They lay claim to both the space of “home” and the nation by making both the site of desire and pleasure in a nostalgic diasporic imaginary. The heteronormative home, in these texts, unwittingly generates homoeroticism. This resignification of “home” within a queer diasporic imaginary makes three crucial interventions: first, it forcefully repudiates the elision of queer subjects from national and diasporic memory; second, it denies their function as threat to family/community/nation; and third, it refuses to position queer subjects as alien, inauthentic, and perennially outside the confines of these entities. (*Impossible Desires* 15).

For the South Asian queer subject, the heteronormative home, as Gopinath suggests, ‘unwittingly generates homoeroticism’ such that home becomes a signifier of same-sex desire. As I have shown in Chapter 1, for Arjie, the Sri Lankan home functions as a key element in his homosexual awakening. In a similar vein, if, for Ali, Kenya represents the “mythic place,” to borrow a term from Brah, it also represents the possibility of queer belonging apparent in the dramatic reliving of Ali’s sexual past as he awaits sexual deliverance from Nawaz (188). His Kenyan home becomes the signifier of his

adolescent queerness. It is an example of what David Eng terms as “enduring queer affiliations” to the concept of home (“Out Here” 32). The resignification of home as a location of queer pleasure in Ali’s imaginary disputes the claim that home can only be a place where queerness and non-normative desires exist as outsiders.

Crucially, Ali’s encounter with Nawaz in Kenya serves to interrogate the assumption of non-western (queer) sexual experiences as either less emancipated or marginal. Within queer theory, critical discussions have begun to challenge perceptions of homosexuality in the Third World filtered “through the imperialist gaze of Euroamerican queer identity of politics, appropriated through the economies of the West, or, at worst, altogether ignored” (Spurlin, “Broadening” 185).⁴ In Chapter 1, I provided instances of how queer adolescence in South Asia disrupts conventional narrativisation of queerness as Western construction. In similar regard, in Dhalla’s novel, Ali shifts from a position of the newly acquired ‘imperialist gaze’ to an acknowledgement of the complexity of sexuality in Kenya. Nawaz’s impending marriage initially prompts Ali to look at the difference and geographical distance between his affirmed homosexuality and Nawaz’s covert bisexuality. From his position of privilege as an American émigré, Ali compares Nawaz’s discreet sexual ambiguity with his own progressive experience of “coming out and being honest and gay” (98). Contrasted to the discourses of queer identity politics in America, Kenyan sexual experiences appear simplistically uncategorised, evident in Nawaz’s engagement or later his friend Akil’s “imposed” marriage (107).

However, Ali soon realises that American and Kenyan attitudes to homosexuality are not constitutive of a hierarchical relationship. The novel contests the notion that

4. See also Gopinath’s assertion that “globalization of “gay” identity ... replicates a colonial narrative of development and progress that judges all “other” sexual cultures, communities, and practices against a model of Euro-American sexual identity” (*Impossible Desires* 11).

queer diasporic subjects must move to the West to find sexual freedom by re-energising Ali's desire for Nawaz in spite of his contempt for the latter. After the sexual encounter with Nawaz, Ali wonders who had "made the right choice" (100). His own sexual discontentment in Los Angeles reminds him of the inefficacy of his choice. He concedes that "perhaps labels are truly for cans of food. Not people. That we were all simply sexual beings" (99). Ali's statement provides an effective counterpoint to the homonormativisation of "gay" identities based on the US frame of identity classification. It points to the universalising tendency of global models at the expense of local experience.

In addition, like the unsettling of the hierarchical construct of Western/non-Western conception of sexuality, Ali's Muslim heritage confounds received understanding of Islam as opposed to homosexual desire. Although at his father's funeral Ali remarks that he "hates" the colour green, a colour conventionally associated with Islam, he lays claim to Islam through its customs and ritual practices (72). Seeing Richard's deteriorating condition due to jaundice, Ali convinces his mother to put a *satado* - an Ismaili Muslim ceremony in which prayers are offered to ward off a specific calamity - at the local mosque (68). Similar to my discussion of the queer sacred in Chapter 1, the queer diasporic subject locates his experience within the parameters of religion by appropriating the rituals of Islam.

The novel reworks the notion of home as a cultural construct in contrast to the geographical rootedness that is associated with it. Ali creates his American home in an effort to regain the geographical centre he loses in Kenya. However, his American home is made to resignify in a diasporic context in order to allow the construction of his Indian identity. In the Chapter titled "Home Again," the "general atmosphere" of his American home reveals the hybridity engendered by his South Asian identity (175). The

“exotic menu,” the “loud pumping remixes of nostalgic *filmi* songs” and “the juicy gossip” of his friend “Salman and his gang of South-Asian expats” and “the sweet exaggerated vernacular of the Indian culture with its opera of gestures and expressions” defeat the assumption that home is a static geographical entity (174-75). Following Fortier’s suggestion that “the identities of ‘home’ as well as those who inhabit it are never fixed, but are continuously reimagined and redefined,” I suggest that Ali’s American home is effectively ‘redefined’ to become a multiple site of the interplay of his identities (116). Like Karim in *Buddha*, he reacquaints himself with the “unbroken ties with India” (177). Symbolically, the reworking of the different locations of home exemplifies what Bhabha terms as the “unhomely” which functions as the “shock of recognition of the world-in-the-home, the home-in-the-world” (“World” 142). Ali’s ‘unhomely’ American home therefore incorporates his Indian ‘home’ as well even though India can only function as an imaginary cultural homeland to both Ali and Salman who comprise the “new generation of Indians that had never even been to India” (190).

In her critique of conventional diasporic narratives, Gopinath observes that diaspora traditionally refers “to a system of kinship reckoned through men,” but in *Ode to Lata*, Dhalla challenges established heteropatriarchal notions of diaspora by privileging the mother-son relationship over the father-son bond (*Impossible Desires* 5). For instance, Ali speaks regularly to his mother over the phone and they share a mutual passion for Bollywood songs. The mother-son diasporic bond stands apart from the routine expressions of diasporic families through the traditional father-son genealogy in literatures of diaspora such as Haroon and Karim in *Buddha*. In contrast, Ali’s father, like Richard, is an absent figure. At various points in the novel, Ali identifies with his mother, whereas Richard and his lovers stand for the lost father figure. He relates to

“the psyche of his dramatic Indian mother” and, wants to “fuse back into her. To become one with her. To be her” (45, 130). His relationship with Richard and its “jagged edges of unrequited love” parallels the failed relationship of his parents where his father abandons his mother and lives with another woman (59). Like his mother, he recasts himself as “forgiving, enduring and perhaps even preventing him from straying again” (39). By presenting Ali’s identification with his mother, Dhalla repositions the mother-son attachment as a primary site of affiliation within the diaspora. Further, his purportedly feminine subject position, implied by this identification, disrupts the logic of gender fixity whereby adult males must identify with masculine role models.

Creating an intergenerational connection, Bollywood opens up alternative ways to account for diasporic identity, which does not rely solely on geographical links. In their study of the Jewish diaspora, Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin suggest that generational links between the Jewish diaspora de-emphasise the significance of geographical territory as the basis for thinking about Jewish identity. Jewish culture, like other cultures, thus becomes a critical site that disassociates the natural bond between “this people and a particular land” (108).⁵ Similarly, Bollywood represents a cultural form that privileges the generational over the geographical link in the novel. The prominence of the product of export that Bollywood films signify illustrates the cultural attachment of Ali and his mother to India, a country in which they have never lived. The title of the novel invokes the renowned Bollywood ‘playback singer’ Lata Mangeshkar, and draws attention to the significance of Bollywood in the narrative.⁶ Ali comments

5. Compare Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur’s conventional definition of the term diaspora “as a naming of the other which has historically referred to displaced communities of people who have been dislocated from their native homeland through the movements of migration, immigration, or exile” (1).

6. In Bollywood, a playback singer provides the voice to the on-screen actor. Lata Mangeshkar was awarded the prestigious *Bharat Ratna* (the Gem of India award) for her contribution to music and is the playback singer par excellence.

that Lata is the “ethereal voice from every Hindi film I’ve beheld as a child” (8). Bollywood binds mother and son in the context of diaspora. Ali finds himself elated when listening to Bollywood music while his mother relates it to the past, “*those days*” with his father (149, emphasis in original). As a child in Kenya, Ali accompanied his mother to the screening of Bollywood films, which was like a ritual for the “entire Indian community of Mombasa” who “would prepare for the excursion as early as noon by packing tiffins of Indian viands” (150). Bollywood thus creates a generational link rather than a geographical link between diasporic subjects. Ali’s migration from Kenya to America is an example of geographical dislocation. However, in terms of his attachment to Bollywood, his Indian identity exemplifies the particularities of cultural displacement.

In implicit relation to home as an imaginary construct in Dhalla’s narrative, Bollywood recalls the nostalgic homing desire of South Asian diasporic populations. Gopinath reminds that “given the vastness of its reach, surprisingly few detailed critical, ethnographic, or historical works have emerged on the reception, consumption, and distribution of popular Indian cinema within different diasporic locations.” (*Impossible Desires* 94).⁷ Bollywood produces a fictional version of home, nation and nationalism through cinematic representation by representing the “nation as a mythical community” (Virdi 1, see also Nandy, *Secret Politics*; Prasad 28). It represents the anxiety surrounding the cosmopolitan, globalised image of India that the postcolonial nation aims to proliferate (Rai 30-32). Rachel Dwyer notes how “the very nature of its close engagement with the people of a nation makes Hindi cinema a primary source of such information” (Dwyer and Patel 9). Within diasporic circles, Bollywood constitutes a cultural tie

7. In her exhaustive analysis of Bollywood, Jigna Desai “reverses the gaze” through an exploration of how Indian films construct the diaspora. She notes “the increasing centrality of diaspora and the transnational class to the postcolonial nation-state due to the deterritorialization of the nation and other global processes” (184).

with the lost homeland. As Ziauddin Sardar remarks, Indian films, the prime “cultural referent” in Asian Britain, provide “a direct emotional link with the subcontinent” (22). Jyotika Viridi also contends that Bollywood “resonates powerfully with the Indian diaspora, often becoming their only connection with the homeland and the main inter-generational culture diasporic families share” (2). For Ali, Bollywood represents a cultural conduit for his connection to an ‘Indian’ past in Kenya. It connects Ali to the other members of the Indian diaspora—Farida, Salman and Riyaz in Los Angeles.

Bollywood enables Ali to express his feelings about Richard in a Western context where men’s expression of emotion is taboo since feelings ‘feminise’ men. “Lata’s songs of doom and devastation in love” are mobilised at various critical junctures in the narrative as a means to express Ali’s failed relationship with Richard (267). Scholars such as Lalita Gopalan and Vijay Mishra show that as a paradigm of the interplay of sexual and gender tropes, Bollywood opens a cultural space for cross-gender and non-normative sexual identification (see Gopalan, *Cinematic Interruptions* and Mishra, *Temples of Desire*). Emotional excess, traditionally associated with women in the West, serves to heighten the loss of Richard and gives a tragic expression to Ali’s feelings. In relation to Bollywood cinema, Dwyer explains that “in melodrama the emphasis is not on the psychology of a unique individual but on the functioning of characters in situations that push their emotions to extremes” (29). The first word of the title *Ode*, as explained in Webster’s dictionary, refers to a lyric poem, which is marked by exaltation of feeling and style. Bollywood’s exalted emotions and melodrama are reinforced if read in conjunction with the definition of the literary style of an ode. Both create a tragic mood constituted by an overflow of emotions.

Further, explaining his homosexuality to his mother, Ali wants to tell her that “she would never have a daughter-in-law. That there would be no grandchildren for her

to dote on, to carry on the family name, *that the tree stopped there*" (144, my italics). Coming-out narratives often involve emotional investment, but the statement above, like lofty Bollywood dialogues, accentuates the dramatic content of emotions. As Ali's friend Frankie points out, "everything turns into a soap opera with you" so that he often appears as "a drama queen" (260). As the novel progresses, melodrama serves Ali's need to construct a tragic self. Although Dhalla critiques the narcissistic figure of the tragic queer by ultimately repositioning Ali as a realist (after much resistance he finally agrees, at the end of the novel, to be tested for HIV), the melodramatic structure enables Ali to reflect upon his failures without 'being committed to bitterness' (284). The pleasure of melodrama allows the audience of a Bollywood film to "overcome the meaninglessness of everyday existence and find reassurance for their fractured lives" (Dwyer 29). Similarly, Ali aims to reconfigure the melodramatic *mise-en-scène* of Bollywood as a remedy for his nostalgia and loveless life.

Crucially, the queer diasporic subject and his attachment to Bollywood decentre the global hegemony of American culture. By aligning Ali and Salman to the melodies of Lata Mangeshkar, Dhalla rewrites the identificatory practices of "a new generation of Indians that had never been to India; Indians who had become multicultural" (190). The resignification of Bollywood as a cultural practice, at the centre of identificatory structure, serves two purposes. It creates a world where "Lata Mangeshkar ousted Barbara Streisand" such that local cultural practices precede dominant/global ones (176). The global becomes a site of contestation where different local sites interact in an equitable relation. Both Lata Mangeshkar and Barbara Streisand thus appear to be local cultural practices, which inform identity formation. Second, it brings to the fore and emphasises the queer subtext of Bollywood, claiming it as a diasporic queer cultural practice.

Ali's identification with Bollywood actresses Rekha, Meena Kumari and the vamp Helen reveals a potential for cross-gendered queer identification (14, 62, 152). Recently, Bollywood has been explored as a critical site that resonates with queer modes of gender and sexual non-normativity. Even though Bollywood articulates an anxiety about securing national, cultural and sexual borders through narratives of cultural purity and authenticity, critical analyses have sought to read the faultlines, which disrupt discourses of a coherent heterosexuality or national community. The focus on song-and-dance performances in Bollywood films, oft regarded as unnecessary to the plot, uncovers a thematic trope of erotic visual pleasures (Dwyer 37). Shohini Ghosh remarks that "as powerful vehicles of emotions and aspirations, songs and dances often play out Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque" (211). As an embodiment of the 'carnavalesque,' song-and-dance sequences disrupt traditional hierarchies of class, gender or sexuality. Ruth Vanita suggests that "while the plot of the films is heavily didactic and censorious of erotic pleasure, the half-dozen songs that punctuate every film tend to celebrate erotic life, including illicit eroticism" (*Love's Rite* 288).

Similarly, male-to-female cross-dressing in songs is not restricted to supporting actors. Even established superstars like Amitabh Bachchan and Shah Rukh Khan participate willingly. The possibility of an implied queer content in the songs constitutes the attraction for Ali. As a child, he cross-dresses as Helen the vamp and gives a performance in front of the family audience (152). He reminisces that the songs and his performances prompted in him "the discovery of my queer self" (152). Bollywood songs, then, are intractable from the construction of his queer identity. Ruminating on their queer identity, Salman and Ali wonder how they can reconcile their homosexuality to the Indian conservatism of the diaspora: "We had no answers and no role models, not

unless we wanted to consider the eunuchs in India ... or the brutish husbands who gave in to blow jobs in toilets” (190). However, as they both agree, Bollywood provides an alternative framework for queer identification, which articulates queer desire through the medium of its songs. For this reason, immediately after underlining the vitality of a gay support group for South Asians, Salman increases the volume of the stereo “letting Lata sing her heart out” (190).

Ali’s construction of his queer subjectivity through identification with Bollywood songs highlights the queer appropriation of a dominant cultural expression. The songs are particularly significant for queer subcultures because marginal or unconventional unions find expression in them. These bonds include cross-class love, inter-religious marriage and, to a certain extent, male and female homoeroticism. Moreover, Vanita explains that “many songs, especially older ones, are in the first and second person (‘I love you’) and thus carefully avoid gendering either singer or addressee” (*Love’s Rite* 283). She adds that the strategy to leave the gender open to interpretation also functions through the use of “the optative voice and the plural” (283). This gendered openness of Bollywood songs is carefully appropriated in Deepa Mehta’s film *Fire* (1996). In a medley of songs, the two sisters-in-law parody the romantic love songs that Bollywood popularises. The ease with which one of them assumes the role of the ‘hero’ testifies to the gendered fluidity of the songs. Likewise, Ali’s performance of Helen’s song “Piya tu Ab to Aaja” (“O my lover, please come Now”) from the film *Caravan* (dir. Nasir Hussain, 1971) is exemplary of the gendered irresoluteness of the lyrics. Although sung as a heterosexual cabaret duet, it can successfully describe any gendered position. The first stanza, like the rest of the song, carefully omits any reference to the gender of the singer:

O my lover, please come now,

My heart is on fire, come and extinguish this fire.

Please embrace me in such a way,

That my body, which burns with passion, can be cooled.

By avoiding any reference to the singer or the addressee, the song can be sung by both the genders. Sexual desire becomes visible via an un-gendered position and can therefore incorporate non-normative identification. Ali's narcissistic cross-gendered identification with the female singer/vamp challenges the norms of gender identification like the expression of emotion afforded by the songs. Additionally, his re-appropriation of the song queers the most important cultural export of India, Bollywood. Ali's performance of Helen's song opens the possibility of queer self-fashioning in South Asian cultures in which Bollywood appears as a mode of expression where queer desire can be made intelligible.

Ali's identification with the vamp Helen underscores the solidarity of marginal identities. Belonging to a non-Hindu/Anglo-Indian minority, Helen offers the most direct contrast to the idealised, traditional heroine of Indian films who occupies the role of the submissive, asexual subject position. Helen's hyper-sexualised performances function as a "clutter of signifiers of Westernization," often involving sexual licentiousness (R. Thomas 11). They define, by contrast, the cultural 'purity' of the Hindu/Indian heroine. As the racialised and religious outsider, Helen embodies the threat of corruption of the national body, which is symbolised by the non-Westernised and sari-clad Hindu/Indian woman. By making Helen a pivotal point in Ali's childhood narrative, Dhalla locates his queer diasporic subject in an alliance with other marginalised identities that challenge the fiction of a unified Indian culture. Ali's other strong identification with Bollywood icon Meena Kumari also places the marginal subject at the centre of discursive representation. Meena Kumari's portrayal of a courtesan in the film

Pakeezah (The Pure One, 1971) has acquired an iconic status in Bollywood spectatorship. Ali suggests that one particular song from the film, in which Meena Kumari declares that she has been sexually exploited by all the members of the society from the postman to the policeman, is “one of the campiest songs” (62). For him, “this should have been the litmus test for any Indian parent to discover a son’s homosexuality. The infamous *Pakeezah* song” (62). Like Helen, Meena Kumari represents the ‘other’ as the degenerate ‘Muslim’ *tawaif* (courtesan). However, the film condemns the society for its treatment of the prostitute, who remains ‘the pure one’. Ali’s identification with Meena Kumari thus conjoins queerness with stigmatised identities and calls into question the cultural stigmatisation of marginal subjects and non-normative desire.

Paradoxically, the enabling queer diasporic identification with the oppressed female figure serves to reinforce male control over the female body in the novel.⁸ The glamorous figures of Helen and Meena Kumari efface the effects of exploitation of female bodies for male pleasure. Asha Kasbekar contends that:

the Hindi film upholds the patriarchally determined feminine idealization through inflated rhetoric on chastity within the narrative, but resists the very same feminine ideals by offering the woman as ‘spectacle’ in the song-and-dance numbers, both idealization and fetishisation being themselves products of patriarchy. (294)⁹

Similarly, Ali’s mother appears both as an idealised and fetishised woman in Ali’s imagination. As the ideal Indian mother, Ali refuses to acknowledge his mother’s sexuality while his father is positioned as an active sexual agent. His mother explains

8. David Eng makes a similar observation with respect to the articulation of Asian American queer male diasporic subjectivity that colludes with global capitalism and patriarchy (*Racial Castration* 223-24).

9. Meg Wesling similarly reassesses the enabling narrative of queer global mobility within diasporas as particularly disadvantageous to women who are forced into prostitution on transnational scale (37-38).

that her husband did not even have “proper intercourse” with her when she became pregnant because he does not wish to “defile her” (5). For Ali, she is the template of the ‘Mother India’ figure who sacrifices her life for the social good. At the end of the novel, he realises that as a mother she had sacrificed all her life so that he can have a better life. He feels an “appreciation for all she had endured” (213). The guilt generated by not being able to give her grandchildren results from his view of her as the ideal Indian mother. Simultaneously, his mother embodies the threat of female sexuality who like Helen transgresses the legitimate boundaries of social order by desiring her son in an oedipal-castrative-incestuous frame. In his dreams, he imagines her ‘*hands ... on her breasts as if priming a weapon of torture*’ (205, italics in original). The desired female bodies of his mother, Helen and Meena Kumari therefore operate in a patriarchal structure that they threaten to rend as active agents of sexual desire.

