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School of Literatures, Languages and Cultures

Homing Female Figures in English Literatures of the Indian Subcontinent: A
Trans/National Focus on Homeland, Body and Return

by

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Abstract

In postcolonial and diaspora literatures of the Indian subcontinent, the idea of home is explored in terms of multiplicity and fluidity alongside social, cultural and political rootedness. The critical questions and arguments that drive this research initiative engage with late twentieth century literatures in English from the Indian subcontinent and the transnational imagination of home in relation to developing female character arcs. This research endeavour would examine women and their relationship with national, cultural and diasporic affiliations of home while navigating discussions on migration – dispersal and return – within and beyond the nation.

Tracing home through female characters in late twentieth century Indian and transnational writers' narratives, the chapters in my thesis explore national, global and cosmopolitan conflicts of border crossing. This relationship develops in various ways: Firstly, while the imagination of the homeland, primarily catered to the male gaze, marginalises women and sidelines them to the periphery of the nation's body politic, it also exclusively allegorises and deifies them as custodians of belief systems. They are disparaged due to their economic and political backgrounds and culturally ostracised due to rigorous societal norms. However, their ability to give birth and continue with the humankind remains essential to the formation of a collective such as a nation. Women are borne by other women and raised to become emblematic and authentic portrayals of national customs and traditions, thus, occupying the public as well as the private realm. Secondly, women's historical relation to the larger political space of the nation is often challenged by marginalised and subaltern narratives in which their bodies develop as prominent figures

of home. Finally, homes have been associated with women; Their presence as the carriers and upholders of tradition and culture in diasporic journeys across nations contribute to the ongoing process of 'being written for' and 'writing back' to a point of origin, hope and nostalgia. These interventions have developed into a major counteractive discourse in postcolonial and transnational literary traditions. This extensive study of the oeuvre of late twentieth century literatures in English emerging from the Indian subcontinent critically analyses female characters in the literary engagements of the period highlighting narratives and counter-narratives by writers such as Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Mahāśvetā Debī, Jhumpa Lahiri and Kiran Desai.

The conclusions that my research draws aid in the exploration of gender relations and the transnational and dialectic associations of home in the late twentieth century literary corpus of the Indian subcontinent. My findings examine the relationship between women and nation deploying discussions on the fixity of home, the corporeality of female bodies, ethnic and cultural nostalgia, and migrant and diasporic return. Elucidating various power structures – narrative, space, culture and identity, it sets up a dialogue between female characters, narratives and contemporary concerns of existence, journey and belonging that span the idea of the nation.

Lay Summary

For centuries, individuals and communities traversing national borders have endured traumatic experiences of displacement, negotiating the idea of home as a part of their existence. Therefore, growing contentions of anchorage and dislocation, fixity and dispersal and location and detachment have remained integral to the transnational imagination of home in contemporary literary endeavours. The space that my research attempts to fill is locating women characters and their voices within the oeuvre of the late twentieth century literatures in English emerging from the Indian subcontinent. This extensive study develops on the idea that female figures remain enmeshed within broad categories of homeland, body and imaginary return, examining the relationship that the idea of home establishes with narratives around women amidst postcolonial, global and cosmopolitan transitions.

My research methodology includes a close reading of the primary texts examining the ideas of nation, home, female body and their subsequent association to the uncertainty of displacement and return within my explorative study. The narratives by Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai, Amitav Ghosh, Salman Rushdie, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Mahāśvetā Debī situate prominent female characters against the developing postcolonial nation while focussing on the contours of cross-border migrations, globalisation, cosmopolitanism as well as the Indian independence and its socio-political relations that contribute to discussions on nation-building. As a part of my study, narratives under the rubric of the late twentieth century literatures of the Indian subcontinent – exploring national, cultural, linguistic and postcolonial associations – are successfully underpinned

by territorial and emotional contexts of home. It engages with aspects such as representation, nationalism, globalisation, and marginalisation which develop a critical understanding of the interrelation between gender and the literatures of the period.