Ali’s identification with the courtesan and the vamp and the privileging of Salman’s narrative of familial compulsion to marry over the only female character Farida’s lesbianism inevitably marginalises the queer female diasporic experience in the novel. Apart from his mother, Ali’s Indian lesbian friend Farida is the only other female character in the novel. Gopinath argues that female homoeroticism is a problematic site in diasporic renditions of Bollywood films. Deconstructing films like Mira Nair’s *Monsoon Wedding* (2000), Gopinath points to the “elision of queer female diasporic sexuality and subjectivity” within queer diasporic texts (*Impossible Desires* 19). Similarly, Emma Parker deplores the “androcentric bias” of queer diaspora studies that privilege the male perspective by “presenting it as universal and representative” (“Queer, There and Everywhere”). Farida’s character and lesbian negotiation of Indianness remain underdeveloped in the novel. As I mentioned above, female homosocial play is one of the key subtexts in certain Bollywood songs and have an enduring history

within folk culture of South Asia (see also Uberoi 317). However, Dhalla elides such references to female homoerotic pleasure and, as a result, Farida appears as the “social matriarch” who conforms to the stereotype of woman as mother (197). Although Farida organises meetings for the queer South Asian support group *Saath* (togetherness), her lesbian identity remains relatively unexplored in the novel. For Ali, instead of being an actively desiring subject, Farida, like his mother, represents the intrusive woman who harasses Ali “with ten phone calls a day” (201). Ali sympathises with Salman and Riyaz in terms of their sexual relationships but disregards Farida’s attachment to her lover Chastity as uninteresting “pussy problems” (193). Unlike the other male members of *Saath* who are “far too simpleminded,” he thinks of Farida as a cunning female who is responsible for his boycott from the group (203). Her character reifies the chasm between male and female homosexuality. She appears as the stereotypical power-hungry lesbian who threatens the order of their support group.

Another limitation of the male queer diasporic subject position and the gay recuperation of Bollywood icons is the resurrection of ‘whiteness’ as culturally superior and desirable. Helen, Meena Kumari and Rekha are all fair-skinned Bollywood stars in an industry, which relegates ‘dusky’ heroines like Smita Patil to the so-called art-house cinema. As an example of the criss-crossing of lines of queerness and whiteness, the superstar Amitabh Bachchan’s cross-dressed performance in the song “Mere Angane Mein” (“What are you doing in my Courtyard?”) from the film *Lawaaris (The Orphan)*, dir. Prakash Mehra, 1981), clearly locates the centrality of light skin in Bollywood narratives. In the song, Bachchan parodies women, wives and their physical attributes. He dresses as the tall woman, the fat woman, the short woman and the dark-skinned woman (image below) thus giving comic pleasure to the audience at the gathering. However, while all the physical attributes are open to ridicule, whiteness remains

inimitable. The couplet about the fair-skinned wife curiously disrupts Bachchan's performance to give a glimpse of his mother who is herself of a light complexion. The performance implies that white/fair skin is beyond parody or replication since it is the cultural norm of beauty.

The appearance of the fair-skinned mother in the song reinforces the cultural attachment to fairness as a signifier of incomparable beauty, especially for women. The South Asian queer project of exploding normative gender identifications becomes complicit in uncritically accepting fairness and whiteness as desirable attributes. In contemporary Bollywood, the fairness of the heroine in the songs is often accentuated by placing her at the centre of a dance troupe of Euro-American females. Also, the demand for fairness in men is increasing through the promotion of skin-lightening creams for men by using Bollywood male superstars like Shah Rukh Khan for publicity. As Ali admits in the novel, "as South Asians away from Asia, and, more painfully, away from the countries of our childhood, we tried to recreate the norms of our culture" (195). In developing Ali's racial prejudice, Dhalla upholds these very "norms of our culture" to criticism.



Bachchan as a dark-skinned wife in *Lawaaris (The Orphan)*, dir. Prakash Mehra, 1981).

In *Ode to Lata*, Bollywood's uncritical appropriation and obsession of imperialist racist binaries of skin colour doubles in the form of Ali's prejudice towards other racialised positions in Los Angeles. Discussions of inter-racial imbrication (between various ethnic/racial groups for instance) have often been neglected in postcolonial analyses. Scholars like Malini Schueller have begun to interrogate the elision of racial parameters in postcolonial theory and have suggested that diasporic subjects interact with the question of race in a complex grid wherein "diasporas and transnational connections are significantly marked by the integument of race" (36). In similar regard, the editors of the special issue of *Social Text* (1997) entitled "Queer Transexions of Race, Nation and Gender" argue for the inclusion of race in queer theoretical frames because:

this deployment not only illuminates how various dimensions of social experience—race, sexuality, ethnicity, diaspora, gender—can cut across or *transect* one another, resulting in their potential mutual transformation; it also "queers" the status of sexual orientation itself as the authentic and centrally governing category of queer practice, thus freeing up queer theory as a way of conceiving not just the sexual, but the social in general. (Harper et al. 1, italics in original)

Given the complexity of Ali's racialised position in Los Angeles, I suggest that the novel deploys queerness as a formulation of Ali's sexual as well as racial categorisation.

Mapping forms of imperial racist formulations, *Ode to Lata* offers an insightful parallel to Alan Hollinghurst's novel *The Swimming-Pool Library* (1988) in terms of the problematic issue of race within postcolonial theorisation. In its portrayal of Arthur, the black boyfriend of the protagonist, Will, Hollinghurst's work, as Brenda Cooper notes, rehearses the "Conradian metaphor of degradation linked to black bodies" (144).

Similarly, Ali's interaction with his only black gay friend, Dar, reveals a process of "the ascendancy of whiteness," to borrow a term from Jasbir Puar (24). For Ali, the maintenance of a safe distance from Dar not only repeats the imperialist notion of 'degradation linked to black bodies' as in Hollinghurst's narrative, but crucially becomes an important factor in his association with whiteness. Puar argues that queer diasporic subjects are under duress to conform to standards of 'white' homonormativity such that they disassociate "from others disenfranchised in similar ways in favor of consolidation with axes of privilege" (26). Ali's reproduction of the 'Conradian metaphor' of racism relies on such strategies of identification with whiteness. After their little outing to the gay bars of Los Angeles, Dar and Ali return to Ali's house. Ali gives him a separate glass of water, and cannot overcome his racial barrier to sleep with Dar on the same bed. He feels that "physical intimacy with him [Dar] would have maligned me (him)" (127). In his essay on black cultural forms, Stuart Hall explores how hybridity in diasporic formations can subvert the dominant and simultaneously reinstate the notion of a "return to the beginning" ("Cultural Identity" 245). Ali's racial prejudice in Los Angeles manifests itself as a 'return' to his Kenyan past where 'black' is associated with inferiority. Friendship between Dar and Ali remains governed by the racial divide that separates them.

Bollywood as a queer cultural practice incorporated by Ali in the construction of his queer subjectivity also informs the understanding of his own racial position as the non-white 'other' in America. The novel critiques Bollywood's racial prejudice and Ali's replication of it by making Richard unavailable to Ali. Ali yearns for Richard, whose Latino ethnicity (his surname is Lopez) still appears as racially 'white' in Ali's Kenyan Indian imaginary (21). In his first sexual encounter with a soldier in the novel, Ali is evasive about declaring his origins. He finds his Indian features "embarrassing"

and wants to pass as a Latino (21). As Ali says, “Was this not a curse of every South Asian whose standards of beauty were in conflict with his own appearance” (22). Although as an explanation he points to the racial colonial constructs of white/non-white binary, the postcolonial Kenyan and Indian cultures continue and reinforce the inferiority of black skin: “Imagine growing up in a country where being white automatically meant that you were entitled to the privileges that everyone had to struggle for” (23). Moreover, in his dream about his mother as a tormentor, Ali cannot imagine her as dark-skinned. He asserts that the woman in his dreams does not resemble his mother because, for him, his mother “*is certainly not as dark in complexion*” in real life (204, original emphasis).

Ali’s brief encounter with Nelson, his black lover, further problematises cross-racial desire in the novel. By framing the Nelson/Ali relationship in a configuration of lust without emotion, Dhalla clearly disputes the racial bias of his protagonist. In his interaction with the racialised ‘other’, the South Asian queer diasporic subject reveals the limitations of cultural practices like Bollywood, which reinforce entrenched racial hierarchies. Nelson figures as what Baldwin terms the “walking phallic symbol” (290). “His bulbous cock bobbing between his legs” connects him to the stereotypical image of the black man reduced to his sexual prowess (116). His “fleshy lips” characterise his inability to kiss properly (121). Ali and Nelson’s aggressive sexual encounters are contrasted with Ali’s romantic longing for Richard. They also point to what Fanon calls the “persistence of infantile formations” in Ali’s mind (158). He equates black men with rapacious sexuality and hence prefers Nelson when he is demeaning and distant, when he is “facing the back of my head in the grasp of his hand and *grunting like a beast*” (121, emphasis added). Ali’s encounter with Nelson foregrounds his fear of black males as sexually and physically powerful as well. He does not trust Nelson with his car and

sinks his car keys in the toilet tank when he meets Nelson (115). Michael Uebel claims that in the presence of the racial other “the subject is intensely ambivalent, poised between desire and fear, incitement and interdiction, mastery and anxiety” (5-6). Certainly, Ali’s suspicion of Nelson makes the latter more desirable: “He aroused in me the kind of sexual compulsion that hits smack in the gut” (113). Even though Ali loathes his own ethnicity, he does not feel “the need to conceal” his body from Nelson (117). Additionally, Ali uses Nelson as the final instrument in provoking the feeling of jealousy in Richard.

Ali’s racial prejudice surfaces in his response to Nelson’s infidelity. When Nelson and Ali’s best friend, Adrian, have an affair, Ali refuses to forgive Nelson in contrast to his earlier clement behaviour towards Richard’s betrayal. Compared to Adrian’s “little pale face, with the adoring amber eyes and prominent lashes, lashes that could make even his most venomous intentions seem benign,” Nelson is seen as a manipulator whose repentance is “a cunning transference of blame” (164). Unlike Nelson, Ali pardons Adrian but given his complex relationship to whiteness, the forgiveness appears problematic. It functions as a medium to efface his sense of racial inferiority. By realising that Adrian is “like the rest of us mortals,” both Ali and Adrian become equal in Ali’s perception (171). Consequently, for Ali then, he belongs to the same world of whiteness that Adrian inhabits.

The contrast between Nelson and Bill, the hustler, reveals the racial fracture in the multicultural fabric of America. For Ali, Bill represents “all the physical attributes of physical beauty” (220). Like Richard, Bill is a Latino with an “unjaded demeanor” (220). Although he is a hustler, Ali does not find any sign of “contrived sexuality” in his eyes (220). Unlike with Nelson, there is an absence of animal imagery when Ali describes Bill. Their sexual encounter lacks the immediacy of the sexual act between Ali

and Nelson. Instead of pursuing him, Ali wishes to “elicit his desire for me” (228). Significantly, Bill exposes the racial fissures of American multicultural discourse. He has a tattoo on his arm, “a derivative of Swastika,” which signifies his hatred of black people (241). As part Mexican and part American-Indian, Bill shares a similar history of oppression and displacement to that of the African Americans. However, he considers them in a frame of competition for equal rights where black people figure as obstacles. For him, the “black monkeys” with their “sorry-ass problems” always “have more than we’ll ever get from this country” (242). His racist comments place white America at the centre of rival ethnicities. Thus, the novel demonstrates that even though the multicultural bars of Los Angeles symbolise the entire multiethnic nation, the centrality of whiteness remains undisturbed by its absence in ethnic rivalry.

The queer diasporic subject’s interaction with the racial binary uncovers the fractures within a marginalised position. Ali’s reaction to Bill’s pejorative remarks reflects and reinforces his own racial bigotry, similar to, as I mentioned above, the coalitional bonds with the feminine that appear embedded in patriarchal logic. The novel critiques Ali’s biased position by making his attempts to counter Bill as failed propositions. Moreover, when Bill suggests the repatriation of all black populations to “go back to where you came from,” Ali remains composed even though this comment infuriates him (242). As he says, “And I felt ashamed because the same remark coming from Bill, from someone I was sexually attracted to, didn’t compromise my desire for him” (242). Over the course of time, Ali even becomes convinced of the validity of Bill’s reactionary position: “Bill’s prejudice, I justified, even in all its repugnance, revealed an honesty that deserved both admiration and pity” (243). The mixed feelings of “admiration and pity” make Bill’s comments excusable and acceptable to Ali. Ali’s endorsement of Bill’s position reflects and reconfirms the conventional paradigm of

black-as-inferior in South Asian cultures. His ultimate rejection of blackness is secured when, in an attempt to forget his loneliness, he urinates on a black man in a bar. As he reflects upon all his “emotional betrayals,” he urinates and “splashes over this boy’s dark skin as he beats himself frantically” (280). Although figured as a voluntary act demanded by the black boy, Ali associates it as an act of revulsion: “Dear God, What am I doing? What have I done?” (280). Even though, for Ali, this is an act of misdirected vengeance on past lovers, it is surely an expression of his contempt for blackness as well.

The ending of the novel portrays Ali as the tragic figure of Bollywood films who remains solitary even though he craves for love. Although there is an assumption of a ‘happy ending’ implied through Ali’s reconciliation with his oft-complaining neighbour Mr Klaus, Ali’s feeling of immense loneliness contradicts such a reading. The family that he had formed with Salman, Riyaz and Farida disintegrates as Salman succumbs to an arranged marriage, and Riyaz and Farida disappear from his life. Disillusioned with the men that peopled his life, Ali is left longing for romance as he remembers his lovers, Richard, Bill and Nelson.

Two key events at the end of *Ode to Lata*, however, signal a move away from the over-arching thematic concern of longing in the narrative. First, shortly after Ali’s resignation, “a new, vibrant young woman who had just emigrated from India took over the post of South Asian coordinator” of the support group *Saath* (284). Given Ali’s barely disguised misogynistic position throughout the story, the appointment of the ‘vibrant young woman’ to his post signifies the novel’s way of challenging such prejudice. Simultaneously, on an invitation from the group, Ali finally decides to get himself tested for HIV. This positive step mirrors his ultimate redemption from longing for Richard and is reinforced by his life-affirming realisation: “Alone, perhaps, but not

bitter. Never bitter. I want to continue to feel desire because I want to continue to live” (284). These incidents points to the several ways in which Ali comes to terms with absence and desire of not only Richard but also of home and his “gradually disappearing” family (283).

In this Chapter, I have outlined the significance of locating the South Asian queer diasporic subject at the centre of debates about ethnicity, home and nostalgia, race, and diaspora. My interpretation of Dhalla’s novel has departed from conventional readings of both queerness and diaspora to involve the complex matrices of race and ethnicity, which appear essential - even though they are invariably diminished - to the construction of queer diasporic identity. It has explained that South Asian queer cultural practices challenge the hegemony of global/American cultural norms and yet they become complicit in the effacement of female desire and the reproduction of stereotypical black bodies. This implies that the subversive possibilities of certain regimes of representation can repeat the norms of other forms of exclusion. As I show throughout this thesis, a politics of coalition of subordinated categories of identities is a crucial exercise, but a critical assessment of such alliances is equally relevant.

Dhalla’s novel stages the crisis of the male queer diasporic subject whereby the simultaneous repulsion of, and attachment to the mother and to the country of origin function in parallel to other exclusionary practices. It complicates those singular readings of diasporic identities, which privilege the linear narrative of geographical displacement over and above other affiliative formations. Moreover, cultural products, like Bollywood, that become interstitial to queerness and diaspora replicate the dominant norms of racial hierarchies. I have underscored the need to reassess such cultural practices by paying attention to their exclusionary effects. As I have argued, if *Ode to Lata* offers the recuperation of Bollywood as a queer cultural export for the diaspora,

then it posits this diasporic queerness against stereotypes of black identities found in Bollywood. Concurrently, the articulation of queer male diasporic subjectivity invariably materialises through a literal erasure of female sexual desire. In this respect, male queer subject position colludes with heteronormative/nationalist ideology. My discussion above has therefore attended to the visible challenges offered by such diasporic queer articulations.

Chapter Four

Fractured Resistance: Queer Negotiations of the Postcolonial in R. Raj Rao's *The Boyfriend*

On 2 July 2009, the Delhi High Court delivered a judgement in favour of Naz Foundation, an organisation that works for same-sex equality, declaring that the application of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code that penalised consensual sex among adults was unconstitutional. The decriminalisation of homosexuality enacted by the landmark decision rescinded in part - it retained non-consensual sex as criminal – the colonial penalisation of same-sex practices introduced by T.B. Macaulay in 1860 that prohibited “carnal intercourse against the order of the nature with any man, woman or animal” (qtd. in Narrain and Elridge 9). Heralded as a “great victory over an archaic and bizarre law,” the successful culmination of a decade long political mobilisation created a distinct temporal divide between pre- and post-2009 queer activism in India (“Gay Ruling”).

Reviewing the complexity of colonial/postcolonial legal frames, Kajal Bhardwaj considered the verdict as an exemplar of “the ultimate vision of India – a society based on inclusiveness” (99). The announcement, without doubt, signals a step further in the process of decolonisation from inherited homophobic laws in postcolonial India. However, the ruling only “read down” the statute and, as queer militant Gautam Bhan states, it did not “challenge the very idea that the state, law and society has the right to decide that certain acts are ‘unnatural’” (45). Faulting the euphoric celebration therefore, Ashley Tellis, a same-sex rights activist from Delhi, decries the alignment of queer movement in India with “international human rights speak” at the expense of intersec-

tional politics and “analogous reasoning with various other minorities like Dalits, adivasis [tribes] and religious minorities” (“Why I Can’t Join the Party”). His timely response to the almost homonationalist recuperation of the sentence in terms of ‘the ultimate vision of India’ contextualises the specific fissures of post-independent/postcolonial India and, in more crucial ways, underlines the immediacy of developing coalitional politics of solidarity between the various embattled groups that include women, Muslims, dalits and sexual and gender minorities. Given the disparate socioeconomic, linguistic and religious privileges/non-privileges of identitarian clusters in contemporary India, I would claim that the ‘great victory’ against homophobia remains partial. In this regard, prior to or post-2009, opposition to the prevalent homophobic discourse, national or cultural, constitutes what I term “fractured resistance” when it does not adequately address the problematic severances based upon class, caste, gender and sexuality within the postcolonial nation.

This Chapter builds upon the above-mentioned discussion about Indian queer identity as it relates to the state of the postcolonial nation. Focussing on R. Raj Rao’s first novel *The Boyfriend* (2003), it examines the intractability of questions pertaining to same-sex desire from debates a propos national culture. Set in Bombay (Mumbai) in the early 1990s, Rao’s work intervenes as a queer narrative of resistance to heteronormative and nationalist impulses in India. Although Parmesh Shahani in his monograph *Gay Bombay* (2008) celebrates it as the first work of fiction “to be fully pivoted around homosexuality” from India,¹ I work contrary to the logic of romantic idealisation that would position the postcolonial nation against repressive homophobic statutes of

1. See also Debyendu Ganguly’s appreciation of the text as “a hugely important book,” since it is “India’s first out and out gay novel” (“Churchgate, Loos, Cops and Biryani”). Ganguly’s review appeared in *Trikone* (December 2003), one of the oldest South Asian magazines on queer issues in the US. It could be argued that P. Parivaraj’s work *Shiva and Arun* appeared prior to *The Boyfriend*. However, it was published by the Gay Men’s Press in London.

colonialism (197). Instead, by exposing the critical fissures of post-independent India in terms of multiple binary divisions, I highlight the impossibility of a union based on same-sex and cross-caste love that emerges from the novel. My reading suggests that the postcolonial nation is complicit with the former colonial project in marginalising and policing queerness. The national and, more significantly, the nationalist framework of postcolonial India prolong the colonial production of normative gender and sexuality. In such a structural duplication of the social norm, reproductive heterosexuality attains legitimacy as the unique, natural choice for the postcolonial nation.

The Boyfriend relates the homosexual relationship of Yudi, a journalist in his forties and Milind, a nineteen-year old dalit boy. My reading contends that the text attempts to negotiate a site of alternative sexualities when, as Mary E. John and Janaki Nair suggest, the theorising of sexuality itself in the Indian context is relatively new, given the “conspiracy of silence regarding sexuality in India” (1). I argue that the novel is about the state of the (post)colonial nation as much as about (homo)sexuality since both are represented as being inextricably linked to one another. The novel critiques the continuation of the colonial statute against homosexuality by the postcolonial nation and creates a space for undermining dominant discourses on gender and sexuality. It exposes, as Jyoti Puri would aver, “the [parallel] role of the post-colonial nation-state in producing and reproducing hegemonic codes of sexuality and gender” (174). The novel explores the inflections of class, language and privilege, and caste in the Indian context as they unfold in the wider framework of sexuality. It also reclaims Hindu myths from a queer perspective. This Chapter looks at how representation of (homo)sexuality refigures India through a rereading of cultural myths which form a part of (Hindu) national(ist) identity. The significance of the novel lies in the elision of a queer perspective in postcolonial studies. The framing of the main themes of the narrative in a spe-

cifically post-independent Indian context and the crossing of homosexual love with the state of the postcolonial nation exemplify what Terry Goldie terms in another context as “queerly postcolonial” (9).

In Rao’s text, the citation of national history becomes the symbolic context of the homosexual relationship. Yudi and Milind’s (both are Hindus) love plot is charted against the backdrop of the Hindu-Muslim Bombay riots in 1992. The riots were a point of culmination of the deteriorating community relations between Hindus and Muslims in free India. The Babri Masjid (mosque) in the city of Ayodhya (Uttar Pradesh) is a contentious site as both Hindus and Muslims refer to it as their holy site. The Hindu nationalists claim that it is the birthplace of Lord Rama and the seventeenth-century mosque desecrates it. On 6 December 1992 activists from fundamentalist Hindu organisations marched into Ayodhya and demolished the mosque which in turn led to the worst-ever Hindu-Muslim riots in the history of independent India.² In her critique of postcolonial reason, Gayatri Spivak regards this “eruption of Hindu nationalism” as “the failure of decolonization in India” that resulted in the “collaboration of the postcolonial in the service of *neo-colonialism*” (*Critique* 361-63, original emphasis). In similar regard, Anshuman Mondal traces the roots of Hindu nationalism to the “long arc of the nationalist imagination” in British India (21). He notes that the nationalist myth of “the composite nation” deployed “a number of tropes that surreptitiously encoded a Hindu majoritarian point of view” (22). By implicating Milind and Yudi’s non-normative sexuality within the larger context of Hindu-Muslim disunity, the novel not only references the communal schisms of post-independent India but concomitantly critiques the ideological construct of ‘the composite nation’ as well.