The conclusions that my research draws add to the study of gender relations and the transnational and dialectic associations of home in the late twentieth century literary corpus of the Indian subcontinent. My findings examine the extent to which the women characters become representations of the fixities of home, embody national and cultural emblems and symbolise the portrayal of nostalgic return to the homeland. Finally, they elucidate various power structures that negotiate narrative, space, culture, and identity. This research establishes dialogic associations around female figures and complex transnational, diasporic, migrant and refugee lives, journeys and the precarity of belonging within and beyond the nation.

Introduction: Home and its Moorings: Placing the Indian Diaspora

Navigating Diasporas: Borders and Beyond:

Diasporas, developing multiple routes of communication across the world for centuries, harbour an ineffaceable sense of dislocation pertaining to their cross-border experiences. The epistemological root of the term 'diaspora' lies in the histories of dispersal associated with Greeks, Jews, and Armenians.¹ Judith Shuval, in "Diaspora Migration: Definitional Ambiguities and a Theoretical Paradigm," traces the term from the Greek translation of the Old Testament (originally written in Hebrew) arguing, "The Greeks understood the term to mean migration and colonization." (Shuval, 42) Shuval notes, "The term diaspora is based on the Greek terms *speiro*, to sow, and the preposition, *dia*, over." (Shuval, 2) Further, locating the term in the context of the Jews² and their re-settlement outside their homeland, Shuval argues, "In Hebrew, the term is generally *galut*, which initially referred to the settling of scattered colonies of Jews outside Palestine after the Babylonian exile and has assumed a more general connotation of people settled away from their ancestral homelands." (Shuval, 2) This expansion in the semantics of the term, formerly excluding several groups of people that were coerced, persecuted, or displaced in search of a better

¹ See Khachig Tölölyan's essay "The Contemporary Discourse of Diaspora Studies" where Tölölyan argues "Until recently, "dispersion" was a very large category of which diaspora was a specific subset, a part not identical with the whole. Its paradigmatic example was the Jewish diaspora; the other two "classical" or traditional diasporas were the Armenian and the Greek." (Tölölyan, 3)

² More information on the origins of the Jewish diaspora can be found in Robin Cohen's book *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (Page – 2-6)

life,³ engages with complex transnational relationships that diasporas form over larger and well-connected landscapes.⁴ James Clifford rightly states,

“We should be able to recognize the strong entailment of Jewish history on the language of diaspora without making that history a definitive model. Jewish (and Greek and Armenian) diasporas can be taken as nonnormative starting points for a discourse that is traveling or hybridizing in new global conditions.” (Clifford, 249)

Transitioning geopolitical relations from mid to late twentieth century enabled the term ‘diaspora’ to be re-appropriated; Emerging trends of globalisation that contributed to the understanding of diasporas during the period, in Peter Y Paik’s words, “has been largely understood in terms of a dynamic that emphasises movement and convergence.” (Bullock and Paik, 1). However, this kind of interconnectedness fostered by developing global networks equally focuses on deep-seated ambiguities of location and identity. For instance, Brigitte Bönisch-Brednich and Catherine Trundle, in the book *Local Lives: Migration and the Politics of Place*, define ‘location’ and ‘place’ in the context of cross-border migrations arguing, “Locality has become ‘relational and contextual’ (Appadurai 1995: 204), constituted through discourse, narrative and imagination as a nostalgic and

³ See Khachig Tölölyan’s essay “The Contemporary Discourse of Diaspora Studies” (Page- 3,4)

⁴ See Alison Blunt’s essay, “Cultural Geographies of Migration: Mobility, Transnationality and Diaspora” which traces the emergence of new technologies that develop diasporic associations through issues of citizenship, urbanism, political organisations and networks over transnational spaces. Also see Roza Tsagarousianou’s essay “Rethinking the Concept of Diaspora: Mobility, Connectivity and Mobilization in a Globalized World” where the connectivity fostered by global movements is examined.