2. The riots ushered in an era of renewed Hindu-Muslim violence since the Partition. A decade later Godhra in Gujarat witnessed another explosion of sectarian/religious/communal violence. For an interesting discussion on the topic, see Peter Morey and Alex Tickell, “Introduction: Indias of the Mind” (ix-xi).

As a strategy of denouncing an increasing development of ‘Hindutva’ (the idea of cultural and religious superiority of Hindus over other religions), post-1992 Indian novelists have often used the riots as emblematic of the destructive divisions in post-colonial India. Representations of homosexuality in recent Indian literature therefore document this anxiety surrounding Hindu-Muslim relations. For instance, Ruth Vanita asserts that “gender-based anxieties are deeply intertwined with anxieties around religious, community and national identities,” because of the “simultaneous and contradictory myths that Muslims introduced homosexuality into India or repressed its expression” (*Queering India* 8). However, as a general trope, Islam functions as an affirmative signifier of queerness. Thus, Radha and Sita seek refuge in a mosque at the end of the lesbian-themed film *Fire* (1996). The Hindu tradition in the film figures as oppressive and sublativ of queer subjectivity. In Manju Kapoor’s novel *A Married Woman* (2004), which Elleke Boehmer reads as “an embattled narrative of secular nationalism,” Astha and her lover visit the site of the destroyed Babri Masjid in order to comprehend their lesbian relationship (56). One other instance appears in Vikram Seth’s novel *A Suitable Boy* (1993) where Maan’s unorthodox masculinity and his covert bisexuality are linked with his sympathy and appreciation of the Muslim minority (115). He saves his Muslim friend Firoz from the attacks of Hindu rioters and is an aficionado of the literary genre of *ghazals*, a form of poetry addressed by poets to their young male lovers in Islamic, Persian and Arabic cultures.

Similar to my affirmative reading of the Arjie/Shehan cross-ethnic bond in communally segregated Sri Lanka in Chapter 1, I contend that in Rao’s novel, homosexuality and contemporary national history intersect within the discourse on desire so that the anxiety of the Hindu-Muslim divide reflects the equally disruptive potential of homosexual love to rewrite dominant discourses of a heteronormative nation. Not

hearing from Milind after their initial meeting, Yudi wonders whether the boy has not been killed during the riots, as he inhabits those spaces (of poverty) which are the most vulnerable to public violence in riots. The social restlessness of the political events in 1992-93 mirrors the upheavals of love between Yudi and Milind. In his search for the boy, he traverses the areas hard hit by the riots (40-41). He even imagines that Kishore/Milind (Kishore is the pseudonym Milind gives Yudi on their first meeting), had been a victim of the riots, so that, "life had fluttered into his hands, and then slipped away forever" (42). While Yudi only watches the riots as a witness, Milind later informs Yudi that he was actually a victim of the violence. When he was going to work in his factory, he nearly lost his life as he inadvertently became a part of the Muslim group being chased by the Hindus (78-79). The riots are present in everyday conversation throughout the novel and Yudi and Milind discuss them and the Hindu-Muslim relations during their regular meetings.

The notion of interpreting homosexuality as a threat to the nation is a strategy devised by all nationalist discourses in order to contain likely disconcerting (homo) sexualities. As Puri explains, "national interests and the functions of the state can relate to the most intricate and explicit details of people's sexual lives" (145). The riots reveal the state-nation's strategies to contain and police homosexuality. They ignite a more aggressive social atmosphere whereby the police use the rhetoric of national security to vent their anger and frustration on homosexuals. Remembering his days at the cruising areas of Azad Maidan in Bombay in the 1980s, Yudi can only sigh that the ground lost its "former glory" in the 1990s due to the riots (48). As he remarks, "the post-Babri riots made the police vigilant. There were reports of gays being thrashed and thrown into the lock-up when they were found loitering in the Maidan after sunset" (49).

The imbrication of national(ist) discourses and sexual sites constitutes the key trope in the novel. In her analysis of the “rhetoric of nationalism” in India, Rumina Sethi points to the role of Hindu iconography in “the creation of ‘imagined communities’” that “more often than not, implicitly ignores class divisions and economic distinctions” (28). Literature in this nationalist scheme, she argues, “is a significant source for witnessing the shifting nature of identities just as it is a viable genre to study the ideological construction of narratives” (36). The interconnection between the nationalist and sexual formations appears at various critical junctures in *The Boyfriend*, attesting to the ‘shifting nature of identities.’ For instance, at the beginning, Yudi casts his love for Milind and the difference in their ages in terms of national identity and its hyperbolic fictions. He asserts that if someone called him a “cradle snatcher,” due to the difference in the ages of the two lovers, he would reply that “the boundary-line between filial and conjugal love is as imaginary as that between India and Pakistan” (40). In framing such an argument, Yudi critiques the biased ‘imaginary’ construct of the nation and dominant discourses of sexuality whereby the object of sexual desire can only be an individual of the opposite sex and of the same age.

Moreover, Hindu nationalist fictions of a homogenised Hindu religion without any distinction of caste or class, which forms the basis for a ‘Hindu’ India, are exposed when Milind informs Yudi that at the age of thirteen, the hardline Hindu party the RSS had enrolled him, knowing well that he was not a Brahmin but a dalit (79). The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS- the National Organisation of Self-Helpers) and its offshoot the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP- World Hindu Society) have gained increased visibility after the Bombay riots. They train numerous Hindus in guerrilla warfare in case of an eventual attack from the Muslims. It is of utmost importance to the workers of the RSS to project a hyper-masculine image of its recruits, partly because

they wish to refute the colonial representation of ‘Hindu’ India as an effeminate nation.

Leela Gandhi contends that:

the oft-cited anticolonial/nationalist endeavor to self-reform in the image of the aggressor, by recuperating a “lost” native masculinity, can be said to herald the onset of a postcolonial heteronormativity—tragically collaborationist and fraught by the pressures of a newly internalised homophobia, or fear, in other words, of effeminacy. (“Loving Well” 89)

Even women are mobilised into this masculinist framework by invoking patriarchal norms of honour and revenge. Hema Chari asserts that in postcolonial India the fundamentalist national reaction like the colonialist construction of India demonstrates “an intense male anxiety about the integrity of male bodies, masculinity, and the nation state” (292). I suggest that the novel presents the counter-response to this nationalist reaction as homophobia.³ The RSS enrols Milind despite prevalent caste divisions in Hinduism. His response to the hyperbolic construction of masculinity, evident in the RSS drills he performs, is steeped in homophobic insult. He considers the workers of the RSS as “gandus”, that is, men who are ‘penetrated’ (79).

Yudi shares a complex relationship with the nation that is most apparent in his subject position as an upper class, urban-educated, homosexual Indian. His attitude to the nation is one of disavowal and it arises from a complex amalgamation of his socially privileged status and his choice of partners from the lower ranks of society. This disavowal is shaped equally by the non-recognition and policed aspect of his homosexuality and the almost impossible union with Milind who is a dalit. He has casual sex in public toilets with strangers usually from the deprived classes and these strangers

3. Paola Bacchetta rightly considers this trait of Hindu nationalism as a manifestation of “dual operations of xenophobic queerphobia and queerphobic xenophobia” in which Islam functions as an outsider (143).

become the nodal point of disavowing the nation itself. Sexuality and the nation state are intricately conjoined in his encounters, whereby his sexual partners stand for the whole nation itself. In his first voyeuristic homosexual encounter in the gents' toilet at Churchgate, he is disgusted to see that no precautions against HIV are taken, and his reaction is one of conscious distance: "Fools... they [the Indians] will never learn" (4). India is disavowed and repeatedly rejected for the state of undercover queer encounters. This rejection of the lower classes and his paradoxical attraction to them becomes for Yudi a rejection of the postcolonial nation, which hinders union between different classes. However, the novel reveals his own class prejudice such that for him, the lower classes and their lack of awareness of HIV is seen as emblematic of the nation's inability to 'educate' them.

Moreover, sexual stereotypes of his partners constitute the sexual imaginary of all Indians for Yudi. Thus, "Indians will never stop being obsessed by size," even though Yudi himself is "disappointed" by the member of one of his partners (5,7). Milind's surname in the novel is Mahadik (Maha in Hindi means big or gigantic) and Yudi is quick to notice the ironical implication as Milind has a small member (16). The caption from a song of Backstreet Boys at the beginning of the novel ("I don't care who you are, Where you're from, What you do, As long as you love me") announces Yudi's self-representation as a privileged, 'globalised' Indian who has access to cultural commodities from around the world. His relationship with Milind therefore develops along the binary of economic privilege and its lack. The novel condemns Yudi's attitude to consider the lower classes as a symbol for the entire nation by presenting Yudi as distanced, culturally and economically, from those deprived sections of society to which he feels attracted.

For Yudi, the lies of the gay subculture (in India) represent the lie of the nation-state. For his first encounter with Kishore/Milind, Yudi blindfolds him to take him to his mother's place, so that the boy would not blackmail him later, and yet when Yudi loses track of Kishore/Milind, he disowns the nation once again, as "Lies were what thieves spoke; gay love in India thrived on lies" (38). Lesbian and gay subjects across the world complain of deceit and falsehood that regulate quotidian life within the queer community. However, the poignant reference to India in the above sentence must be read as a frustration at and a condemnation of the Indian state, which regards heterosexual marriage as the only platform for sexuality, thus coercing homosexual liaisons into lies and doubleness. The lies of the gay subculture (in India) become the lie of the nation-state. At the end of the novel, when Milind gets married and years pass away without the lovers seeing each other, Bombay, the symbolic image of British India (and referred to as 'Bombay' throughout the novel) is disavowed as Yudi settles for a more de-colonised appellation of the city and resumes "his single-gay-man-in-Mumbai routine" (221). The shift from Bombay to Mumbai in the novel signals the transition from the colonial to a postcolonial nation. However, this shift in the novel comes immediately after Milind's heterosexual marriage, which terminates his relationship to Yudi. If Bombay stands as a metaphor for colonial authority that introduced the 1860 edict of the criminalisation homosexuality and 'unnatural acts,' then the postcolonial self-representation symbolised in Mumbai is equally oppressive and unsatisfactory for liminal identities as its former counterpart.

In a way, Yudi's disavowal of the nation is a reaction against, and symptomatic of, the unease in recent debates about homosexuality in particular and sexuality in general, in India. Following the controversy surrounding *Fire*, Hindu fundamentalists have routinely sought to redefine Indian national identity through the establishment of

authorised and non-authorised versions of Indian sexuality. Vanita and Kidwai's attempt to recover same-sex narratives in Indian history in their anthology *Same Sex Love in India* (2000) defines a rich queer cultural heritage that can be made available to lesbians and gays in India. Certain queer scholars of India, however, address the question of homosexuality in ancient India in terms that are largely similar to nationalist discourses of sexuality. Such readings, as Puri suggests, "are confounded by the discourses of national cultural identity" (174). The reluctance of the nation-state to address the problematic issue of alternative sexualities is reflective of the cultural importance it attaches to marriage and by extension reproduction. The regulation of sexuality and gender in India reaches its point of culmination in the institution of (heterosexual) marriage, the privileged site for the nation-state to control and legitimate sexualities of individuals.⁴ Therefore, Yudi's reaction at the spectacle of Milind's marriage exposes the heteronormative apparatus of the nation: "In India marriage is like ablution, like washing one's arse. People marry involuntarily, just as they bring their left hand to their arse after a crap. Ditto with babies" (221). As the postcolonial nation represents Indian-ness by privileging heterosexuality through marriage and reproduction (and proscribing other forms of alternative sexualities), the novel illustrates that nation has to be disavowed in order for it to be possible to embrace homosexuality, as in Yudi's case.

Marriage is a critical site for comprehending the nation's regulation of sexual and gender identities. Arvind Narrain argues that "in the laws that define marriage, divorce and adoption ... the absent figure is the queer person" (62). Also, in her seminal work on same-sex marriage in India and the West, Vanita highlights the differences between religious or community marriages and institutional marriages. She explains that although in modern democracies the state controls and regulates marriages in the form

4. See for example, Mary E. John, "Globalisation, Sexuality and the Visual Field: Issues and Non-Issues for Cultural Critique" (368-96).

of marriage registrations, many variations of unions still exist especially in India where many marriages are unregistered. Marriage is the outcome of mutual love and often occupies a 'private' space, even if several countries opt for institutional approval. Vanita affirms that "the Indian government recognizes as legal any marriage performed according to customary rites, whether or not a licence has been obtained" and that "this is a crucial difference between marriage law in modern India and most Western democracies" (*Love's Rite* 68, 72). Milind's heterosexual marriage is certainly one such marriage where the religious ceremony legitimates the union. Nevertheless, if religious ceremonies can take precedence over state institutions, then Milind is already a married man. Milind and Yudi spend a week together in Yudi's flat in the symbolically named 'Mate House' (96-114). During their sojourn, they decide to consolidate their union by performing a Hindu marriage where the groom (Milind) and the bride (Yudi, dressed up in his mother's sari) take seven rounds of the sacred fire to seal their marriage (107-108). Milind even puts sindoor (red vermilion powder) in Yudi's parted hair, they walk around the sacred fire seven times as in Hindu marriages, and repeatedly exchange marriage vows: "I promise to be your humsafar (life partner), trust me, till death do us apart" (107).

As proof of their marriage, Milind and Yudi take photographs of the ceremony. Vanita has shown that in many Indian marriages photographs of the ceremony can suffice to secure registration of a marriage. Thus, their marriage is valid under social traditions in India. Rather than becoming a mockery or an imitation of marriage, if read in conjunction with Milind's heterosexual marriage later in the novel, their queer marriage problematises the relations of social and civil marriage, and exposes the contradictions of the institution itself. Their marriage draws on the idea of a traditional union as presented in ancient Hindu treatises, where no reference to the gender of the

partners is mentioned (Vanita, *Love's Rite* 37). It therefore reads as a critique of the modern state's regulatory regime that outlaws homosexuality.

Furthermore, following Judith Butler and Homi Bhabha's analysis of the fraught relationship between imitation and the alleged original, their same-sex union highlights the fictional status of what constitutes legal marriage. Butler asserts that if heterosexuality is seen as "an impossible imitation," which has to repeat its "norms" of heterosexualised genders to pass as an original, then any parody of heterosexuality within homosexual cultures "is always and only an imitation of an imitation, a copy of a copy, for which there is no original" ("Imitation" 313-14). The 'original' heterosexual marriage read in light of the parodic imitation of Milind and Yudi's marriage appears thus to be a sham, an 'imitation' and a 'copy.' Likewise, Bhabha's concept of mimicry, through which he reads the ambivalence of colonial discourse, illuminates the national(ist) regulation of marriage. The colonised "mimic man," Bhabha argues, is only a "partial, incomplete Englishman" because the "colonial can only be (re)produced partially," otherwise it loses its status as the dominant (*Location* 87). Similarly, the national cannot be naturalised because the partial "representation rearticulates the whole notion of *identity* and alienates it from essence" (87). Seeking customary and ritual legitimation of their marriage through the ceremony performed at Yudi's flat, Yudi and Milind 'perform' a parody of national identity in India, of which marriage is an important component. This parody denaturalises the institution of marriage by alienating it from its 'essence,' which is heterosexual marriage and reproduction. The nation's attempt to naturalise itself, apparent in marriage being 'like ablution, like washing one's arse,' is defeated if rewritten from a queer perspective as in Yudi and Milind's marriage.

Extending my discussion of the queer sacred in Chapter 1, I suggest that Rao's subversion of national identity intersects with queer paradigms in meaningful ways in

terms of Hinduism. The Hindu myth of Lord Krishna and his poor friend Sudama runs throughout the novel, as it reflects the differences between Yudi's and Milind's class and caste status. In the myth, Krishna visits Sudama's house where Sudama's poor wife has only one grain of rice to offer the guest. Krishna accepts the offering and even washes Sudama's feet as a part of accepting Sudama as his dear friend. In the novel, Milind's and Yudi's relationship often recalls the myth. At their first meeting at Testosterone bar, Yudi draws a parallel between their relationship and that of the homoerotic charge of the friendship between two mystics, Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, such that Milind is shocked at his comparison to Vivekananda since he is a dalit.⁵ Rao's narrative challenges the rigid distinctions of class and caste by comparing Milind, a dalit, to a respected mystic sage like Vivekananda.

At the same meeting, Yudi compares them to Krishna and Sudama, telling Milind, "you are my Sudama and I will happily bathe your tired and grimy feet ... right here with this beer!" (73). The Krishna-Sudama myth is traditionally regarded as a framework for appreciating cross-caste, cross-class friendships in Hindu culture. Later, when Yudi pays his cousin a visit in the famous Taj hotel, he wants to smuggle sandwiches for Milind who is waiting in the lobby, for, he wonders, "when, otherwise, would his poor Sudama get to savour Taj food?"(97). Even Milind's wife Leela, on seeing the television serial *Krishna*, has the idea of sending her husband as a Sudama to Yudi's (Krishna's) house to ask for help in order to resolve their financial troubles (222). In a reworking of the myth, it is Milind/Sudama and not Yudi/ Krishna who goes to his friend's home. Arriving tired at Yudi's place, Milind is made to sit down while Yudi rushes back "with a half-bucket of water and a mug ... to wash the boy's feet," as Gauri,

5. For a detailed explanation of the homoerotic bond between the two Hindu sages, see Vanita and Kidwai (230). See also Hoshang Merchant's explanation of the intersection of eroticism and spirituality in the religious domain (Rao and Sarma 16-17).

Yudi's close friend, watches this spectacle with a note of jealousy (227). Rao uses the myth to queer Hindu culture. For instance, the sexual charge of washing Milind's feet are a part of Yudi's sexual imaginary and expressions of love for the boy, as when he wanted to wash Milind's feet with beer in *Testosterone*.

Recent participants in discussions of queer India have warned against the romantic tendency of queer activists to reclaim a same-sex past from Hindu scriptures and culture since it legitimates the right wing discourse of a golden Hindu era (Shah; Thadani). The notion of an enlightened Vedic age and Hindu antiquity, crystallised by the colonising missions of the Orientalists, is rehearsed by the postcolonial nation in its nostalgic evocation of past national culture. Therefore, the scholarship on Indian antiquity that uncritically interprets Hindu myths (notably the *Kamasutra*) and culture as paradigmatic of sexual liberty or same-sex legitimacy, reinscribe what Puri calls "European meta-narratives" about the golden age of Hinduism before Muslim integration into Indian culture (178). However, Rao uses the Krishna/Sudama myth in a creative way to destabilise the sole claim of nationalist discourses to India's cultural heritage. By reclaiming it from a queer perspective, he undermines a singular claim to it by the nationalists and in the process shows the tendency of nationalist discourses to read history and myths monolithically. The creative use of the myth in the novel gains force precisely because it is queered. Yudi's complex relationship with the nation notwithstanding, the myth is deconstructed to allow images of a modern India to emerge. The first discussion cited above takes place in a bar, where Yudi wishes to wash Milind's feet with 'beer'. Again, the overarching image of Taj hotel and its attendant luxury deviates from the myth being (re)produced in a simple exchange between friends. Most significantly, the recurrent metaphor of washing Milind's feet introduces the element of sexual desire into the very act of washing itself, comparable to the homoerotic charge of

the narrator in Gide's novel *The Immoralist* (1902) while taking part in the making of champagne with the farm help, Charles. Whereas the original myth is devoid of any homoeroticism, the refashioning of the myth in the novel queers it by framing it within homosexual desire. This reconstruction of the myth effectively unsettles the nationalist discourse of an uncontaminated national (Hindu) culture.

Apart from the revision of cultural myths, Rao mobilises several other elements of resistance to heterosexist and nationalist narratives. The hijras (transgender and other non-cisgender subjects), whose identities have often been erased by master narratives of the nation, are represented as an integral part of the queer subculture in Bombay.⁶ Thus, Shuklaji Street in Bombay represents the neighbourhood of famous hijra sex workers (88). Similarly, when Milind joins the A.K. modelling agency, he finds that the callboys are classed into three categories and made to sleep in their respective dorms. Besides the usual active-passive role classification of the boys, the third dorm accommodates the "hijras, hermaphrodites, and high society blokes who'd had a sex change operation" (184). Moreover, the novel offers a glimpse of the gay subculture in Bombay with at least two self-identified drag queens Anarkali and Umrao Jaan (names of two famous Mughal courtesans). The "Chhakke log" (hijras) as the policeman Dyaneshwar puts it, include Gulab (rose) and her gang Raat Rani (queen of the night), Pinky, Sweety, Badnaseeb (the unfortunate one), Akash (the sky), Hira (diamond), Moti (pearl), Chandni (moonlight), Laila, Salma and Salma-ka-Balma (Salma's lover) (35).