fictive anchor in a sea of movement.” (Bönisch-Brednich and Trundle, 2) Responding to contemporary interactions between local, national and global politics of place, the term ‘diaspora’ evolves and encompasses “political refugees, alien residents, guest workers, immigrants, expellees, ethnic and racial minorities, overseas communities.” (Shuval, 2) Further, from the early 1990s the literary and cultural domain of the term began to be associated with different forms and conditions of uprooting.⁵ Theorists widely defined it as any group (usually a particular minority) identifying with a homeland, dispersed to settle in another notwithstanding the internal conflicts and nuances: Gabriel Sheffer⁶ ascribes the term to various kinds of migrant groups that have had a relationship with the homeland, William Safran⁷ associates it with broader considerations of ‘homeland and exile, and Robin Cohen⁸ defines diaspora in relation to the homeland. However, the shift from the idea of the nation (or homeland)⁹ as a group sharing a common culture and identity within a bounded territory to the gradual formation of communities outside its borders led to the rise of transnationalism and globalisation.¹⁰ The diaspora discourse, thus, developed alongside transitioning national spaces. While diasporic relations are deeply invested in aspects of assimilation, integration, ethnic conflicts, and exclusion

⁵ See Sukanya Banerjee’s book *New Routes for Diaspora Studies* (Page – 1-3)

⁶ See Gabriel Sheffer’s book *Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad* (Page – 48-52)

⁷ See William Safran’s essay, “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return”.

⁸ See Robin Cohen’s book *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (Page – 25, 26) where several salient features of diasporas have been outlined.

⁹ Allon Gal et al., in the book *The Call of the Homeland: Diaspora Nationalisms, Past and Present*, draw correlations between nation, the diasporic homeland and transnational interactions.

¹⁰ See Toyin Falola’s book chapter “Globalization and Contemporary Cultures” for more information on globalisation and transnationalism as nations, identities and cultures reconstitute in a global space.

owing to their emotional attachment to the homeland and the restrictive potential of the host-land, mobility across borders has remained crucial to delineating them.

Cross-border movements have interlinked national territories and re-imagined global spaces, making diasporas thrive on the rift of such interactions.¹¹ Exploring diasporas in a globalised framework, Khachig Tölölyan quotes Bill Maurer stating, “discussions about globalization are founded on assumptions about movement,” and these attach themselves inappropriately to discussions of diaspora.” (Tölölyan, 9) He goes on to assert that diasporas have emerged from internal conflicts of “local and global” (Tölölyan, 9) spatialisations intensified by the growing propensity for migration. Thus, the typological attachment of the term diaspora to a long-lost homeland was gradually re-evaluated considering “a plethora of global movements and migrations: Romanian, African Asian, black, Sikh, Irish, Lebanese, Palestinian, ‘Atlantic’ and so on.” (Keown et al, 1)¹² It is important to note that movements and migrations brought about in postcolonial societies have predominantly originated from a history of colonial expansions. Jamella N Gow, in the essay, “Reworking Race, Nation and Diaspora on the Margins,” rightly argues,

“Diaspora is not simply an open-ended term but is perhaps the response of a dispossessed “underclass” (Cho 2007, 19) whose experiences are shaped by the

¹¹ See Khachig Tölölyan’s essay “The Contemporary Discourse of Diaspora Studies” (page- 8, 9) where Tölölyan calls for a re-examination of the aspect of mobility associated with diasporas as they are defined against ‘nationalism’, ‘sedentariness’ and rootedness of national territories.

¹² The contributing authors of *Comparing Postcolonial Diasporas* are M. Keown, D. Murphy and J. Proctor.

history of colonization and the corresponding ideological construction of difference. Such memories and current experiences of dispossession stem from a colonial history which laid the groundwork for race and nation.” (Gow, 11)

Gow’s argument traces a colonial past of exclusion, inequality, and displacement “for the needs of capitalism,” (Gow, 12) that continue to affect diasporas. In fact, colonisation was one of the prominent factors that created present-day diasporas and their speckled histories of dispersal across the world. Amit Sarwal, in his book *South Asian Diaspora Narratives: Roots and Routes*, identifies diasporas as a motley group that developed because of unprecedented migrations across national and territorial borders. Acknowledging diverse trends of migrations often “linked to political misfortunes or to commerce,” (Sarwal, 22) Sarwal resituates a backdrop of imperial history that have contributed to the diasporic associations existing today including “People of African origin, with the painful history of slavery, descendants of indentured labourers, people of Chinese origin displaced through cultural revolution, and many others who had been transported, displaced, or exiled due to the workings of the European imperialism.” (Sarwal, 22) Although diasporas emerged as communities that experienced multiple forms of dislocation¹³ – fostering a sense of disengagement with monolithic structures like nation – they simultaneously negotiated an unabated quest to locate themselves through cross-cultural associations, socio-political affiliations, and territorial relations. Theories on diasporas in the postcolonial context widely explore these disconnections. For instance,