In response to the Indian state's official insistence on the absence of homosexuality in Indian culture and tradition, the novel highlights that gay male subculture in Bombay has a highly developed though encoded linguistic framework. In his assessment of the subcultural language of diasporic Filipino gay males in the US, Martin

6. For a detailed definition of hijras, see Bakshi 212-14.

Manalansan analyses the distinct ability of swardspeak (a creolised language that incorporates English, Spanish and Philippine languages) to “mark and reinscribe the historical and biographical histories of colonialism, postcolonialism and diasporic displacement and settlement” (51). Used as a “mobile code” and in “a purposive manner,” swardspeak signals a “queer code” of “survival and continuity” in the context of restrictive national borders and access to the global North. I would claim that Manalansan’s observation is equally applicable to the queer vernacular that Rao’s narrative presents. The strategy of using an encrypted language for expressing a marginal sexuality is similar to that used by the hijra community in India. As Kira Hall suggests, by “mapping their own sexual ambiguity onto linguistic ambiguity India’s hijras are able to locate themselves in an otherwise inaccessible social grid” (432). Similarly, in the novel, Panthi and Koti refer to the active and passive roles in bed, just like “plug and socket” (90, 91 and 184). In Churchgate toilet, Yudi acts as a “pigeon” that “sees” the “cats” performing sexual acts (5). In his interactions with the queer subculture Yudi obviously knows the “slang of working class homos” such that “dhakka start” (a car that starts only when you push it) denotes a passive gay, and “biryani khayega” (literally, would you like to have biryani) stands for rimming (30). Again, when Gauri compliments Yudi on his bright eyes, he is quick to reply: “you know why my eyes sparkle? Because I’m an ammonia-queen, that is to say, toilets addict” (143). Thus, the complex linguistic frame of the queer community in Bombay signifies a political strategy to survive erasure from normative/nationalist discourses.

Just as the novel offers a critique of hegemonic Hindu nationalism, it interrogates received understandings of gender and gender identity through Yudi and Milind’s relationship. Fluidity and multiple gender identifications are central to queer scholarship. Butler’s anti-foundationalist analysis has helped queer studies to deconstruct

normalising discourses, which regard gender, sex and sexuality as mutually dependent and fixed categories. She claims that gender is a “*corporeal* style, an “act,” as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where “*performative*” suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning” (*Gender Trouble* 177, italics in original). Gender identity in the Butlerian sense is an effect of the acts of gender itself and is forever shifting since it is both ‘intentional and performative.’ Although Yudi gladly offers his partners “the active role in bed, his actions are governed by considerations of class rather than sexual preference (as he believes that the act of penetration, for many lower class boys, does not amount to homosexual activity) (12). His relationship with Milind evolves through a variety of gender roles, where the line between masculine and feminine acts is constantly confounded (12). Milind makes it clear to Yudi at the beginning of their affair that he would not “take [it] in the mouth” or “take it in the arse” (82). However, the novel defies any neat or stable categorisation of sexual and gender identities. During the preparation for their queer wedding, both vie for the place of the groom. Milind would like to be the groom because he feels that he has the “active” role in bed while Yudi cites his being “the breadwinner” as an argument in his favour (107). Ultimately, Yudi becomes the bride; however, Milind decorates the house with rangoli, a customary decoration with colourful lines drawn across the landing as a sign of the presence of the new couple. Rangoli is usually drawn by women in South India. This prompts Yudi to term Milind “his tender gender bender” (107-108). The episode primarily positions the novel in explicit opposition to the notion of gender as a binary construction and simultaneously proposes a critique of the stereotypical assumption that same-sex couples copy the heterosexualised norm of ‘man’ and ‘woman.’

Rao contests the assumption that same-sex couples copy heterosexuality by suggesting an alternative reason for Milind’s non-normative behaviour. At a symbolical

level, Milind's interaction with Yudi serves his psychological need to replace his father. In his disturbed childhood, his father left his mother to live with another woman who is often referred to as a keep and a whore in the novel. Milind's male role model has been his father and even if he has only contempt for him, he asks Yudi to "keep" him, thus identifying Yudi as his father and at the same time willing to play the role of a kept mistress (113). Moreover, when Yudi gets into a brawl with a man eyeing Milind at Testosterone, the idea of being protected appeals to Milind, even though he does not wish a parallel identification with the feminine. In a confusion of gender and sexual identity, he wonders to himself: "He was no woman to be fought over. He was the one who fucked, wasn't he? And yet, he felt elated. Seeing Yudi's bloody face, he realized that there was someone at last who cared for him" (95). He adopts varying gendered positions and sexual identifications. At the A.K. modelling agency he plays the active role as a callboy and yet is repulsed at the very idea of prostitution which he explicitly associates with women. He thinks of himself as "a whore, and in his scheme of things it was women who were whores, not men" (201). His attitude to women, as shown later towards his wife as well, remains (hetero/homo)patriarchal. He considers his sex work as "womanly work, like sewing and cooking, not manly work as his brothers did. So what if the men he serviced spoke in a passive voice and gave him a chance to speak in the active?" (201).

Likewise, Yudi shows a similar pattern of changing attitudes to his gender identity. Although, he thinks of himself as the breadwinner and supports Milind by giving him pocket money once he has lost his job as an office boy, Yudi is represented as a woman in at least two instances in the novel. Once when Milind is in the company of his working class friends at the local tobacco shop, Yudi waits for his lover to come back to him and feels "like a bride in her husband's childhood home" (146). At another

juncture, he goes to Milind's house since he cannot trace him and cries in front of Milind's parents. When Milind returns his parents ask him to inform Yudi about it. Milind's brother promptly questions Milind: "What kind of a womanly man is your friend? He was almost in tears when we told him you had left home?" (207). Thus, both Milind and Yudi locate themselves in a continuum of constantly shifting lines of identity and identification. Both perform masculine and feminine acts throughout the novel and relate to each other and the rest of the society in a multiple grid of identities which is in a peculiar interaction with received understandings of gender and sexuality.

The novel also explores the inflections of class and caste (in the Indian context) in the wider framework of sexuality. Queer scholars have recently begun to address the absence of class and Third World/ethnic contexts from the larger queer paradigm. Thus, Terry Goldie in the special issue of *Ariel* on the intersection of postcolonial and queer studies, contests the "the end of ethnicity as a social category" within recent cultural studies and critiques the relegation of the "social configuration of homosexuality" to a marginal element in queer studies (21). Similarly, critiquing the globalisation/Americanisation of queer identities, Donald Morton addresses the following questions in his work on developing a materialist queer scholarship: "How must the "global" be theorised so as to enable social justice worldwide to all? How is the question of class being minimized and trivialized by the dominant queer left?" (207-08) Developing the debate, Rob Cover questions the "assumption that worldwide sexual subjects transgressing heteronormativity operate in the same way" as, he adds, "it ignores the different inflections class and postcolonial ethnicity perform on the sexual subject" (31).

Therefore, any nuanced reading of Rao's novel must engage with the questions of class and caste consciousness as these sites intersect with those addressing the sexual

identities of Yudi and Milind. Yudi is a journalist and belongs to the English-speaking, educated upper strata of the Indian society. He is always aware of this privilege and even uses it to his advantage in his sexual encounters. One such incident is his sexual encounter with Dyaneshwar, a local police officer. After having sex, Dyaneshwar extorts money from Yudi who in turn uses his class advantage and network of local gay queens in *Testosterone* to get Dyaneshwar roughed up (35-37), an incident he describes as the Operation Stonewall, thus equating it to the famous homosexual rebellion in New York. Without his class privilege, Yudi could certainly never imagine the act of publicly humiliating Dyaneshwar.

Yudi belongs to the upper classes, apparent in his unconventional lifestyle - he lives alone in Nalla Sopara while his mother lives in posh South Bombay - and is unmarried at the age of 42 in contrast to Milind who marries according to his parents' wishes. Yudi often speaks in English to the boys he takes home and is extremely suspicious of blackmail from his lovers, including Milind. He uses English as a tool to impress the lower-class boys he takes home and as a means of intimidating them in case of an eventual blackmail since English is the language of the elite and the economically privileged in India. As Aijaz Ahmad remarks, English is significant in India not because it is "simply one of India's languages now," but because it "is used in the processes of class formation and social privilege" (*In Theory* 77). Its defining feature is, as Ahmad adds, "its differential availability to the propertied and the working classes respectively ... the greater access it provides to the job market and hence the great prestige that attaches to the person who commands it with fluency" (*In Theory* 77). Yudi is conscious of this social prestige and reveals an anxiety at losing the privilege that English bestows on him. When he goes to Gauri's house for her birthday, he makes sure that her father, the Colonel, does not label him "a Telugu-speaking country bumpkin" (65). At the

inquisitive look on the Colonel's face at not understanding why Yudi would not speak Telugu, he quickly asserts, "I'm not that kind of Andhradu, from the depths of Samalkota, you know ... My mother is not a Telugu. We speak English at home" (65).⁷ Thus, Yudi consciously identifies with a position of privilege in which English and Telugu do not appear simply as two languages of postcolonial India but as markers of 'the propertied and the working classes.'

Even though he admits that he is guilty of class prejudice before meeting Milind, and in Milind's company, he could say with "absolute conviction" that "people were no different from each other," Yudi's bias resurfaces at the pilgrimage to Chaitya Bhoomi and at Milind's heterosexual wedding (105). He wonders why the dalits are "unhygienic" (173). At the pilgrimage, he compares the dalits to "our colonial masters" who are "used to bathing once a week" (173). He cannot understand why "almost all of them stank" (173). At Milind and Leela's wedding his essentialist understandings of class surpass largely his chagrin at lost love. Yudi's cross-class sympathies disappear once Milind is (re)married. Rao critiques Yudi's class bias by making his prejudice reappear during the wedding ceremony. Yudi cannot relate to the aspirations of the dalits, as they "were poor people, trying to look rich," and certainly, "the fakers had no idea what to apply to their rancid bodies" (219). In the festivities of their weddings, he would prefer to hear cheap Bollywood numbers rather than cultural masterpieces of Indian classical

7. The status of English as a language of social and economic privilege in India is not an ahistorical process in itself. Under colonial India, it served the purpose of creating a national language but simultaneously created a social hierarchy whereby other Indian languages appear as regional or vernacular. Many factions of nationalists, including Nehru and Jinnah, often reproduced the superiority of English over other languages in the colonial era. For a detailed discussion, see Ahmad, *In Theory* 75-77.

music. He thinks it is “an insult ... to Bismillah Khan” to be played at such weddings (219).⁸

Yudi’s understanding of his own homosexual identity is definitely inflected by his class status. He believes that “there was indeed something sensual about filth” (28). Besides, he never fully trusts Milind. When Milind loses his job as an office boy, he prefers to give him pocket money rather than have the boy live in his place as he cannot bear the boy’s gutkha- (tobacco granules) eating habit which leaves “red blotches all over his bathroom tiles’ and which ‘nauseates him” (105). Similarly, immediately after their wedding they watch a Bollywood film in which the hero pushes the heroine off the terrace on the day of their wedding. Both Yudi and Milind think that “the bloody movie” might give the other “ideas” (109). Yudi even has a “theory based on years of experience” about which sexual role to offer the lower class boys he takes home (12). He offers the active role to his partners because he believes, “as long as men were allowed to penetrate, there was no fear of their returning afterwards to demand money or beat you up. Some even thought it beneath their dignity to accept cash from someone they had buggered” (12). Significantly, he does not mind “if his lovers thought of him as a hijra. It was so much more relaxing if one was freed of the need to perform” (12-13). The interaction of class and Yudi’s sexual desire for lower classes is apparent in the

8. In an insightful account of class dynamics in queer communities in India, Alok Gupta narrates his personal journey to the heart of Tamil lower class gay subculture in Bombay. His dress and manner of walking immediately earns him the title of “Englishpur ki Kothi.” His comment on the appellation is telling in its own right: “I may also be a homosexual, but I was different. I was a cunning Ambassador of the English-speaking people. Not just that, I was from an exclusive, inaccessible-to-all and English-speaking domain called ‘*Englishpur*’” (124). His friend forges gay solidarity with the lower class homosexuals but, admits that it was the first time he was interacting with them as homosexuality helped them find a common ground. However, the class barrier can only be transgressed partially. His friend qualifies this transgression in another significant remark: “Gosh, if my mother were to see this she would not be scandalised by the gay thing, but the kind of people I am hanging out with” (124).

choice of music he plays for his partners. He categorises them in three classes, first, the English-speaking professionals, for whom “he usually played classical music,” the college students from Gujarati or Marathi backgrounds, for whom “Western pop music” was “compulsorily,” and finally the men from the working class for whom it was Hindi film music or music channels on television (26-27).

Evidently then, Yudi’s relationship with Milind reflects the trope of the sugar daddy and his dependent. At their first meeting in a public toilet, Yudi is repulsed at the boy’s uncut toenails, but admits that “the odour of sweat from the young working-class body made his head spin” (7). The differences in their age and class makes Yudi “fit for the post,” as Yudi contends “everyone wants a sugar daddy” (22). Milind’s search for a substitute father prompts Yudi to refocus their relationship around the figure of sugar daddy: “In his place Milind had found a sugar daddy! That was what gay men all over the world looked for anyway: sugar daddies” (113). Yudi buys clothes and accessories for Milind so that he can look presentable when they go out to dance at Testosterone. He provides financial support when Milind loses his job and the ‘perfect arrangement’ at the end of the novel can be regarded as a continuation of the cliché. Furthermore, the trope is reinforced in the novel by a recurrent appearance of food imagery. Milind as a deprived child had to share his food with his siblings, so that he is delighted at a full meal of Chinese food at Yudi’s flat. The time they spend together at the flat has continuous references to food and the “middle of the week [is] dominated by food” (105). Yudi also addresses Milind in an affectionate manner as his “chickoo” (an Indian pear-like fruit) (138).

In a sophisticated analysis of the sugar daddy/rough trade binary, Alan Sinfield argues that the “social inferiority of the lower-class partner corresponded to the relative powerlessness of the heterosexual wife” (150). Murray Healy, on the other hand, has

argued that middle-class gay men invest in working-class men because of their fantasies about “real men,” and so the working-class men have to be imagined and kept straight. This is what he terms “a drive for fantasy-preservation” (17-19). Following Sinfield’s and Murray’s work closely, Niall Richardson remarks that the rough trade stereotype actually strengthens “essentialist notions of gender transitive homosexuality compared with masculine heterosexuality” (39). For him, “the eroticized image of rough trade” not only reconfigures “*essentialist* perceptions of sexuality,” it “reinforces the binaries of straight and gay and their corollaries of masculine and feminine” as well (39).

As mentioned above, in *The Boyfriend*, Milind’s relationship with Yudi invokes the rough trade/sugar daddy binary. However, Rao attempts to subvert the cliché through an alteration of Milind’s identification with his class. Milind adopts the mannerisms of the middle classes and even starts thinking in English (200). His self-perception as an active male in terms of his sexuality is problematised with his fluctuating gender identity and his need to transgress the class restrictions. Rao departs from a simplistic reading of this dynamic by partially queering it as Milind climbs up the social ladder. Milind feels a part of the middle classes when he works for the eco-feminist conference with Gauri. Once he has earned enough money at the modelling agency, he even surreptitiously visits Testosterone, something he consciously associates with the sexually passive homosexuals (202). At the end of the novel, he realises that both his hetero- and homosexuality are a transaction, as his wife “paid for it by doing his cooking and washing” (230).

Milind can be termed the “queer subaltern” in the novel. Drawing upon subaltern scholarship, Ratna Kapur articulates the position of the “sexual subaltern” as “the complex layering of sexual subjectivities in a postcolonial context that are not captured in a straightforward ‘lesbian’ or ‘gay’ reading” (383). Given the persistence of non-

normative gender and sexual identifications in the novel, I would suggest that the term “queer subaltern” (a slight variation of Kapur’s formulation) appropriately incorporates Milind’s class, sexual, caste and gender positions. Coming from an underprivileged class and caste background, like Yudi, Milind is conscious of the chasm between him and his lover. Despite Yudi’s attraction for him, he undergoes a condescending process of othering at their first meeting. Yudi addresses him as the “boy,” and is surprised that he does not know how to use a condom at the age of nineteen (9). Class anxiety restrains Yudi from letting Milind live in his house for more than a week. Milind is cautious enough to announce to Yudi that he is a dalit in case Yudi did not want to kiss an untouchable “whose ancestors cleaned the shit of others” (74). He is aware that Yudi can manage his gay lifestyle because he is a member of the upper echelons of society and that “for the middle class, indecent behaviour is a crime” (82).

As a dalit, Milind has to negotiate not only his class status but his sexual preference as well, which compounds his marginality within Indian society. For him, Yudi belongs to the “talking class” who, as Debjani Ganguly points out, has “the prerogative of setting the terms that might enable (the) dalit lad to ‘speak correctly’” (43). As he awaits Yudi in the lobby of the Taj hotel, he is manhandled and thrown out by the guard as “it is not a refuge for the city’s urchins” (98). On their trip to Shravanabelagola, he feels compelled to please Yudi and follow him “like a sorry dog follows his master,” as “at the end of the day, it was Yudi who held the purse strings” (128). For Gauri, he is not even a “respectable Dalit ... whom the government’s reservation policy had transformed into, say, a college lecturer” (196). As Rob Cover argues, if the “needs of survival are over-riding” as in the case of Third World sweatshops, then the body cannot be used for the purposes of desire (45). Similarly, Milind is at the margins of society and has to negotiate his existence before his sexual orientation.

Milind's self-perception of his sexual identity remains heteronormative, as he does not believe that playing the 'active' role in bed makes him homosexual. The novel shows him as an example of internalised homophobia, whereby he does not wish to be labelled a "chhakka," a homosexual (209). His sexuality is a reminder of how sexual acts differ from an individual's sexual identity. Within queer research, this notion signals the ongoing disruption of constructions of sexuality from the perspective of non-White and Third World cultural differences. In his detailed study of homosexuality in India, Shivananda Khan states that the insistence on sexual desire has informed much scholarship in lesbian and gay paradigms in the West. However, the validity of a discourse on sexuality and sexual identity is questioned in the South Asian context, where "clear distinctions between concepts of "active" and "passive," concepts of "discharge," "pleasure," and "desire" take precedence" (106). Surely, such concepts operate in Milind's construction of his sexuality, as for him sexual identity is not a primary marker of his identity as a whole, which, is also defined by his class, family and marriage. The urban elite and members of the privileged class, like Yudi, however do define their sexual identity as "gay" or "queer," and Khan points out that many such discourses criss-cross with the former view. One instance of this perception in the novel is Milind's surprise when Yudi makes him read same-sex matrimonial advertisements in the gay magazine, *Bombay Dost* (84). His surprise arises out of the different class spheres that Yudi and Milind inhabit. It demonstrates the opacity of these spheres in the postcolonial nation, whereby class and caste segregation manifests in the availability of the press. Similarly, in another instance, Yudi informs Milind that being gay was an integral part of his life, his religion and his caste. Milind fails to comprehend the meaning of Yudi's gay identity. He only replies, "But you are a Brahman, aren't you?" To which Yudi retorts, "No I am a homosexual. Gay by caste. Gay by religion" (81).

Even though Milind's perception of his gender identity is queered by the end of the novel and he becomes the 'tender gender bender' for Yudi (107-108), his sexuality remains defined in terms of the sexual act; he constantly perceives himself as the penetrator. As Khan asserts, "the act of sexual penetration is not so much a definer of identity, but one of phallic power" so that the penetrator retains his "manliness" (107). Thus, the survey in A.K. modelling agency reveals that "most ... boys didn't think they were abnormal or perverted as long as they were 'active'" (180). Certainly, for Milind then, marriage and family are far stronger markers of identity than his 'sexual acts'. He may regret that his life would have been different had Yudi asked him to live with him years earlier. However, on returning from his night with Yudi once he has procured money for his family, he thinks with a note of contempt of "how he fucked him (Yudi) on the fancy bed on which his (Yudi's) mother once slept" and this thought remains foremost on his mind (230). Vanita suggests that the exploiter/exploited binary is often inverted in cross-class relations:

When the social superior is single and the subordinate married, heterosexual privilege may trump class privilege and result in a transaction that is mutually useful but that downgrades the gay person. This happens in R. Raj Rao's *The Boyfriend* (2003), where gay protagonist, Yudi, a journalist, manages to retain his relationship with his working class boyfriend Milind, who gets married to a woman, despises Yudi for homosexual identity and single status. (*Love's Rite* 244).

Milind's contempt for Yudi, his class and homosexuality, cannot endorse the idea of a "perfect arrangement" as Yudi would like to believe at the end of the novel (232). Perhaps the most important feature of the novel is that this "perfect arrangement" appears unambiguously flawed by Milind's derision of Yudi.

Compared to Rao's text, one other powerful narrative of resistance to hegemonic codes of heteronormativity reveals the opposition of the gendered subaltern. Deepa Mehta's lesbian film *Fire* (1996) functions as a crucial corollary to Rao's novel in the politics of mainstreaming queer issues before the turning point of 2009. Whereas *Fire* ignited homophobic violence by members of the Shiv Sena (a faction of the extreme right wing party of Hindu nationalists) for its overtly lesbian theme, *The Boyfriend* escaped any such scathing homophobic commentary. Unlike *Fire*, which was released both in English and Hindi, Rao's novel was only available to the English-speaking, urban-educated Indian reading public of the upper classes and the intelligentsia who generally supported the screening of *Fire* and argued against the ban on the film demanded by Hindu nationalists. The severances of the postcolonial nation in terms of the colonial language, as I have shown above, thus appear critically significant in the articulation of queer subjectivity in post-independent India.