¹³ See Ipek Demir’s book *Diaspora as Translation and Decolonisation*, where various forms of diasporic journeys are explored. (Page – 2, 3)

Homi Bhabha, in his book *The Location of Culture*, situates the postcolonial 'present' in "its discontinuities, its inequalities, its minorities." (Bhabha, 7) Alluding to the nuances in theory which prompt a re-examination of the established divisions of the identified 'West' and its territorial and cultural expansions, he questions, "What does demand further discussion is whether the 'new' languages of theoretical critique (semiotic, poststructuralist, deconstructionist and the rest) simply reflect those geopolitical divisions and their spheres of influence." (Bhabha, 30) Bhabha's interrogation points to the fact that while bifurcations in theory accentuate 'differences' in geographical locations and political, racial, or gendered positions, it is treated as complete political entity positioned against and defined by the established viewpoints of Western institutions. Counteractively, highlighting the inherent heterogeneity of the idea of 'difference', he argues, "our political referents and priorities – the people, the community, class struggle, anti-racism, gender difference, the assertion of an antiimperialist, black or third perspective [...] are always in historical and philosophical tension..." (Bhabha, 39) For Bhabha, difference and hybridity manifest themselves in the 'Third Space,' amidst processes of articulation and meaning creation,

"...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 inbetween 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 others of our selves." (Bhabha, 57)

An ongoing discourse of difference has remained deeply rooted in diasporic associations with both the homeland and the host-nation. In fact, Khachig Tölölyan, tracing ways in which diasporas are often dissociated,¹⁴ argues "diasporicity manifests itself in relations of difference" (Tölölyan, 5) in the process of building relationships across communities, nation-states, and cultural and political identities. Therefore, what Bhabha's postcolonial present brings to light are colonial, racial and gender-related anxieties that diasporas have carried into a period of constant international exchange. Avtar Brah's 'diaspora space' is a concept that further probe into these contentions. Brah proposes the 'diaspora space' as "a space where 'diaspora,' 'border,' and the 'politics of location' are immanent"¹⁵ (Brah, 242) arguing,

"Here, politics of location, of being situated and positioned, derive from a simultaneity of diasporisation and rootedness. The concept of diaspora space decentres the subject position of 'native,' 'immigrant,' 'migrant,' the in/outsider, in such a way that the diasporian is as much a native as the native now becomes a diasporian through this entanglement." (Brah, 242)

¹⁴ See Khachig Tölölyan's essay "The Contemporary Discourse of Diaspora Studies" (Page – 5)

¹⁵ See Avtar Brah's book *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (Page – 240-242)

I would argue that as Avtar Brah's concept of diaspora space 'decentres' the diasporic subject, it engages with displacement – historical, cultural, and political – more closely. This 'entanglement' of identities, cultures, and positions that Brah proposes is, in the 'simultaneity' of translation between rooting and dislocating, linked with Homi Bhabha's Third Space – that inscribes, translates, and negotiates culture in its 'hybridity.' Diverse diasporic relations, therefore, form a space where vital issues of identity, history, culture, and location become prominent. It is in the ambivalence of borders and boundaries and the altering in-between spaces through which cultural associations and meanings are grasped that India as a nation can be scrutinised alongside its transnational influences.

The Indian Trans/Nation: National, Postcolonial, and Global Directions

Political and cultural transformations that emerged due to events in India's colonial history – including the formation of postcolonial Pakistan, the emergence of the Sikh diaspora, the ambivalence of the diasporic Goan identity, and increasing border crossings in the twenty-first century¹⁶ – trace a common legacy of imperial conquests and exploitations. This generated a culture of movements across regional and international borders of the newfound Indian nation, developing countless diasporic interactions. Gijbert Oonk, in the book *Global Indian Diasporas: Exploring Trajectories of Migration and Theory*, closely examines Indians that have 'globally dispersed' but have strong relationship with the host nation and the homeland. For instance, Indians living in Southall London identify as 'Southallians' and have their own community, and epics like *Ramayana and Mahabharata*

¹⁶ See Gijbert Oonk's book, *Global Indian Diasporas: Exploring Trajectories of Migration and Theory* (Page – 10-12)

continue to be popularised to promote Indian culture. Such developments portray an ever evolving and complex relationship that diasporas have with nation, situating the bearings of home at the heart of the Indian diaspora. Further, Ralph J. Crane and Radhika Mohanram, in the book *Shifting Continents/Colliding Cultures: Diaspora Writing of the Indian Subcontinent*, navigate varying layers of identity creation associated with transnational experiences through the body of work emerging across languages, meanings and cultural associations, enabling India to produce “one of the most mobile populations (within postmodernity and in the aftermath of colonialism) in the non-Western world in the last two hundred years.” (Crane and Mohanram, ix) However, people’s movements across borders are not the only aspect that that defines contemporary India. The association of the term ‘diaspora’¹⁷ with nebulous interconnections fostered by migration¹⁸ have resulted in expanded forms of communication. The idea of the nation conceived in terms of the borders that defined the colonial nation-state – limiting mobilisation of people and protecting against the perforation of its ethnocultural fabric – is significantly affected by the inter-planetary connectivity established “despite great

¹⁷ See Thomas Faist’s book *The Volume and Dynamics of International Migration and Transnational Social Spaces*, where Faist locates the term diaspora within a broader scale of migrations, cultural interactions and community formations highlighting, “Transnational spaces consist of migrant networks cutting across discrete organizations such as nation-states. They are thus interstitial, even though they may congeal into bounded groups such as transnational communities, as for example, diasporas.” (Faist, 11)

¹⁸ See Nicholas Van Hear’s book *New diasporas: The mass exodus, dispersal and regrouping of migrant communities* (Page – 48,49) where Van Hear examines the formation of contemporary diasporas. Aside from imperial coercions, forced migrations due to loss of ethnic identities and homelands and other political and economic reasons that lead to diaspora formations, Van Hear locates the ““return” or in-gathering of some scattered ethnic populations.” (Van Hear, 48) which form newer forms of diasporic associations.

distances and notwithstanding the presence of international borders.” (Vertovec, 447) In fact, boundaries governing international relationships are vital to understand these intensified linkages built by communities as well as media and information technology across severely fortified nations. At present, they have emerged as a stronger response to the varied forms of diaspora formations including climate migrants,¹⁹ who have lost their native lands, seeking shelter and opportunity beyond borders. Additionally, virtual spaces²⁰ like the internet “have become crucial environments for border crossing interactions and exchanges across diasporas as well as between migrants and their homelands.” (Sahoo and Kruijf, 2) For Bill Ashcroft, interactions between national spaces have given way to a diffused version of the nation-state – a space interceded between the unifying trajectories of both the national and global aspirations and the diversity of communal and cultural engagement – the ‘transnation’ defined as,

“...something more than diaspora, since it is both internal and external, and more than cosmopolitanism, because the transnation may include monocultures. It inhabits that ambivalent space between the promise of hegemonic unification offered by globalization and the fragmentation of transnational cultures. Just as it

¹⁹ See Amitav Ghosh’s book *The Nutmeg’s Curse* (Page – 153- 155) where Ghosh traces the migration of South Asian communities and individuals due to the disastrous effects of climate change, asserting that despite constant departures across borders, “South Asians rarely figured in media reports on the migration crisis.” (Ghosh, 155)

²⁰ See Ajay Kumar Sahoo and Johannes G. Kruijf’s book *Indian Transnationalism Online: New Perspectives on Diaspora* where they trace the emergence of new age diasporas from Hindus forming religious networks to Dalit communities uniting over the internet.

occupies the spaces between the boundaries of the state, so it operates, in its multiplicity, around the structures of global hegemony.” (Ashcroft, 11)