However, it is imperative to note that *Fire* showed the element of sexual (and lesbian) desire in women for the first time in popular Indian cinema. It provoked the aggressive response from the Hindu far right because women are typically represented as sexual objects and not as sexual subjects with desires of their own, and lesbian desire decentres men. Further, Mehta's non-resident status in India (she resides in Canada) added fuel to the controversy around the film, specifically those concerning India's national culture and heritage. Rao on the other hand was part of the national community and Penguin Books India Limited published his book. *Fire* dealt with lesbian desire in an Indian context and the Shiv Sena critiqued the import of western forms of same-sex desire and their imposition on India. For Bal Thackeray, the iconic chief of Shiv Sena, homosexuality was not a part of Indian culture and people like Mehta were "ushering in a wretched culture" (sawnet.org). Thackeray's remark emblematises a standard domi-

nant view of cultural essentialism that connects non-normative desire with the “decadent” West. However, both Mehta’s work and Rao’s text extend in order to redefine the cultural norm of what constitutes Indian culture.

This Chapter has demonstrated how questions of nation and queerness are implicated and how a queer inquiry exposes the fractures of a postcolonial nation. The policing of homosexualities in postcolonial India and their subsequent marginalisation in mainstream discourse reveals a discomfort at addressing the problem of sexual desire itself. Rao’s novel deconstructs received understandings of sexuality, sex, and gender in India and inscribes the queer subculture of Bombay as a legitimate part of Indian culture, thus counterbalancing homophobic nationalist discourses that reproduce normative sexualities. Read in conjunction with one another, the queer union of Yudi and Milind against the backdrop of Milind’s heterosexual marriage to Leela, the recasting of Hindu myths, the presence of hijras and the use of a homo-specific language in the gay subculture of Bombay, gesture towards critical resistance to heteronormative discourses of postcolonial India. In this regard, *The Boyfriend* negotiates a space for queer representation within the context of Indian/Hindu nationalism and appears as a counter-narrative (in the Foucauldian sense of the term) to the ‘conspiracy of silence’ concerning homosexuality in India. However, Milind’s contempt for Yudi and the conflicting class/caste impediments to same-sex love reposition the queer narrative of resistance to the heteronormative nation as “fractured resistance.”

Chapter Five

Past Continuous: Queer Contestations of the Colonial Paradigm in Leslie de Noronha's *The Dew Drop Inn* and Shyam Selvadurai's *Cinnamon Gardens*¹

Frank thought he deserved it, and told himself that he now understood why he had gone to India in the first place. Why was the young Englishman so brutalised, resourceless in comparison to his Indian counterpart? Why was the sensibility so different? Why these fragmentings and scatterings of identity in his own money-hungry culture, while his Indian friend remained in a world that, if narrow, certainly had a depth that was absent from the celebration of surfaces which lay at the heart of Western society. –
Jeremy Seabrook, “Dilraj: Empire of the Heart”

In a way, the British journalist Jeremy Seabrook's story “Dilraj: Empire of the Heart” (1998) repositions the Fielding/Aziz homophile friendship of E.M. Forster's novel *A Passage to India* (1924) as an overtly homosexual liaison.² Frank, the protagonist of “Dilraj,” arrives in Delhi to work for an aid organisation and embarks on a relationship with Prakash, a recruit in the Indian police. Their relationship ends when Prakash marries a girl of his mother's choice. Set in contemporary India of the 1980s and 1990s, Seabrook's complex account of an unsuccessful (homo)sexual bond resurrects the failure of interracial desire which characterised Forster's narrative. The subtitle of the

1. The titular phrase refers to Neel Mukherjee's novel *Past Continuous* (2007). Like my discussion, the novel dramatises the tensions between colonial past and postcolonial present through the lens of queerness.

2. Joseph Bristow makes a useful distinction between the homophile and the homosexual: “Where the term homophile accentuates the affectivity of desires between men, the label homosexual draws more fully on the specific identity that embodies the sexual subject of such desires” (3).

story, “Empire of the Heart,” alludes to the rich literary tradition of imperialist fiction of Forster, Rudyard Kipling and Paul Scott among others, which not only dramatised but eroticised as well, the relations between populations across the colonial divide. At the end of the story, Frank leaves for Britain feeling that “his had been another alien presence in India, which had changed nothing” (149). The East/West dichotomy, which was “intensified, expanded and reworked” during European colonial expansion, resurfaces in postcolonial India when Frank realises that the ‘cultural difference’ that separates the two lovers remains insuperable (Loomba 106).³ The story rehearses, and in several ways reinforces, the anxiety of the colonial framework of Forster’s novel whereby Seabrook resuscitates what Sara Suleri has called, in another context, “that obsessive tale of Anglo-India, which can only sexualize colonial exchange in terms of an aborted homoeroticism” (195).

The following Chapter attempts to provide insights into the homoerotic anxiety that defines the male-male cross-cultural dimension of the colonial divide. It aims to read queer interracial desire as “a historical archive for both individuals and communities, one that is excavated through the very act of desiring the racial Other” (Gopinath, *Impossible Desires* 1). In relation to the field of postcolonial/queer studies, it continues the argument formulated by Leela Gandhi that “any coherent understanding of homoerotic articulation and disarticulation in such [Indo-Anglian] literature requires that we return, once again, to the scene of the colonial encounter” (“Loving Well” 88). In this Chapter, I address the significant omission of the theme of same-sex desire and its articulation and/or disarticulation in colonial times from my dissertation, which explores representations of queerness in (post)colonial South Asian fiction. My analysis engages

3. Partha Chatterjee locates the crystallisation of the difference between the East and the West in the period that immediately follows the Enlightenment era in Europe. Certainly, this period, which he refers to as “the moment of departure,” coincides with the advance of European colonisation and nationalism (50).

with the fraught ‘scene of the colonial encounter’ as represented in Leslie de Noronha’s second novel *The Dew Drop Inn* (1994) and Shyam Selvadurai’s novel *Cinnamon Gardens* (1999). It offers a critical assessment of the intersection of same-sex desire with the anxieties and ambivalence that inform the realm of interracial desire in the colonial period. Resisting the neo-orientalising tendencies of Seabrook’s narrative, both novels rework and rearticulate the colonial anxiety surrounding interracial (homo)sexuality which was routinely thematised in historical fiction from Kipling’s *Kim* (1901) to Scott’s *The Jewel in the Crown* (1966). Written from a South Asian perspective, Noronha and Selvadurai’s novels become a reverse response to Seabrook’s text through an acknowledgement but simultaneous revision, challenge and contradiction of established literary tropes in historical/imperialist fiction.

In this Chapter, following Christopher Lane, I combine “the aim of an established field of colonial inquiry and a growing body of literary and historical work on same-sex representation” (xi). Subsequent to the publication of Ronald Hyam’s extensive work on sexuality in the colonial period in *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience* (1990), Lane’s seminal analysis of colonial homosexuality in *The Ruling Passion* (1995) and Joseph Bristow’s account of homoerotic writing written after 1885 in *Effeminate England* (1995) have initiated the emergence of academic interest in the intersection of queer theory and analysis of colonial discursive practices. Additionally, within postcolonial theory, Benita Parry underscores the difficulty of recuperating the subjectivity of the colonised. Reviewing the deconstructive practices of Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak and Homi Bhabha, she notes that the incessant focus on the analysis of colonial discourse has “obliterated the role of the native as historical subject and combatant” who resisted imperialism (“Problems” 34). Parry’s position of dissent in post-colonial studies anticipates Joseph Boone’s useful analysis of Mohammed Mrabet’s

novel *Love with a Few Hairs* (1967). Written in response to Andre Gide's novel *The Immoralist* (1902), Boone demonstrates that Mrabet revises the story "from the perspective of the "kept" Arab boy" so that "the sexual object ... becomes the subject of his *own* story" (67; italics in original). Boone's examination of the novel is an attempt to decentre Gide's colonial/queer narrative by emphasising the 'role of the native as historical subject' in a postcolonial/queer text.

In a similar vein, Hema Chari points to the "predominantly heterosexual frameworks of postcolonial theory" resulting in the elision of the issue of same-sex desire in the otherwise invaluable contributions of Edward Said, Suleri, Bhabha and Spivak (280). Addressing the absence of the intersection of race and sexuality in the works of Michel Foucault and Eve K. Sedgwick, Chari adds that queer theory remains "ensconced within a predominantly Western metropolitan frame of reference" (280). Her critique of Foucault's oft-cited account of the birth of the homosexual in the second half of the nineteenth century is particularly effective because it links the construction of the colonial Other as sexually deviant to the establishment of the category of homosexuality in Europe (282). Kobena Mercer and Isaac Julien also consider the simultaneity of the construction of deviant sexuality and the colonial other: "the European construction of sexuality coincides with the epoch of imperialism and the two inter-connect" (106). The sexually deviant characteristic of the "savage," based on the "visibility of his sex ... led the Europeans to assume that the savage possessed an open, frank and uninhibited "sexuality" – unlike the sexuality of the European" (107).⁴ Although Chari does not acknowledge Mercer and Julien's assertions, her methodological approach attends to the gaps in postcolonial and queer theories in a similar manner. Her analysis offers a

4. In the context of the United States, Siobhan B. Sommerville suggests an identical intersection of racial and sexual discursive constructions: "the formation of heterosexuality and homosexuality emerged in the United States through (and not merely parallel to) a discourse saturated with assumptions about the racialization of bodies" (4).

complex understanding of male sexuality whereby questions of same-sex desire are not liminal to the “cultural politics of colonialism” (278).

In view of the above-mentioned and ongoing interactions between queer and postcolonial analyses, my reading of Selvadurai and Noronha’s novels highlights the significance of a South Asian response to interracial same-sex desire during the Raj. Selvadurai and Noronha reverse the imperial (homo)sexual gaze by appropriating and contesting dominant representations of the coloniser/colonised binary which occlude the subjectivity of the latter. However, I would argue that the South Asian response to representations of interracial same-sex desire cannot easily be defined as a singular and/or synthetic whole. British colonialism was neither ‘internally coherent’, nor did it generate ‘a single and self-evident “colonial homosexuality” in British literature (Lane 1995: xi). Critical interpretations of the imperial attitude to homosexuality include the homophobia manifest in the legal prohibition of homosexual activity in Britain and its colonies. Nevertheless, scholars have also noted the ambivalence of colonial dictates, which fostered homosocial bonding (Hyam; Lane). Robert Aldrich explains that “British law codes made homosexual acts illegal in India, though they did not forbid intimacy between men that might have a homosocial component” (276). In addition, whereas Radhika Mohanram describes the colonial indictment of homosexuality as a “disavowal of “black” behaviour” since black male sexuality indicated degeneration and perversion, Gandhi asserts the creation of “a counteractive form of dissident or radical homo/bisexual[-ity]” as a derivative effect of aggressive colonial homophobia (Mohanram 84-85; Gandhi, “Loving Well” 88-89). Thus, alternative productions of interracial same-sex desire in South Asian literature reflect the multiplicity of interpretations of colonial homosexuality. The two novels portray different and at times contradictory representations of queerness. Although both engage with the complexity of same-sex

desire, the articulation of queerness in the colonial context is dissimilar. The South Asian response varies from the gradual acceptance of homo/bi-sexuality after a sustained period of internalised homophobia in *Cinnamon Gardens* and au contraire, to the recurrence of homophobic guilt that leads to suicide in *The Dew Drop Inn*. I concur with Lane's argument that "the pursuit of homosexual truth places an impossible demand on this period's diffuse constituents and diverse representation of same-gender desire" (5).

By examining a South Asian response to historical and imperial fiction, I shift the critical focus from an analysis of colonialist fiction to postcolonial narratives from South Asia that focus on interracial same-sex desire in the colonial era. Aldrich rightly comments on the erasure of non-western voices in homosexual encounters during colonial rule: "as for the voices of men from outside Europe, they are seldom heard" (405). The significance of my approach lies in not recovering merely the historical subjectivity of the colonised, but in broadening the field of colonial discourse analysis as well. In her work on interracial intimacy, Anne Stoler takes note of the increasingly varied studies in the field of colonialism: "students of colonial histories now direct their archival energies to the instabilities and vulnerabilities of colonial regimes" (10). Similarly, contemporary academic discussions foreground the necessity of moving beyond the saturated, albeit interesting, exploration of colonial texts and routine themes. Thus, the editors of a recent volume entitled *Imperial Desire: Dissident Sexualities and Colonial Literature* (2003) argue for "a widening of the application of the phrase "colonial text" beyond European literature with colonial themes" (Holden and Ruppel xxiii). Their volume incorporates queer assessments of adventure fiction, travel writers, women pioneers and a postcolonial text. My analysis of Selvadurai and Noronha's texts

contributes to this growing inter-disciplinary exchange between colonial/postcolonial history and queer discursive analyses.

Although Selvadurai's first novel *Funny Boy* has been the focus of sustained critical scrutiny, the reception of *Cinnamon Gardens* has been relatively subdued. In one of the very few full-length critical accounts of the novel, S.W. Perera focuses on the literary and structural merits of the novel. Perera critiques Selvadurai for a historical misconstruction of the period that immediately preceded Sri Lanka's independence ("In Pursuit" 91-93). Reviewers have labelled the novel as "structurally as well as thematically more complex than its predecessor" *Funny Boy*, a "restrained second novel," "wildly exotic," "an epic" and, "an interesting [historical] experiment that does not really succeed" (Jayasena 829; Flexman 136; DeCandido 1643; Park 183; Perera, "Sri Lanka" 173). Moreover, as "a post-mortem" of colonial Sri Lanka; it functions similarly to "a carefully researched work of historical fiction" and (Alexander 157; Nelson 249). Compared to Selvadurai, Noronha's novel has largely been ignored by reviewers perhaps due to the relatively low-profile dissemination of the novel - the book is only available in India. In the only published review of the novel, Peter Nazareth compares Noronha's thematic concerns to Salman Rushdie's exploration of "colonialism, neo-colonialism, classism, and racism" (871). Given the complexity of colonial/postcolonial and queer interracial concerns that the novels raise, I would argue that an extensive critical examination of both the texts is in order.

I contend that Noronha's novel, set in pre- and post-independent India, and Selvadurai's fictional account of late 1920s Sri Lanka are significant contributions in the field of colonial and cross-racial homosexual relations. *The Dew Drop Inn* continues narrative links with Noronha's first novel *The Mango and the Tamarind Tree* (1970). However, as Nazareth points out, "the designation "sequel" is misleading" since No-

ronha's second novel departs from the earlier text by having only one character from it and focussing on events from colonial and postcolonial India instead of colonial Goan identity in the former novel. Further, both Selvadurai and Noronha's second novels reinscribe the themes of homosexuality and interracial desire in (post)colonial South Asia thereby signifying the critical deployment of queerness in articulating, to borrow a phrase from Gayatri Gopinath, "the barely submerged histories of colonialism and racism" (*Impossible Desires* 2). The novels make evident the complex ways in which the issue of (queer) interracial desire is implicated in long-standing histories of colonial intervention.

Both the texts present several thematic concerns such as (post)colonial history, cross-racial same-sex desire in colonial times, female emancipation and marginalisation of Anglo-Indians among others. In this context, one single and unique issue does not emerge as the principal plot. Although same-sex interracial desire does not function as the key signifier in the novels, it does not appear as being tangential to their multiple sub-plots. Rather, the depiction of queerness serves to embody the engagement of the South Asian subject with colonial history. Noronha's narrative is located in the transition period from the end of British Raj to independence when "the Union Jack on the Flag Pole on the crest of Gun Hill was replaced by the Indian Congress Flag" (17). The English/Welsh couple Tim and Megan Morris own the eponymous guesthouse, the Dew Drop Inn, located in the Himalayas. Divided into several books, which are named after each character, the novel interconnects the stories of a wide array of people who sojourn at the inn, and like Scott's novels, functions as an archive of the end-of-the-Raj society. The suicide of Steven Murray, an Anglo-Indian, marks a turning point in the novel's narrative. Steven is considered a closeted homosexual, "a closet queen," by Claude, Edwin and Jake, the three gay residents of Goa at the inn (162). Queerness in the form

of homosexual guilt leads to his ultimate death - “he wanted boys, men, desperately” (172). The incident correlates to the over-arching theme of the demise of the Raj, of which Steven is ostensibly the most visible signifier due to his bi-racial heritage.

In *Cinnamon Gardens* the parallel narratives of Balendran Navaratnam and his niece Annalukshmi Kandiah centre on the desiring South Asian subject. It begins in 1927 with Annalukshmi seeing “clearly the sea of her desires” for the successful completion of Senior Cambridge exams and qualification as a teacher even though her career plans are directly opposed to the wishes of her mother, Louisa, and her mother’s family, the Barnetts (3). It ends with Balendran’s “immense gesture of bravery” in accepting his desire for the Englishman Richard Howland, his former lover (354). Balendran and Annalukshmi’s desire for sexual transgression and social emancipation is interconnected to the other underlying theme of the decolonisation of Ceylon - the colonial name for Sri Lanka until 1972. The political backdrop of the Donoughmore Commission of 1927, which dealt with the question of constitutional reforms in colonial Sri Lanka, serves to “highlight the main characters’ struggle for independence” (142). Balendran’s lover Richard is a member of the Commission, which purports to review the limited franchise accorded to Sri Lankans in 1921 (65). Balendran’s desire for Richard and the constraints of his family life provide a parallel to the social movements of decolonisation. Queerness therefore functions as a relational subtext, suturing to themes of colonialism, independence movement, women’s franchise and class politics.

Same-sex desire connects to the colonial framework whereby Balendran expresses queerness through colonial imagery in *Cinnamon Gardens*. In other words, the articulation of same-sex desire paradoxically yet implicitly depends upon the availability of colonial science, which is directly responsible for the subjugation of the South Asian subject through its coding of racial hierarchy. Waiting for Richard to arrive as a

member of the Donoughmore Commission from England, Balendran notices a copy of Edward Carpenter's novel *From Adam's Peak to Elephanta: Sketches in Ceylon and India* in his study (53).⁵ The discovery of the book, a present from Richard, disrupts Balendran's normative life as a married man with a son. It forces him to reminisce about his past relationship with Richard in England: "the trip Richard and he had made to see Carpenter after reading his *Intermediate Sex* ... There, for the first time, he learnt that inversion had already been studied by scientific men who did not view it as pathological" (53). For Balendran, the affirmation of queerness as non-pathological becomes available through the colonial parameters of 'scientific men.' As Holden suggests, "it is ... a moment that is quickly incorporated into a very colonial rationality, Balendran naming his sexuality as identity through the support of "scientific men" (295).

However, if colonial science appears as a liberatory means for the South Asian subject to enunciate queer self-identity in the novel, it also restricts its complete identification with queerness. The narrative interrupts the identification of queerness for the colonised South Asian subject as Balendran is reminded of the racial structure in the empire — a mechanism of subjugation of the colonised which is put into place by the 'very colonial rationality' that Balendran evokes for understanding his sexuality. He recalls his astonishment when he visited Carpenter and his lover George Merrill with Richard: "Balendran had been amazed and then intrigued by the way they lived ... the way they had carved a life out for themselves, despite such strong societal censure" (54). The nostalgic return to the scene of the possibility of European homosexual love is

5. The novel fictionalises the friendship between Edward Carpenter and the first president of Ceylon National Congress, Ponnambalam Arunachalam. Despite the colonial divide and the fact that Arunachalam did not have a sexual liaison with Carpenter, the two friends shared similar views on colonialism. Carpenter was a committed anti-imperialist whose views were reflective of his intimacy with Arunachalam. Arunachalam on the other hand, supported Carpenter's radical formulations of "homogenic love" and "the intermediate sex." For a full discussion of the friendship between Carpenter and Arunachalam, see Aldrich (290-98).

immediately contrasted to the evident failure of a bi-racial union. Balendran compares his comfortable lifestyle in Sri Lanka to “the meagre life he might have had in London” (55). He ponders the “increasing frustration” of not being able to progress in the legal profession “if he had stayed in London with Richard” (55). The image of “the shabbily dressed Indian gentleman” with “an excessive deference, the way he would unnecessarily step off the pavement to let others pass” is a constant reminder to Balendran of his similar status as a colonised citizen of the empire (55). In the incomplete identification with queerness, which becomes in the first instance available through colonial science, Balendran is appropriated, to use Bhabha’s terminology, into the “colonialist chain of command” (*Location* 88). In such a scheme, for the South Asian queer subject, the imitation of paradigms of European queer emancipation does not engender liberation in any way. Indeed, in terms of independence or sexual identity, the coloniser’s European-ness/queerness remains only partially imitable.

The evocation of colonial science as the first point of contact of queerness for the colonised subject stands in contrast to the explicitly violent effect of the colonial law against homosexuality as well. Therefore, the novel challenges and pre-empts the position of colonial science as an affirmative signifier in terms of queer self-fashioning by explicitly referencing the homophobia of legal frames of the Empire. As I have noted earlier, colonial law prohibited homosexual activities under Sections 377 of the Indian Penal Code and 365A of the penal code of Sri Lanka, which were enacted in 1860 and 1883 respectively. In general, the law was a response to “native perversity” or what Lord Elgin labelled the “special Oriental vices” (Arondekar, “Without a Trace” 19; qtd. in Hyam 123). In particular, however, it intended to shift British attitudes towards the colonies after the 1857 uprising in India “wherein it was imperative that the rulers maintain their sexual, social and racial “purity”” (Bhaskaran 80). The result of the

change in imperial governance was manifest in the penalisation of homosexuality in the colonies and the adoption of “peculiar Purity laws and conventions” in Britain in the 1890s (Hyam 88). The Wilde trials bear witness to the widespread homosexual panic in the period. The novel therefore shows the ramification of the trials as a means of exposing the violence of colonial laws. Explaining the reasons behind the break-up of the union between Balendran and him, Richard tells his new lover Alli that Balendran’s father turned up at their flat in England and put an end to their relationship. After Balendran’s precipitated departure, his father “threatened to have the police charge me with sodomy” (128). Richard further recalls, “After all, it hadn’t been that long since the Wilde trial ... One word to the law can shatter our lives into a thousand pieces” (128). Richard’s memory is significant since it locates the queer subject as an embattled identity in terms of the colonial legal machinery. Therefore, the violent repercussion of colonial dictates on the quotidian lives of Balendran and Richard reveals the inefficacy of Balendran’s reliance on queer emancipation through colonial science.