However, such interrelations seldom simply culminate into a separate overarching space that transcends the colonial nation-state; It brings into consideration that transnational engagement refers to a much broader network that effectively encompasses the nuances of diaspora formations and binds them into, in the words of Katie Willis and Brenda S. A. Yeoh, a “form of shared identification.” (Willis and Yeoh, 2) Further, contemporary forms of transnational interactions extend far beyond the border crossings carried out by migrating communities; Language, culture, power, and information all exist in the inevitability of movement. Emily Apter’s ‘translation zone’ expands on these emerging connections beyond national territories. Apter defines it as “a broad intellectual topography that is neither the property of a single nation, nor an amorphous condition associated with postnationalism, but rather a zone of critical engagement that connects the “l” and the “n” of transLation and transNation.” (Apter, 5) The prefix ‘trans,’ associated with fluidity as well as notions of unhindered shifts and stirrings, adds to the collaborative potential of nations and their engagements over larger terrains. It ushers in trends wherein nations and acts of translation encounter disproportionate interactions between identities, cultures and geo-political relationships against the inertia and immovability of borders and frontiers. Diasporas are central to these interactions. In fact, Ipek Demir, in the book *Diaspora as Translation and Colonisation*, rightly argues that “Diasporas are the archetypal translators, as they put new identities, languages and world-views in circulation.” (Demir, 6) With a growing interest in expanding national, cultural and

linguistic interactions, diasporas exist in an ambiguous position – carrying the vestiges of imposed imperial borders while being burdened by the possibility of global conversations. Additionally, diasporas, despite distorting the idea of the nation and unpacking countless meanings of home, form a close-knit relationship with the nation-state and its newfound considerations, landscapes and contours beyond territorial limits. It is, therefore, important to understand the Indian subcontinent both in relation to its territorial, national, regional, political and cultural anchors as well as its inherently translative potential: An interrelation between the Indian nation and the possibility of a trans-Indian national vision around which diasporas and the multiplicity of their associations are constantly in motion.

Interconnections across the Indian subcontinent have inspired literary writings that both celebrate and critique continued border-crossings. Susheila Nasta, exploring writing as a popular way of travelling and making connections, is aware of the changing “nature and perspectives of the voyages” (Nasta, 6) undertaken by countless migrants in the late twentieth century. She urges literatures addressing these conflicts, concerns and experiences to incorporate different perspectives. Importantly, national history, cultural memory and time have continued to foreground literary endeavours from the Indian subcontinent amidst concerns over a world increasingly aspiring to be ‘frontier-less. Literatures are, therefore, significant to the examination of cross-border interactions and their impact on postcolonial nation-building.

Establishing the Indian Transnational Literary Corpus: Global Perspectives

Postcolonial studies incorporate diversions and directions that consistently influence literary productions.²¹ It takes up space in, as Elleke Boehmer and Rosinka Chaudhuri note, “yet another academic conference, seminar series, university course, cultural review, or reader, though now coupled with such words as ‘beyond,’ ‘re-routing,’ transforming,’ and ‘transnational.’” (Boehmer and Chaudhuri, 3) Postcolonial exploration of the Indian subcontinent occupies one such diversion: postcolonial studies navigate the theoretical and literary productions of the Indian subcontinent recreating its history, culture, and literature. Elleke Boehmer and Rosinka Chaudhuri acknowledge the local, national, and global reception of postcolonial discourses and criticisms disseminated from there,

“The influence of Indian postcolonial critical discourses in English, peaking around 1990s, can be explained with respect to several important and interlocking historical and pedagogic factors, including the status of India within the broad history of independence movements; the international location and prominence of many Indian critics, writers, and theorists, not least Salman Rushdie, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi Bhabha; as well as the institutional receptivity of these writers and critics of poststructuralist literary theory.” (Boehmer and Chaudhuri, 5)

²¹See Neil Lazarus’ book *The Postcolonial Unconscious* (page – 1, 2) where he explores Eurocentric perspectives that have segregated and disrupted communities, histories, cultures, and geopolitical locations of formerly colonised lands, situating postcolonial literature, criticism, and consciousness.