The dispute between Richard and Balendran’s father exemplifies the ways in which postcolonial operations of power often validate and reproduce colonial oppression. In the previous Chapter, I reflected upon the complicity of the postcolonial nation with several colonial ideologies. In *Cinnamon Gardens*, Balendran’s father, the Mudaliyar (the chief), is representative of the nation’s elite who reinforce the imperial binary divides. As a member of the upper echelons of colonial Colombo, he lives in the affluent enclave of Cinnamon Gardens and aims to participate in the birth of the postcolonial nation. However, his violent encounter with Richard attests to the continuation of colonial authority in reproducing homophobia and the prerogative of heterosexuality. Although he is himself involved in extra-conjugal sexual liaisons with the maidservant in his house, he disowns his elder son Arul when he marries the house servant’s daugh-

ter Pakkiam. However, the Mudaliyar had decided to groom Pakkiam for his own sexual pleasures when she was an adolescent. His overt condemnation of homosexuality as “degradation” and “filth” is hence an ironic comment on his own sexual practices (337). The novel further traces the alignment of colonial and postcolonial positions by positioning the Mudaliyar as a fervent opponent of a full franchise. As he says, “universal franchise would be the ruin of our nation” (64). Like the colonial predecessor, he opposes the idea of electoral participation by all citizens since it would undermine his class privilege, fearing that “it would put the vote in the hands of the servants in our kitchen, labourers, the beggar on the street” (64). For him, the underprivileged classes are content with the protection provided by the landowners. The colonial administrators justify their rule on a similar basis by arguing that “the common man ... had no aspirations for freedom from colonial patronage” (104). The potential substitution of power from colonial to postcolonial representation offers no promise of change for the ‘common man’ who, as the narrative cautions, “would simply change one set of masters for another” (104).

Selvadurai critiques the continuation of the nexus of class and heteronormativity in the postcolonial nation by allowing dissenting views on electoral reform. The points of view of the two protagonists explicitly challenge the Mudaliyar’s position. Both Balendran and Annalukshmi support constitutional reform with the possibility of self-government in Sri Lanka. Although the Mudaliyar’s “loyalty was to the British governor and Empire,” Balendran is in favour of “more or less a federal state” whereby “all the various groups feel that they have a hand in governing this country” (27, 63). Similarly, Annalukshmi participates in the nascent Sri Lankan feminist movement by becoming involved in the Girls Friendly Society, which is led by Balendran’s wife, Sonia. Additionally, Balendran undermines the Mudaliyar’s position by rejecting the

choices he has made for his private life. At the end of the novel, he confronts his father about his relationship with Richard and refuses to accept the suppression of queerness that the Mudaliyar so forcefully advocates. He states in a firm manner, “No, Appa. I cannot, for this is how things are with me” (337). Balendran’s final defiance of the Mudaliyar exposes the legacy of heteronormativity that the postcolonial nation systematically reproduces from the paradigm of colonial governance.

The paralysing impact of colonial law is by no means confined to the separation of Richard and Balendran. As Alexander remarks, “if homosexuality is banned in England, it certainly is a dark secret worth keeping in Ceylonese society” (156). Also, commenting on the Labouchère Amendment (1885), which banned acts of “gross indecency” between men in both the public and private domains, Bristow notes the repercussions for homosexuality: “this pernicious piece of legislation until very recently created a climate of secrecy and fear in the lives of men-loving men” (1). In *Cinnamon Gardens* the ‘secrecy and fear’ of homosexual activities become a part of articulating queerness as they develop into internalised homophobia for Balendran. In a way, the narrative unfolds as a gradual dissipation of the homophobic guilt generated by colonial law. Balendran’s discreet same-sex encounters with Ranjan, an army recruit, at the Bambalapitiya railway station are paradigmatic of the feelings spawned by ‘secrecy and fear’ of allegedly illegal homosexual activities (73-75).

Although it could be rightly argued that Balendran takes advantage of his class prerogative by assuring Ranjan’s discretion through monetary benefits, I would suggest that the transaction is at least partially a ‘pernicious’ consequence of colonial law. Certainly, Balendran’s discreet encounter with Ranjan functions as a continuation of colonial class privileges. In my analysis of Rao’s novel *The Boyfriend* in Chapter 4, I demonstrated how the postcolonial nation reproduces the colonial differentiation of self

and Other through a clear demarcation between the classes in terms of command of the English language. Similarly, Ranjan likes to “practise his English” with Balendran in Selvadurai’s text (74). As with Rao’s narrative, the class divide is discursively strengthened through the variable accessibility of English. However, the penalisation of homosexual activities by the colonial authorities produces a form of clandestine homosexuality in which homophobia becomes internalised. Balendran’s sentiments of “a terrible anguish” as he “curse[s] himself for his imprudence” after the routine meetings with Ranjan corroborate my reading of homophobic guilt as a logical effect of the colonial statute against homosexuality (75).

The enduring connection between colonial logic and the homophobic impulse to disavow queer desire is further complicated in *The Dew Drop Inn*. Like *Cinnamon Gardens*, the narration of “The Book of Steven Murray” in Noronha’s novel commences “in the 1920s and 30s when the British Raj was paramount and English colonial life-style was supreme” (118). Steve, as Steven is called in the novel, has an Anglo-Indian heritage. Although his hybridity challenges the injunction of racial purity in the Empire disseminated by the Purity Campaigns of the 1890s, he paradoxically comes to represent Englishness through his Anglo-Indian origins. Noronha asserts that Anglo-Indians “were piously Christian, anglicised, Western in dress and habit, clean, and spoke English” (121). Similarly, Steve “in the tradition of a community that completely identified itself with the British ... thought of himself as an Englishman, a regrettable error into which he fell naturally” (133-34). His rape by Jake, Claude and Edwin and eventual suicide function as a rejection of homophobic colonial Englishness that he embodies. The novel dramatises his repression of homosexual desire by linking it to his racial descent. In her work on the interconnections between race and sex, Mohanram contends that “if sexuality is predicated on notions of difference, then the bodily differ-

ence that race provides is fundamental not only to desire but to the perception of sexuality and sexual practices” (83). Steve’s homophobic containment of his queer drive is an instance of how his ‘perception of sexuality’ is mediated through his racial difference.

The non-acceptance of Steve’s queerness is intimately connected to the indeterminacy of his racial genealogy. His Anglo-Indian heritage recalls Kipling’s famous hero Kim, the oft-cited model of cultural hybridity: “though he was burned black as any native; though he spoke the vernacular by preference ... Kim was white” (Kipling 49). However, where Kipling’s purpose, as Edward Said’s reading of *Kim* emphasises, “is in fact to show the absence of conflict,” Noronha’s South Asian response consists in highlighting “the tragedy of the community, the legendary Eurasian or half-caste descendants of casual liaisons between British Tommies and the local prostitutes” (Said *Culture* 132-62, 146; Noronha 121). Hyam suggests that the ‘tragedy’ of the Anglo-Indian community was a direct outcome of British policies in the colonies whereby the East India company reversed its position on intermarriage following a violent uprising against white rule in the French colony of Saint Domingo in 1791 (115-17). Acknowledging his debt to Kipling in his depiction of the Anglo-Indian community, Noronha carefully addresses the apparent lack of colonial conflict in *Kim* by describing a crisis of cultural identity in the Raj (121). While Kim is able to conceive of his loyalties to the British Empire and the Indians as an integral element of British India, the Anglo-Indian community of Byculla in Bombay in *The Dew Drop Inn* “identified itself with the British and antagonised the Indians by calling them “natives”, “dirty niggers”” (121). The question of allegiance is rapidly subsumed under the colonial logic in *Kim* but in Noronha’s text, it signifies the disparity between real/geographical “home” and a fantasised homeland: “the Anglo-Indians were totally and always unquestioningly loyal to their King, Country (England) and the Union Jack” (122). Thus, when “the Sun was

setting over the mighty British Raj,” Steve and his mother Beth like several other Anglo-Indians leave for Britain which “they fondly imagined was “Home”” (131).

Whereas Kim’s enrolment in the army of the Empire at the end of Kipling’s novel points to a successful cross-cultural exchange, Steve’s sojourn in England attests to the defeat of the very colonial logic that fuels Kipling’s text. Steve’s double crises of identity in terms of racial/cultural and sexual identification confound the legitimacy of the Empire by showing it to be in profound disorder. Although he carries a British passport, he fails to comprehend how “a passport nationality and a “country of origin or birth” nationality could be different” (133). He is considered as “an English lad” even though “Englishmen considered Anglo-Indians and Indians as blacks” (134). Unlike Kim, Steve’s cultural and racial hybridity threatens to dissolve his perception of identity into inchoateness. He undergoes a process of “absolute depersonalization” (to use insights from Frantz Fanon’s work on the psychological impact of colonial alienation) such that he feels estranged from his Anglo/Indian origins (*African Revolution* 53). Employed as a delivery boy in London, he accompanies a white delivery-van driver who refers to Indians as “those blackies” (134). Steve’s incomprehension at being part of a community that called Indians black or disparagingly referred to them as ‘niggers’ or ‘natives’ underlines the force of the imperial gaze in producing a racially split subject in Steve.

The racial split in Steve induces him to suppress his Indian heritage in the hyphenated Anglo-Indian identity. According to Bhabha, splitting functions as a mechanism of producing differentiation:

Splitting constitutes an intricate strategy of defence and differentiation in the colonial discourse. Two contradictory and independent attitudes inhabit the *same place*, one takes account of reality, the other is under the

influence of instincts which detach the ego from reality. This results in the production of multiple and contradictory belief. The enunciatory moment of multiple belief is both a defence against the anxiety of difference and itself *productive* of differentiations. (*Location* 132, italics in original)

Steve's confusion about his racial identity results in a response guided by his instincts, 'which detach the ego from reality.' Since he cannot "make sense of the driver's remarks," he gives up the "unequal struggle" in order "to believe he really was English, grandparents and Byculla conveniently forgotten" (134-35). The 'anxiety of difference' leads him to a denial of the other half of his split identity - the Indian heritage. It further catalyses into an internalisation of racial hierarchy in which the Anglo-Indian subject becomes the object of contempt. Steve's mother, Beth, disapproves of his modelling assignments in the United States. Her internalised shame at being an Anglo-Indian herself is manifest in the verbal assaults on her son: "You filthy, dirty, half-caste bugger, guttersnipe, you bloody bastard!" (146). Steve confronts Beth's hatred of racial impurity by constantly reminding himself of his English nationality. Thus, when Reverend Taylor meets him after Beth's death in London and offers him the post of Physical Instructor in a residential school in India, he consciously suppresses his Indian origins even though the Reverend assures him that Anglo-Indians are considered Indians after independence: "My passport is British and I'm a British citizen" (148). His evocation of a British passport is a 'defence against the anxiety of difference.'

Steve's internal (racial) conflict must be interpreted as a critique of the absence of colonial conflict in *Kim*. Noronha further accentuates this racial conflict by interconnecting it with the crisis of Steve's sexual identity. The novel foregrounds questions of racial identity as a key signifier in Steve's denial of queer desire. The indeterminacy of

Steve's racial origins ('half-caste bugger') becomes the cause and is replicated in his disavowal of (homo)sexuality. The novel justifies his aversion to heterosexual sex by linking it to his mother "Beth's promiscuity, a legend in Byculla" (135). As a result, "sex with women, even the picture of a nude woman" repels Steve to the "point of deep nausea" (157). Although Steve is convinced that he is indifferent to same-sex desire, he re-lives the pleasure of the forced sexual orgy with Jake, Claude and Edwin who are co-residents with him at the Dew Drop Inn. After his rape:

he actually stretched his limbs languorously to again feel that muscular pain of strain and bruising that was almost erotic, as it was a subconscious re-statement of virility by a strong athletic body. And with that vaguely erotic feeling, there came another shocking realisation. *He had wanted it. He had enjoyed it. He wanted more. And more. Endlessly.* (169, emphasis in original)

Similar to Balendran's feelings of shame and agony in the sexual encounters with Ranjan in *Cinnamon Gardens*, the articulation of queer desire is expressed in the contradictory incorporation of pain ('bruising') within the act of pleasure since 'he had enjoyed it.'

Furthermore, like Balendran's homophobic guilt, Steve's internalisation of homophobia constructs around the operations of colonial power. As an ultimate expression of the effacement of queer desire, his suicide is provoked by the guilt of betraying his father. The "erotic feeling" after his rape crystallises to become a "newly-discovered, still dimly recognised need in him" (170). However, the emergent recognition of queerness is immediately pulverised by the evocation of racial genealogy and colonial science: "The genes of an unknown father, an Englishman, surfaced ... The unknown father had bred these seeds of honour in him" (170). Steve, the son of an

Englishman, is regarded as “the bastard son of a whore” in the system governed by a colonial logic of racial control and stratification (171). The thoughts about his “unknown father” uncover the racial/biological essentialism in colonial discourse, which forecloses the possibility of an affirmative queerness such that “life would be agony, a daily agony of denying himself” (170). Therefore, his suicide, which is indicative of his internalised homophobia, is a subset of his racial guilt produced by the colonial exchange.

As a violent outcome of colonial policies of racial purity, Steve’s death renders visible the false coherence of the imperial project. It interrogates the assumption of those unifying national principles that naturalised the continuation of colonial rule. In his readings of same-sex desire in British colonial representations, Lane considers “how unconscious identifications disturb national allegory to clarify contrary and antagonistic histories of imperial policy and national unity” (4). In this interpretive framework, “sexual desire between men frequently ruptured Britain’s imperial allegory by shattering national unity” (4). Lane’s explanation is apposite to the formulation of a South Asian counter-response to narratives of cohesion of the British Empire. The Anglo-Indian community in the novel is the focal point in exposing the limits of national allegiance as their shifting identifications challenge any conceptualisation of ‘national unity.’ Although they identify with the white British and leave India after independence, the English consider them “blacks” (134). When Reverend Taylor informs Steve that after independence Anglo-Indians are considered Indian citizens, Steve, who is a British citizen, fails to comprehend the logic of national inclusion: “Mummy was right, then, about me being an Anglo, but now I’m Indian?” (148). The final portion of Steve’s question – ‘but now I’m Indian’- interrupts ‘Britain’s imperial allegory’ of national allegiance. Crucially, Steve’s conflicting allegiances re-materialise at the time of his

death. His “English father” and “Indian” education in a “good Jesuit school” depict two exclusive sites of disunity (170-71). His suicide is paradigmatic of the death of the queer subject but it signals the demise of the imperial allegory of national unity as well.

Moreover, in his dual heritage as an Anglo-Indian, Steve represents the alleged harmonious unity of the coloniser and the colonised in the Empire. This imperial/national unity, as Anne McClintock suggests, is predicated on the “metaphoric depiction of social hierarchy as natural and familial — the “national family,” the global family of nations,” the colony as a “family of black children ruled over by a white father”” (*Imperial Leather* 358). However, Steve’s queer racialised (English and Indian) body becomes significant in the ways in which it disrupts the very narrative of a congruent ‘social hierarchy’ by pointing to colonial aporia in relation to the presence of violence within the Empire. The narrator in *Cinnamon Gardens* rightly asserts that dominant interpretations of colonial rule disregard “the crippling poverty and illiteracy, the terrible health and sanitary conditions” in the colonies (104). The violence associated with Steve’s rape and suicide emblematises the eruption of discordant elements in the Empire through which hegemonic narratives that justify colonialism are undermined. This violence resounds in Steve’s final act of sexual pleasure, in “his erection pounding, followed by a violent ejaculation, explosive” (171). The ‘violent’ explosion of Steve’s sperm functions as an ultimate release for his same-sex desire. However, if Steve’s ‘hybrid’ body can be considered a visual embodiment of colonial contact, then the ‘violent’ suicide that follows his ‘ejaculation’ can be understood as a necessary attribute of this contact. The violence of the colonial encounter becomes instrumental in the annihilation of Steve’s queer and bi-racial body.

The evocation of multiple issues and themes in both the novels functions as a South Asian attempt to address the absences of images of disorder in imperialist fiction.

Although some representations of chaos and instability do appear in British fiction about imperialism in the 1980s, they do not incorporate issues of auto-subjectivity by South Asians themselves. In her reading of *Kim*, Parama Roy notes Kipling's "willful forgetting" of the 1857 Mutiny "in a novel about the everyday vigilance necessary to sustain India as British" (76). In the technique of "remembering to forget," India remains "transparent and knowable" despite its differentiations in terms of language, religion and caste and, appears as "an unproblematic landscape" (76). In another instance, J.G. Farrell's novel *The Siege of Krishnapur* (1973) centres around the events of the 1857 Indian Rebellion but, in recounting the narrative from a specific British point of view, it creates an imbalance of sympathy such that colonial agents almost appear as victims of their own violence. Even though the absence of any significant Indian character can be regarded as a critique of British imperialism which silenced the subjectivity of the colonised, the novel belongs to a particular revivalist mode of imperialist fiction which Jenny Sharpe describes as "a mourning for the loss of empire that masquerades as self-criticism" (144). Selvadurai and Noronha's texts undermine such putative narratives of 'masquerade' by outlining the constant flux of decolonising movements in Sri Lanka and India. South Asian fiction departs from its Western counterpart by incorporating moments of hostility as an integral attribute of the colonial encounter. The exodus of Anglo-Indians from India, the Women's movement in Sri Lanka, the struggle for Home Rule and Steve's rape and subsequent suicide are signifiers of inherent instabilities in colonial rule.

In several ways, Steve's violent rape in *The Dew Drop Inn* draws upon the textual figuration of the tension between the coloniser and the colonised in which rape functions as a "concept-metaphor for imperialism" (Sharpe 140). Interracial rape became a recurrent trope in the Anglo-Indian fiction after the Indian Revolt of 1857. In

an instance of intertextuality, both *The Dew Drop Inn* and *Cinnamon Gardens* reference the two most significant works of the canon of imperialist fiction that deploy the ‘concept- metaphor’ of rape as a defining feature of colonial relations. Annalukshmi’s refusal to read *A Passage to India*, the interiors of the Inn that resemble “a movie from a Paul Scott novel” and, the search of Charlotte Merrywood, a historical romance writer, for the authentic history of colonial Goa in *The Dew Drop Inn* are exemplary of the presence of canonical works of fiction of the Raj (Noronha 254). Significantly, both *A Passage to India* and *The Jewel in the Crown* dramatise colonial tension in the literary trope of interracial rape.⁶ Noronha locates Steve’s rape in the context of interracial rape, resulting from the violence of colonial intervention.

Although, *The Dew Drop Inn* acknowledges the debt it owes to Forster and Scott, it departs from its predecessors by queering the trope of interracial rape. In her sophisticated examination of interracial rape in post-1857 narratives, Sharpe cautions against a facile reading of rape as a master trope since “rape is not a stable and consistent signifier but one that surfaces at strategic moments” (2). According to her, the alleged threat of native violence on European woman, which figured in the image of interracial rape, served as a justification for colonial military aggression after the Indian Rebellion of 1857. The violence of the 1857 rebellion transformed the stereotype of the subservient Hindu to the savage rapist of British women. Such narratives reproduced the normative gender roles whereby “women’s bodies can be sexually appropriated” and coevally enabled a “structured silence” around the violence of Indian men against European men because this would “negate colonial power” (67). Similarly, Eve Kosof-

6. For a cogent account of the recurrence of “colonialism-as-rape” as an imperial imaginary, see Loomba (77-81). She offers one of the earliest examples of the reversal of the trope in Shakespeare’s play *The Tempest* (1611) and provides a comprehensive commentary on the plausible causes of the stereotype of the dark-skinned rapist. For her, the causes are understood as “a native reaction to imperial rape, or as a pathology of the darker races, or even as an effort to rationalise colonial guilt” (79).

sky Sedgwick emphasises the importance of men at the centre of the colonial enterprise. She suggests that the trope of male penetration became a “prominent feature of national ideology in Western Europe” by the end of the nineteenth century and it culminated in the “image of male rape” (*Between Men* 182). Steve’s rape appropriates the trope of interracial rape by revealing the ‘structured silence’ around male rape. It explicitly shows that the colonial encounter was a project “between men” and its description in terms of penetrative violence must focus on the image of interracial rape of men by men.

Additionally, Steve’s rape functions as an inscription of contemporary discourses of activism against the legal ban on homosexuality in South Asia. Noronha complicates the vexed question of the origin of violence in the rape. If Steve stands for the empire, the violence perpetrated on his Anglo-Indian body emblematises the violence of the colonised on the colonial authority. I would suggest that in shifting the locus of violence from the coloniser to the colonised, Noronha’s text resists any neat categorisation of guilt or victimhood. Claude, Edwin and Jake represent the affirmation of queer desire in the text. As a contrast to Steve’s internalised homophobia, they are agents of queer acceptance who struggle through patriarchal homophobia to define their queerness. Their stories reveal modalities of alternative/same-sex identity that do not necessarily depend upon their Western counterparts for discourses of queer emancipation. Although he is of Jewish heritage, Jake refuses to immigrate to Israel because he belongs to the “mosaic of the cultural, ethnic and religious values” that constitutes the pluralism of India (100). By locating the narratives of Jake, Claude and Edwin in postcolonial India in the 1970s and 1980s, Noronha contrasts Steve’s monolithic colonial heritage to the postcolonial ‘mosaic’ of independent India. Crucially, in a paradoxical attempt to maintain the status quo of colonial laws that criminalise it,

homosexuality is often upheld as a western import and an instance of Western depravity in the ex-colonised world. My discussion of *Fire* and *The Boyfriend* in the previous Chapter instructively alluded to such a coterminous relationship between colonial discourse and postcolonial homophobic formations. However, by explicitly connecting Steve's homophobia to the colonial condition, Noronha identifies the originating moment of homophobia in the colonial laws of the Raj. Instead of reading homosexuality as a western construct, it is the contrary- the repression of homosexuality- that operates as an import of western laws in the novel. The significance of Steve's rape therefore lies in the rejection of colonial regulation of homosexuality of which Section 377 is the most explicit signifier in postcolonial India.

Steve's suicide in *The Dew Drop Inn* provides a direct contrast to Balendran's emancipation in Selvadurai's text. Steve's twin crises of racial identification and sexuality originate and converge (in the image of his suicide) on the issue of colonial contact. In comparison, the affirmation of queer desire is figured as a rejection of the colonial dynamic in *Cinnamon Gardens*; Balendran's acceptance of his desire for Richard becomes possible once the vestiges of colonial contact literally disappear from view even though colonial imprint remains the pervasive image in both the novels. This image includes the colonial architecture of Colombo, the fine residences of the elite in Colombo that bear English names, the Georgian-style house of the Mudaliyar called the Brighton Pavilion, the penchant for European food, the location of the Dew Drop Inn in Shantimarg, a hill station, the golf clubs and the racecourses, to give but a few examples. Although founded on the history of colonial intervention, Richard and Balendran's intimacy re-invigorates through a movement away from places of colonial history. Balendran is able to articulate his desire for Richard when they leave Colombo for a trip to the countryside where Balendran manages an estate: "I refuse to let our friendship

end as it stands,” Balendran said to Richard. “In silence” (174). The refusal to accept the ‘silence’ becomes a point of departure in the affirmation of queerness as Balendran immediately kisses Richard ‘on the lips’ (174). The estate bungalow where queer desire is affirmed is “a simple building whose architecture was closer to a village hut than a *colonial-style* bungalow” (172, emphasis mine). Given the persistent presence of colonial architecture in the novel, there is a certain ‘queer’ aspect to the ‘village hut.’ Thus, the positive transformation of queerness becomes available through a visual absence of colonial spaces.

A similar movement in the multiple thematic concerns of Selvadurai’s novel consistently reinforces the subtext of queer emancipation through a symbolic exclusion of the colonial dynamic. In the critique of *Cinnamon Gardens*, Perera regards Selvadurai’s engagement with various issues as a problematic narrative technique: “Not only do these themes impinge on one another but they affect his artistic focus” (“In Pursuit” 108). Certainly, the novel explores a wide array of themes of personal and national emancipation but the constant change in focus serves to illustrate the overarching narrative of decolonisation, which implies a movement of displacement of the colonial equation. Thus, in her analysis of the complementary narratives of Balendran and Annalukshmi, Alexander contends that “the dual shape of the narrative can be regarded as constituting a decentring in its own right as this structure forces the readers to continually shift attention from one protagonist to the other” (155). Alexander’s remark can be extended to include the ‘decentring’ of the colonial position that is attained by a ‘continual shift’ in the narrative. The narrative shift from Balendran to Annalukshmi connects queer liberation to other narratives of women’s struggle and decolonisation.

Like queer desire, which can only circulate outside colonial spaces in Selvadurai's novel, the emancipation of the colonised female depends on questioning colonial authority. For Annalukshmi, the decentring of the colonial paradigm consists in the understanding that Miss Lawton, the British Headmistress of her school, does not necessarily represent a model for the emancipation of women as "for Miss Lawton the right of women to be free to pursue whatever they chose did not truly encompass women of the colonies" (264). Annalukshmi progresses from a position of idolising Miss Lawton's "opinions and advice ... above her own mother's" to that of acquiring a critical awareness of Miss Lawton's participation in the colonial machinery (7). In similar regard, her dismissal of Balendran's British-educated and anglophile nephew Seelan as a possible companion constitutes a rejection of the imperial project of civilising the natives. Seelan's (colonial) education in Britain ideologically moulds him to ignore the anti-colonial unrest in his own country. When asked about the protests at the Galle Face Hotel, he replies that he finds "such things of very little interest" (329). His opinion of British imperialism is restricted to the benevolence of colonial administration in terms of "so many advantages, railways, rule of law, postal services, electricity" (329). Annalukshmi's final decision to exclude Seelan as a potential suitor registers her evolution from being a subject in the colonising mission of education – as a teacher in Miss Lawton's school – to becoming an active agent in interrogating the moral foundations of this mission.

Apart from Jake, Claude and Edwin, the character of Dr Norman Abreu provides another figure of queerness in *The Dew Drop Inn*. Unlike Annalukshmi in Selvadurai's text, Norman represents Bhabha's mimic man with "Anglophilic leanings" as he embodies a "quasi-Western British-oriented culture" (Noronha 180-81). Raised in an affluent family and educated in Britain, Norman exemplifies the stereotypical image of

the effects of acculturation on the South Asian subject who “regrets the passing of the Raj” (185). For instance, in his attempt to resurrect the age of the Raj, he names his fourteen children after British monarchs (214). In addition, as “a confirmed bisexual” Norman profits from the privilege accorded to his gender by coercing his wife Priya Castello’s opinion on extra-conjugal homosexual sex (207-08). Compared to the struggle of Claude and Edwin in terms of their queer identity, Norman’s bisexuality is framed in unproblematic terms whereby female desire is subordinated to the demands of male pleasure. The novel therefore undermines Norman’s position by ridiculing his Anglophilia that constitutes the most significant element of his self-representation. As a committed Anglophile, he is “adamant that all his sons attend a public school run on British lines” (216). Run by Reverend Taylor, St. Michael’s school appears to be the best option for his son Henry. However, when he is about to leave Henry at the school, his son “flung his arms around his Daddy and screamed and hugely cried” (220). The outburst of emotion that Norman perceives as contrary to the “tradition of the British stiff-upper-lip” exposes his Englishness as an imaginary construct (220). He realises, as “he had always known, that he could never be an Englishman, despite the basic inherent British values he had absorbed by osmosis in his youth” (222). The rupture of his identification with the object of his desire - “the deep indissoluble kinship with another country”- effectively critiques Norman’s appropriation of Priya’s desire in his bisexuality (222).

Even though Norman’s bisexuality is the result of the imperative of compulsory heterosexuality, the compromise of Priya’s desire remains problematic especially when compared to Balendran and Sonia’s bond in *Cinnamon Gardens*. Like Norman, Balendran follows the tradition of arranged marriages and marries Sonia according to the wishes of the Mudaliyar. At the beginning of the novel, Balendran utilises his male

privilege to recommence his affair with Richard and even leaves Sonia to spend days with his lover at his estate. The novel signals Sonia's estrangement from her husband by equating their "grand four-poster bed" with "a funeral bier" (71). However, Richard's absence in the latter half of the novel is a testimony to the final choice that the male queer subject makes in relation to the other disempowered category, that of the compromised woman. Although Balendran's ultimate confrontation with the Mudaliyar achieves the liberation of the queer subject, the narrative does not fold into a celebratory affirmation of queer love. For Balendran, the subsequent erasure of internalised homophobia is dependent upon the realisation that queerness cannot be made to signify the marginalisation of women. As a result, he decides to "take his place amongst his family," which implies neither a negation of the queer subject nor a naturalisation of dominant ideology because his independent choice makes him an agential subject (354).

The novel further reinforces the subjectivity of the colonised/South Asian queer subject by placing Balendran at the centre of the Richard-Balendran-Sonia erotic triangle. Sedgwick's schema of triangulated desire is to some extent reworked when the issue of colonial exchange is considered. In his study of colonial psychology, Ashis Nandy states that "the white women in India ... unconsciously saw themselves as the sexual competitors of Indian men, with whom their men had established an unconscious homo-eroticized bonding" (*Intimate Enemy* 9-10). The colonising male becomes the item of exchange in Nandy's conception. However, the revision of the erotic triangulation re-bolsters the existing axis of power by making the colonising male the central object of both hetero- and homosexual desire. The Richard-Balendran-Sonia triangle reworks both Nandy and Sedgwick's formulations by defeating the colonial equation of power. The centrality of the South Asian queer subject as the object of desire is significant in two crucial aspects. First, it re-arranges the coloniser/colonised binary from the

South Asian perspective so that the colonising male can become intelligible only in his relation to the colonised male. Second, the figure of the almost routinely absent colonised female becomes the deciding factor in the colonial exchange between men. Balendran's choice to remain with Sonia at the end of the novel is exemplary of the alteration of the colonial dynamic in which both the South Asian queer subject and the colonised woman conventionally appear as disempowered identities.

The displacement of the colonial binary in Balendran and Richard's relationship is significant for the articulation of queer desire. Suleri observes that friendship fulfils the function of the signifying trope of homoerotic desire in *A Passage to India*. However, the ending of Forster's narrative displays the limits of this "imperial friendship" whereby "the discourse of friendship becomes a figure for how the imperial eye perceives race" (135). If, as Suleri suggests, the conclusion of Forster's novel depends on a re-affirmation of the imperial divide, Selvadurai's text shows what 'the discourse of friendship' may be after the binary of the colonial divide is shattered. In this respect, Balendran's plea for friendship in his letter to Richard does not simply borrow from Forster's narrative, but re-signifies both Richard and himself as independent subjects as well. As in Forster's text, the trope of friendship as a key signifier of queer desire resurfaces at the end of *Cinnamon Gardens* but the initiation of the cross-racial/cross-cultural queer amity is constructed around an equitable relation.

I began this Chapter by offering a cursory analysis of Seabrook's short story as a postcolonial continuation of the colonial paradigm of what Gopinath refers to as "the erotics of power" (*Impossible Desires* 2). In contrast to Seabrook's narrative, Noronha and Selvadurai locate their texts in the colonial period without endorsing the tradition of colonial obliteration of South Asian subjectivity. Unlike Prakash, whose enunciation as a desiring subject invariably depends on his depiction as an object of desire by Frank,

Noronha and Selvadurai's characters address the problematic of non-normative sexuality through the optic of their own subjective desires even though it literalises in terms of an internal conflict. Again, unlike Seabrook's story, *The Dew Drop Inn* and *Cinnamon Gardens* disrupt the contemporary discourse of the East/West dichotomy and render visible the historical functioning of the binary. The enduring validity of the cultural divide in global interconnections points to the immediacy of rupturing the well-established discourses of segregation. Noronha and Selvadurai's texts participate in the South Asian effort to dismantle the propagation of such divisions.

My discussion of *Ode to Lata* traced the interaction of the South Asian queer subject with the critical sites of race and migration in Chapter 3. In this Chapter, I have elaborated the scope of the representation of same-sex interracial desire and placed it within the historical context of colonialism. I have argued that Noronha and Selvadurai's novels draw upon the literary tropes of British fiction of the Raj and in the process extend their meanings by contesting, challenging and revising them. My analysis of rape in *The Dew Drop Inn* is an instance of how revisions from a queer perspective align colonial intervention with male rape. Both the texts address the problem of the colonial law against homosexuality and, in their different ways, point to the repercussions that hinder the articulation of same-sex desire for the colonised South Asian subject. My reading has shown that as a postcolonial response to multiple paradigms of colonial homosexuality, the two narratives adopt varying trajectories in formulating queerness. The intensification of Steve's homophobia in *The Dew Drop Inn* and the emancipation of queer desire in *Cinnamon Gardens* reveal the opposite orientations of the texts.

Finally, *The Dew Drop Inn* and *Cinnamon Gardens* are significant texts in terms of their uniqueness whereby same-sex desire is articulated and arranged from the point

of view of the colonised within a colonial context/test. Written from a South Asian perspective, they enable the recuperation of the subjectivity of the colonised queer identity. The recovery of South Asian queer subjectivity within the parameters of the colonial encounter is relevant not only because it disputes colonial fantasies of aberrant sexuality in the colonies, but also because it makes histories of same-sex desire available to present-day queer activists in India and Sri Lanka. Heather Smyth's observation that *Cinnamon Gardens* indigenises and legitimises "gay sexuality in Sri Lankan space and history" is equally applicable to Noronha's text in the Indian context (20). In his address to the Canadian Booksellers Association, Selvadurai underscored the significance of his second novel for contemporary times. He stated, "I think of *Cinnamon Gardens* not as a historical novel, but more as a metaphor for the present" (qtd. in Alexander 155n21). Indeed, both the novels are 'a metaphor for the present' as they connect colonial histories to current homophobic laws in that recent queer struggles in the region are attempting to expunge. Given the pervasive neo-colonial/neo-imperial balance of power, colonial laws are resurfacing in nefarious forms that affect the populations of the global South. As I have shown in allusions to Western homonationalism earlier, queer liberalism can function in tandem with hegemonic discourses to (re-)naturalise the dominant. Such re-imperialising/territorialising tendencies as seen in Seabrook's works for instance confirm, in my view, the urgency to multiply critical analyses that make visible the interconnections between colonial and postcolonial narratives. My reading of Selvadurai and Noronha's novels does not salvage the queer agency of the colonised South Asian subject, rather, like Mukherjee's novel *Past Continuous* which is also the title of this Chapter, it attests to the crucial ways in which these texts emblemise how the past informs the present.

Conclusion

South Asian queer fiction posits a critical challenge to Western accounts of non-normative gender and sexual configuration, which routinely construct queerness as a monolithic formation. In so doing, the postcolonial and diasporic queer representations I consider in this thesis offer alternative models that run counter to the constitutive “objectification-theorization mechanism” of queer discussions in the West (Chow 2). The commitment to critique of hegemonic formulations of lesbian and gay frames becomes increasingly urgent in the context of neo-colonial/neo-imperial thrust of Euro-America whereby intersecting narratives of Human Rights and queer liberalism obliterate, appropriate and eventually theorise queer positions of the Third World. My reading of contemporary postcolonial queer literature resists the “objectification-theorization” binary that (pre-)defines conventional approaches to South Asia in general. The fictional works that I have examined draw and build upon available models of gay literature, but simultaneously depart from them in order to underline a compelling discontent with existing paradigms of queerness. As a result, same-sex self-representation from postcolonial South Asian authors enables queer scholarship to re-assess its own theoretical horizons and disrupt untenable Eurocentric assumptions that regularly present queerness as culturally embedded in the First World. In my analysis of queer (post)colonial literary representations I argue against framing queer modes within larger discourses of Western progress, development and modernity, noting that such logic circumvents a thorough examination of long-term colonial and postcolonial histories of homosocial and homosexual contact in South Asia.

The bearing of queer reading practices on postcolonial sites complicates the simplified and uncritical association of radical potential with non-normative identitarian

politics. The implication of same-sex desire in postcolonial/diasporic constructs crystallises the anxiety surrounding LGBT and queer models of analysis. In other words, the term “queer” appears significantly more appropriate in comparison to lesbian, gay or bisexual when considered in the postcolonial context of South Asia. As I have shown in my assessment of queer adolescence in India and Sri Lanka, and the purportedly bisexual subaltern in Chapters 1 and 4, Third World same-sex sexual representations call for a careful understanding and even differentiation of particular formulations of “gay” and “homosexual” identities. Within this framework, “queer” forcefully gains legitimacy in postcolonial and transnational locations such that the cultural specificities of South Asia become meaningfully implicated in queer epistemology. However, in a coeval stance, postcolonial readings inflect the queer project by turning to certain normativising tendencies of queer theory, the “new normativities” as Jasbir Puar puts it, that elide privileges of racial and/or national hierarchy (xiii). In this sense, postcolonial interpretations of queerness fully participate in the articulation of queer counter-vigilance, which resists the homogenisation of same-sex/alternative paradigms.

Within these matrices of interstitial critical inquiry, queer epistemology extends beyond the focus on Eurocentric positions such that, as David Eng, Judith Halberstam and José Muñoz observe, “some of the most innovative and risky work on globalization, neoliberalism, cultural politics, subjectivity, identity, family, and kinship is happening in the realm of queer studies” (2). Concomitantly, I have argued against a romantic appropriation of the postcolonial space, a particular form of idealisation that would locate diasporic and Third World identities beyond normative regimes and outside dominant structures of power thereby endorsing them as unique guarantors of solidarity and equality. Therefore, in Chapter 4, I call into question the heteronormative/heteronationalist agenda of the postcolonial nation in reproducing the colonial

example of policing non-conformist identities in terms of gender and/or sexuality. Attentive to the intersectional relation of analytical categories such as race, ethnicity, class, caste, language and religion on the one hand, and gender and sexual non-normativity on the other, this thesis challenges the recurring academic oversight of queer parameters in postcolonial scholarship.

QUEER ENDINGS

Throughout this thesis, I have signalled the numerous modes in which South Asian queer subjectivity becomes intelligible. Fictional representations document, reference and construct queer ways of experiencing the world. In the case of South Asia, contemporary same-sex narratives that I have examined re/define queer (male) subject positions through an engagement with and interrogation of prevailing archetypes of Western queerness. Existing global/First World formations of les/bi/gay and queer models appear in a complex relation to postcolonial specificities of religion, caste, language and race among others in order to appropriate, transform and rearticulate queerness in local/Third World terrains. The emergence of identity-based political activism in South Asia, especially the demand for equal rights by queer groups in Nepal, India and Sri Lanka, instructively indicates the analogous re-orientating shift of South Asian fiction in English from a queer perspective. As I have discussed in Chapters 1 and 4, this queer turn recalls and recasts Sedgwick's notion of "the modern problematic of sexual orientation" in postcolonial *mise en scène* (91). Evidently then, the anxiety around the definition and articulation of queer subjectivity in South Asia explicitly hinges on questions of colonial/postcolonial dominant structures (see Chapters 3 and 5). Moreover, the articulation or disarticulation of queerness is inflected by regional, local and global linguistic frames that afford an assumed privilege of class to English (see Chap-

ters 1, 4 and 5), ethnic identification or disidentification, affiliation or disaffiliation to bonds of home/nation/diaspora (see Chapters 2 and 3), and caste, religion and the biological imperative of reproduction. Following Puar, I have determined queerness “as not an identity nor an anti-identity but an assemblage” that is inflected in the South Asian context by differential concerns of global and local struggles of power (204). In the light of this complexity of South Asian queer position(s), my critical survey of seven key texts of diasporic/postcolonial queerness consistently destabilises the notion of a unitary category of queer identity.

In Chapter 1, I provided a critical framework for understanding queerness in relation to the teenage narratives in Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy* and Parivaraj’s *Shiva and Arun*. In this regard, adolescence functions not only as an appropriate metaphor for the emergent queer subjectivity in South Asian fiction, but in its insistence on the “in-between” temporality of the child/adult divide, it literalises the fluidity of identity categories as well—a reading that the queer adolescent account in Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia* complements in Chapter 2. Concurrently, by locating queer adolescence in South Asian/postcolonial/diasporic structures, I disrupt conventional suppositions of dominant formations that position South Asia on the lower scale of the tradition/modernity binary. Although Arjie, Shiva and Arun draw upon available (Western) forms of same-sex desire, they re-energise these models through a re-adaptation to postcolonial sites. Arjie’s cross-gender identification with the Sri Lankan star Malini Fonseka and Shiva’s queer appropriation of Hindu idols exemplify the suturing of queerness to South Asian signifiers. Similarly, Karim’s queer dis/identification in *The Buddha of Suburbia* is intimately imbricated in his partial and often incomplete identification with his bi-cultural/bi-ethnic British Asian origins. In this composite assemblage, queerness functions in tandem with ethnic and racial dis/affiliation to deprivilege

discourses of fixed naturalised identities in terms of sexuality, ethnicity, race and national belonging.

In another insightful instance, Yudi and Milind's contrasting perception of sexual identity in Rao's novel *The Boyfriend* legitimates the significance of reading queerness as a differentially constituted category of identification. Where the upper-class, English speaking journalist Yudi conforms to the culturally accessible model of "gay" (male) identity, the queer subaltern Milind identifies with the penetrated/penetrator sexual binarism to construct his notion of sexuality in general. In several ways, Milind's queer sexuality highlights the inadequacy of the consolidated, almost essentialised "homosexual/gay" identity that Yudi espouses. Milind's queerness eschews an unproblematic, normative folding of sexual desire into the hetero/homo split. His arranged heterosexual marriage illustrates the primacy of familial bonds such that sexual identity is implicated in other equivalently impelling signifiers of caste, class and language. The limitation of identitarian definitions such as "gay" or "homosexual" notwithstanding, queer positioning in South Asia is particularly interpellated by the Western/global connotation of the terms which invariably subtend into narratives of gay lifestyle, gay consumer power and other forms of homonormativisation. Rejecting the call for a gay selfhood therefore, Arun in *Shiva and Arun* sublates "homo" identity as a "foreign brand name" (152). Clearly, Milind and Arun's queerness(es) challenge(s) globally commodified gay male subjectivities that operate as convenient products of identificatory praxes.

The differentiation of gay/non-gay identification lies partly in the entrenched distinction between English/non-English speakers. Although, as an outcome of colonial intervention, English is one of the major languages in South Asia, it confers a position of privilege in terms of class and social status. Yudi's relation with Milind emblem-

atises the uneven bond that predominantly feeds upon inter-laced linguistic and social prerogatives. Yudi's command of English upholds the class distance between the two lovers, and simultaneously empowers Yudi with a/the "gay" subjectivity that is denied to Milind. In this regard, English becomes interfused in the articulation of multiple cleavages of rank and sexual identification whereby access to the consumer-style "homo"(normative) identity is annexed to familiarity with English.

However, the queer/postcolonial texts that I have examined in *Back/Side Entry* provide an incisive re-evaluation of English and by extension, the Westernised version of gay identity that it invokes. The rigorous dismantling of presumptions of colonial benevolence in the field of (English) education and literature in Chapters 1 and 5 offers a sustained critique of colonialist hierarchy of languages in South Asia. The novels that I have analysed in these Chapters explicitly rewrite Western coming-out narratives and English literature of the Raj that explores interracial same-sex attraction. In terms of South Asian fiction in English, the novelists lay a claim and paradoxically disavow the language of the coloniser. The articulation of queerness becomes symptomatic of the search for new critical vocabulary that reaches beyond the English language to understand same-sex desire in the South Asian context. For instance, the glossary of Tamil words appended to *Funny Boy* attests to the intractability of local (regional languages) from global (English). For Arjie, Shiva, Arun, Yudi and to some extent Milind and Balendran in *Cinnamon Gardens*, the identification or disidentification with queer paradigms constitutes a conscious engagement with English and a negotiation of the same-sex grammar that it generates. Arun's retort to his brother in *Shiva and Arun* - "I just happen to be a man who loves men" - emphasises the laboured effort to construct newer forms of queerness even though current English-language terms such as gay or homosexual purportedly describe same-sex sexual identification (152). Furthermore,

considered as an ensemble of postcolonial queer literature in English, the seven novels orientate South Asian fiction towards queerer perspectives for the new millennium. With respect to English writing in general, the “bastard child of Empire,” to borrow a phrase regarding Indian-English literature from Salman Rushdie, develops original avenues of storytelling that combines same-sex desire and Third World/diasporic accounts (Rushdie and West x).

Foregrounding agential queer subjectivity, bound through discerning appropriations of the language debates in South Asia, Arun’s partial refusal of English-language identifiers for same-sex experience underlines the crucial mandate to envisage aptly representative semantic systems that unlike Standard English do not disregard cultural and linguistic pluralism. In Chapter 4, I furnished a critical exemplar of such multiple formations within the subculture of hijras in Bombay, claiming that marginalised identities recast existing linguistic connotations to form alternative methods of signification, “idioms [that] point to the unsettling and unsettled nature of the code” (Manalansan 60). Another riveting example includes the term “gaysi” which has gained popularity following the decriminalisation of homosexuality in Nepal and India in 2009. Gaysi conjoins the English term “gay” and “desi”- the Hindi appellation for communities from Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and India. As Alpesh K. Patel observes, desi is derived from “Desh,” which means “country” and so, desi would imply being “from my country.” The word is “often colloquially used by many Western-based subjects of South Asian descent to refer to themselves” (11).¹ Surely then, attesting to the multi-linguistic cultural enunciation of queer subjectivity, the originality of gaysi offers a paradigmatic instance of the necessity to galvanise local as well as global constructs in

1. Patel further comments on the origin of the term desi thus: “The colonial residue of Desi itself is embedded within the history of the term as indicated by the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), which notes that in the term’s early use by colonials, Desi referred to an “unsophisticated person”” (12).

order to reflect the multi-layered position of queer identity in South Asia. Thus, the “Gaysi Forum” on the internet underscores the multiplicity of queer-identified subject positions (“Gaysi”). Even while it references “gay” (male) identity, gaysi disentangles the global/local hierarchical structure of languages by producing an alternative vocabulary of identification that Arun’s interrogation initiates.

South Asian queer male subjectivity becomes further intertwined with other global complexities in transnational discourses of migration, displacement and diasporic cultural production. Framing my discussion in terms of a queer diasporic critique, I have affirmed the critical import of queer discursive practices that challenge master-narratives of national, ethnic and cultural authenticity in Chapters 2 and 3. Karim in the UK and Ali in the US, the two protagonists of Kureishi and Dhalla’s novels, occupy similar positions as queer diasporic subjects even though, as Gayatri Gopinath remarks, the differing “class demographics and racialization” of South Asian migrants produced distinctive forms of “labor diasporas” in the UK and “a bourgeois professional class” in the US (*Impossible Desires* 8). Both Ali and Karim relate to established binary categories of race, ethnicity and culture through a ‘queer’ process of simultaneous identification/disidentification and affiliation/disaffiliation. For Karim, this process leads to an ultimate reclamation of his often suppressed Indian self in the dual British Asian identity and the realisation that his friend Charlie benefits from the privileged position of whiteness. Ali, however, colludes with the larger normative paradigms of beauty by internalising and subsequently reinforcing the racial divide.

The queer diasporic practice of appropriating popular cultural forms enables an alternative space that undermines ideological imposition of (hetero)normative regimes. In this framework, Bollywood functions as an empowering signifier of queerness in diasporic circuits. Cross-gender identification with Bollywood heroines in *Ode to Lata*

serves to queer the heteronormative discourse of national attachment. Ali's queer appropriation of mainstream Indian cinema disrupts the affiliative narrative of belonging to a fixed geographical homeland. Kenya, Ali's purported "home" country and India, his cultural "home" partly through Bollywood, appear inextricably inter-linked in the diasporic imaginary. Yet, if Bollywood becomes the agent of queerness that reinforces the cultural bond with an imagined home, it bolsters the reproduction of racial dichotomy as well. Ali's queer subjectivity decentres Euro-American popular-culture icons by replacing them with other Third World forms, but simultaneously, reinscribes the hierarchies of race that are engendered in the process. In relation to the stereotypical images of enduring black/white racial binary that Bollywood circulates, Ali's queer identification with whiteness becomes a site of privilege.

Throughout this thesis, I have engaged in a critique of positions of power, whether global or local, colonial or postcolonial, transnational or national. I have attempted to unbraided inequitable binary constructs and pointed to the complicity with the dominant in allegedly disempowered sites of identity. I have worked on the premise, informed by the ongoing critical debates in the field of postcolonial and queer studies, that marginalised identities can inevitably serve to garner support for hegemonic constructs even when they dispute the authority of master discourses in other domains. Recent discussions of homonationalism illustrate a prime instance of the reproduction of such problematic binaries. With regard to my thesis, the maintenance of homophobic colonial laws by the postcolonial state, as I argued in Chapters 4 and 5, instructively alludes to the *similar* rather than *oppositional* processes of the repression of non-(hetero)normative subjects. Ali's internalisation of the racist construct of beauty in its association with whiteness in Chapter 3 is another significant example of the replication of the dominant ideology by a purportedly unprivileged position. In Chapter 4, Yudi's

class bias constitutes further evidence of the complicitous nexus of margin and centre that rehearse various 'other' forms of binary divisions including class and caste in postcolonial India.

Therefore, attentive to the multiply layered subject position of South Asian queer male identity, I have sought to address the privilege of gender explicit in the theorising of male same-sex subjectivity. As I have argued, even in terms of critical reception of the novels, the gender of the authors invariably accounted for the success of their work or escape from state control. As such, Hanif Kureishi's first novel claimed greater popularity than Ravinder Randhawa's novel *A Wicked Old Woman* partially due to the male protagonist and author. Similarly, in contrast to *The Boyfriend*, the lesbian-themed film *Fire* (1996) provoked violent protests in India because it affirmed female homosexuality and desire. In providing a sophisticated analysis of the myriad ways in which gender hierarchy functions within the wider grid of queer articulations, I have laboured to explain, counter and disrupt the continued focus on male writers and queer male subjectivity.

Although South Asian gay male consciousness contributes to the dismantling of fixed gendered identities as I suggested in my reading of Yudi and Milind's queer marriage in Chapter 4 and Arjie's hyperbolic feminine performance in the bride-bride episode of *Funny Boy*, it can simultaneously foreclose and exclude female desire by privileging male experience. Borrowing from Gopinath's critique of the elision of queer female sexuality in same-sex diasporic formulations, my discussion of *Ode to Lata* addressed the obliteration of female queerness whereby Ali's cross-gender identification with Bollywood actresses, in some ways, implicitly reproduces the heterosexual male prerogative of controlling female bodies. Such a reading is further strengthened by Ali's treatment and ultimate exclusion from the narrative of his lesbian friend Farida. By

highlighting the erasure of female queerness I have challenged the assumption that same-sex desire is coterminous with male homosexuality. Therefore, in Chapter 2, I have located the discussion of female characters in *The Buddha of Suburbia* at the centre of the larger context of Karim's sexual/ethnic/national disaffection. In addition, in the final Chapter, critiquing the overtly objectifying colonial project of casting colonised subjects as desirable, my endeavour to construct the South Asian queer male as a desiring subject leads to a reworking of the homoerotic triangulation. In such a reimagined erotic configuration, the colonised female becomes the compelling centre of desire so that Balendran, the agential queer subject of the post-coming-out period, chooses to age with his wife Sonia in *Cinnamon Gardens*. Indeed, the inclusion of South Asian female subjectivity in my thesis acknowledges the material and cultural advantages that heteropatriarchy offers to gay male subjects. Balendran's decision, I have suggested, provides an alternative to collusion with the socially sanctioned gendered privilege of male experience.

In sum, South Asian queer male identity that emerges from my interpretation of the seven key texts of same-sex postcolonial/diasporic queerness escapes legibility in terms of fixed and stable category of subjectivity. This purported unintelligibility does not comprise a "failed" queerness, to extend Sara Ahmed's conception of postcolonialism as "failed historicity" (*Strange Encounters* 10). Instead, like all sites of identity, it lies in the interstices of differentially coded identifications, which in the case of South Asia, accommodate specific interactions of class, caste, religion, language, race, ethnicity, region and nation with queerness. In this respect, as Gopinath observes in relation to queer diasporic literature, "sexuality functions not as an autonomous narrative but instead as enmeshed and immersed within multiple discourses" (*Impossible Desires* 27). Precisely, by allowing the particularised version of "multiple discourses" of colo-

nial/postcolonial South Asia to become central, the various narratives that I have considered in this thesis trouble the crystallisation of a/the coherent queer identity that often functions as critical shorthand to Western formulations of homonormative subjects. However, neither do these texts call forth an unproblematic redemptive reading of South Asian queer sexuality since, as I have highlighted, it is ambivalently implicated in the hegemonic construction of racial, national, linguistic, class, caste and gendered privilege.

QUEER BEGINNINGS

Informed by existing queer and postcolonial research, *Back/Side Entry* extends their conceptual frames by noting, explaining and engaging with incomplete theoretical models. It attests to the validity of reading queer and postcolonial analyses in conjunction, since such interpretations reveal the troubling absences ingrained by mono-disciplinary conceptual paradigms. By borrowing critical insights from the burgeoning field of queer/postcolonial intersections, queer diaspora studies and queer of colour analyses, this thesis responds to the academic call for a “renewed queer studies” that is “ever vigilant to the fact that sexuality is intersectional, not extraneous to other modes of difference” (Eng, Halberstam and Muñoz 1). By articulating the impact of race, class, caste, religion and language on sexuality, I have underscored the significance of rethinking queer parameters in order to “renew” queer studies.

In proposing a double-pronged approach to postcolonial and queer epistemologies, this thesis makes a number of original contributions to research in both domains that often ignore each other at their own peril. First, it has provided a trenchant critique of homonormative assumptions within the Euro-American academy that places Western subjectivity at the centre of studies of sexuality. The focus on postcolonial identities

raises important questions about the disabling effect of uncritically reading queerness as monolithic and uniform. Second, it has disputed the elision of sexual and gender non-normativity in the area of postcolonial studies. Although postcolonial theory is, by now, an established field of critical inquiry, it has insufficiently illustrated the important issues of alternative genders and sexualities. As my research shows, a productive re-mapping of the overlapping interests of both theoretical positions not only addresses their underlying biases, but offers a nuanced comprehension of multiply positioned identities as well, which in turn makes the two sites truly transformational. Third, by making South Asian queer self-representation central to the project, I have countered, often-preposterous claims made by all strands of heteronationalist ideology in South Asia that same-sex desire is a foreign import, an instance of Western decadence. Given the rich archive of literature on same-sex love in South Asia, such assertions become meaningless when confronted with the sophisticated analyses of queer historians like Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai, among others. My work adds to the dynamic of this growing body of literary and cultural critique.

This thesis has propelled more questions than those that I commenced with initially. These interrogations proliferate as critical, albeit parallel, concerns that signify the multiple ways in which research in the field can be extended. Indeed, the absence/presence of specifically South Asian lesbian positions through the process of deprivileging gay male subjectivity and the differential/similar articulation of queer sexualities in literature that is produced in other/regional languages of South Asia since such “writing in non-European languages is excluded or marginalised” globally, seem evident identifiers of further critical inquiry (Loomba 206). Although my focus on contemporary queer South Asian novel-length fiction excludes *de fait* cinematic repre-

sentations and other genres of queer fiction, poetry and theatre,² the literary themes that relate to female (homo)sexual experience, that I attempted to recover in Chapters 2 and 3, surely signals further frontiers of research that my thesis intimates. The novels of Suniti Namjoshi, the Indo-Canadian writer Farzana Doctor, and the Urdu-language author Ismat Chughtai appropriate questions of sexuality by locating the female gender at the centre of narratives that unsettle heteropatriarchy and heteronormativity.³ Similarly, the fictional accounts of the Hindi authors Vijay Dan Detha, Pandey Bechan Sharma ‘Ugra’ and the Marathi novelist Bindumadhav Khire,⁴ to name but a few, orientate the queer problematic in India in directions that I have not followed. Vanita’s recent work indicates that thinking along such lines of inquiry is crucial in order to develop potential research in South Asian queernesses.⁵

One other interconnected topic to my work is the silence on the various transgendered positions in South Asia. My brief discussion of hijras in Chapter 4 explicitly stands in close relation to the ongoing transnational struggles for recognition of transgender subjectivity. South Asian culture embodies an enduring history of multifarious gendered categories with the Hindu god Shiva (called Ardhnareeswar, literally half

2. These omissions include several Bollywood films that deploy queer subtexts or more contemporary explorations of queer sexuality. In terms of print literature, representative works comprehend Rahul Mehta’s short-story collection *Quarantine* (2010), the poetry of the Indo-Canadian-British writer Ian Iqbal Rashid and the plays of Mahesh Dattani.

3. While Namjoshi is an acclaimed Indo-British lesbian writer, Farzana Doctor is an emerging writer of South Asian descent who lives in Toronto. Her first novel *Stealing Nasreen* (2007) narrates the problematic lesbian liaison of two South Asian women. Ismat Chughtai wrote the path-breaking short story *Lihaf* (1941; *The Quilt* in English), which loosely served as the screenplay for the famous film *Fire*.

4. *Partner* (2009) by Bindumadhav Khire has lately been translated into Hindi from Marathi. It makes a passionate plea for the acceptance of homosexuality in contemporary India. The translation project was jointly funded by UNAIDS and the Humsafar Trust, Mumbai.

5. For instance, Vanita has translated the writings of Hindi writers into English and written academic essays on regional-language authors in her anthology *Gandhi’s Tiger and Sita’s Smile* (2005).

man/half woman) being a manifest representation of gender fluidity. In contemporary times, the TV presenter Begum Nawazish Ali in Pakistan and the dancer and stage performer Queen Harish in India celebrate the inclusion of trans-icons in popular culture.⁶ Although the existence of high-profile queer figures in South Asia suggests change, the simultaneous process of marginalisation and oppression of trans-identities outside the visible realm of celebrity groups remains a critical concern. The recent autobiography *The Truth about Me: A Hijra Life Story* (2010) by A. Revathi inveighs against compulsory social cisgenderism from a trans point of view and documents the violence that such protests generate. Revathi's narrative reinforces my analysis of the gradual disempowerment of the hijras and other non-normative subjectivities in post-colonial India in Chapter 4.

Despite the exclusions that I have mapped above, the development of postcolonial and queer theoretical aggregates signals the myriad possibilities for future interdisciplinary crossings. The ever-increasing body of queer male South Asian literature has just begun to be discussed and the task is to multiply readings that focus on the interconnection of sexual subjectivities with other crucial signifiers of identity formation such as ethnicity, religion, race, class and language. Three contemporary works of fiction in English actively lend themselves to such interpretations and therefore become central in furthering research that I have initiated in my thesis. The related themes of queerness and postcolonial identities that are articulated in Firdaus Kanga's debut novel *Trying to Grow* (1990), Rakesh Satyal's only text *Blue Boy* (2009) and Neel Mukherjee's fictional work *Past Continuous* (2007) propel a renewing interest in criss-crossing

6. Begum Nawazish Ali was the assumed female persona of Ali Saleem. Her TV shows offered rigorous political and social critique of the state of postcolonial Pakistan. They ended in 2007, following heavy critique from political censure. Queen Harish is a transgender artist from Rajasthan. She is currently participating in the reality-TV competition *India's Got Talent 2* (see www.queenharish.com).

patterns of identity and identification.⁷ Although I have briefly cross-referenced them in this project, they will prove significant for future developments of queer/postcolonial pollinations in the South Asian context.

Trying to Grow shifts the queer/postcolonial narrative towards an encounter with physical disability. Brit Kotwal, the protagonist, suffers from brittle bones disease that confines him to a wheelchair in later life. Named by his sister Dolly for his incapacitated condition, the word ‘Brit’ also recalls the heightened anglophilia of his community, the affluent Parsee groups of Bombay. Brit narrates the travails of growing up (both literally and metaphorically) with the double bind of disability and non-normative sexual preference. Kanga’s semi-autobiographical novel yokes the themes of physical/sexual difference and the condition of newly independent India together in order to reflect upon the paralysing difficulties of the postcolonial nation. The novel makes evident the several ways in which notions of heterosexuality, ableism and Indianness (since the Parsees are often scripted as inauthentic Indians) serve to augment the maintenance of normative regimes.

Intervening in debates on queer diasporas, Rakesh Satyal’s novel *Blue Boy* connects Hindu mythology to Indian American literature. Like *Funny Boy*, it begins with cross-gender feminine identification of Kiran Sharma, the sole son of Indian immigrants in Ohio. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, the title of the book references the queer potential of the Hindu deity Krishna who is often referred to as the blue deity to reflect his royal lineage. In order to justify his propensity to use his mother’s make-up articles, Kiran explains to the Indian community that he is the Lord Krishna. The queer sacred becomes a mode of understanding same-sex desire in South Asia. In Satyal’s narrative, the

7. Past Continuous is the primary title of the last chapter of my thesis and it makes reference to Mukherjee’s novel, which was published in the UK under the title *A Life Apart* (2010).

queer diasporic sacred importantly articulates Kiran's sexual and cultural difference. Finally, Mukherjee's novel *Past Continuous* focuses on two alternate narratives of Ritwik Ghosh, a gay Indian student at Oxford who becomes an undocumented migrant and sex worker in London in early 1990s, and Miss Gilby, the English governess of Rabindranath Tagore's work *The Home and the World* (1916). Although set in two different eras, the novel is significant in 'queering' a minor character in Tagore's oeuvre as Miss Gilby's marginalisation in India is echoed in Ritwik's death in London. Importantly, the rewriting of Tagore's story is a gesture towards the alignment of queerness with the Bengali Nationalist Movement of the first decade of the twentieth century of which Tagore was a representative figure.

Back/Side Entry opens up new avenues of exciting critical enquiry into queer South Asian positions. These nascent subjectivities cannot simply be made to follow Lee Edelman's highly pessimistic call to "the embrace of queer negativity" in same-sex theorisation (*No Future* 6). The visible gaps that my thesis leaves behind rest on the optimism that further analyses will engage with those his/herstories, transgender narratives and even queerly *straightforward* anecdotes that I could not recount. The prolific fiction-producing site of South Asia is already pointing towards fabrications of such futures. Two authors that I have considered in this thesis have recently written their second books. While Rao has authored a novel about another gay romance in *Hostel Room 131* (2010), Dhalla's second work, *The Two Krishnas* (2009), engages with themes of bisexuality, religious cultures and illegal immigration. Future research on queer South Asian literature hinges on such un-recounted and unfinished narrations and the challenge is not so much as to ask, with Edelman, whether there is a future for queer theory but instead to articulate how multiple postcolonial and queer futures will coincide, collide and benefit mutually. My project, like the increasingly vocal queer move-

ment in South Asia, clears space for such momentous crossings. The challenges of queer political activism in the region, as I have signalled throughout this thesis, lie in the crucial interface with global rights movements. A recapitulation to the validity of national frames in such contexts appears a fraught outcome of struggles that destabilise other embedded dominant discourses. Indeed, for the queer subject, the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in India in 2009 and various instances of same-sex marriages in Nepal in 2010 should not potentialise as excuses of non-solidarity with other long-standing minoritarian contestations. My thesis therefore remains alert to these collective narratives, oppositions and paradoxes of the emergent queer tropes in post-colonial South Asian fiction by men.

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