The receptivity of postcolonial critics and theorists whose roots lie in the Indian subcontinent have been noteworthy in Western academic circles. Developing around similar strands of thought and cultural production, literatures of the Indian subcontinent incorporate many transnational and transcultural experiences of displaced Indians who have traversed geopolitical borders. Importantly, the conflicted relationship between Indian diasporas and national borders lies at the heart of literary efflorescence in the late twentieth century. This tension often manifests in themes of identity, belonging and the negotiation of cultural heritage across borders with postcolonial theorists emphasising on the ambivalence and fragmentation that accompany such experiences. For instance, Nivedita Menon identifies the dynamism of the diasporic and transnational existence which challenges the concept of the nation as a territorially and culturally bounded space by differentiating it from, what she identifies as, 'postnation,' arguing,

“...on the one hand, there is the static nation, defined forever by the symbols of identity produced in the now irrelevant era of nation-states; on the other the dynamic post-national corporation, located everywhere and nowhere, resisting the parochialism of national pride and national symbols.” (Boehmer and Chaudhuri, 317)

Menon renders the exclusivity of the nation as a governing body somewhat obsolete and situates the diasporic (dis)location as an example of counter-hegemony by taking an example of the SALGA (South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association) and Sakhi (addressing domestic violence against women in South Asia). The two organisations

stood outside – “over the nation, across national borders” (Boehmer and Chaudhuri, 328) – of the unified idea of India and were excluded from marching in the Indian Independence Day parade,

“The presence of SALGA and Sakhi [...] disrupted the narratives of the Indian nation in two crucial ways, as the reasons given for their exclusion attest, one, they insisted on the South Asian identity, which would have meant that Bangladeshis and Pakistanis would have marched in the Indian parade. Two, SALGA is gay and lesbian, identities that could not, by definition, be ‘Indian’ since homosexuality did not exist in India. Sakhi was evidently additionally problematic because it exposed disjunctures in the family, the cornerstone of the Indian nation.” (Boehmer and Chaudhuri, 328)

While Menon’s theorisation locates the Indian diasporic identity as a counter-narrative to the idea of the nation, Vijay Mishra disintegrates it and rehashes its internal conflicts. He critically analyses postcolonial reverberations of loss and disconnect with respect to the idea of the nation contextualised in the Indian diasporic experience.²² He identifies the Indian diasporic imaginary as “the idea that against one’s *desh* (‘home country’) the present locality is *videsh* (‘another country’)” (Mishra, 5) and undercuts it by emphasising on a process of ‘social semiosis’ highlighting, “Against the fictions of a heroic past and a distant land, the real history of diasporas is always contaminated by the social processes

²² See Vijay Mishra’s book *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorizing the Diasporic Imaginary* (Page – 1)

that govern their lives.” (Mishra, 7) For Mishra, the idea of the ‘nation develops as a “receding horizon’ that is flexible enough to accommodate demands other than those enshrined in its putative content.” (Mishra, 183) He prospects Kamala Visweswaran’s denotation of America-born Indians as ABCD - ‘America Born Confused Deshis’ – and her personal conflict with the English language²³ as an example of the uneasy location of newly emerging Indian diasporas. Such conflicts of the Indian diasporic identity and the nuances of its relationship with the idea of the nation are vociferously voiced by diaspora writers. Additionally, late twentieth century literatures in India emerged as a product of global and contemporary locational anxieties of writers often supported by their discernible presence and growing popularity in the geopolitical locale of the ‘West.’ In fact, the twentieth century is a witness to wide-ranging visibility of writers hailing from the Indian subcontinent beyond national borders including Arundhati Roy, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, to name a few.

As twentieth century writers hailing from the Indian subcontinent globalise its literary productions, they continue to garner attention from ‘Western’ readership. For instance, Graham Huggan, in *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*, examines the “fetishized body of Indian writers” (Huggan, 60) including Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy and Amitav Ghosh who become embodiments of the ‘consumption’ of the Indian subcontinent through its literature. However, Salman Rushdie, in *Step Across This Line*:

²³ See Vijay Mishra’s essay, “The hyphen and the postcolonial condition” in *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorizing the Diasporic Imaginary* (Page – 188) where Mishra elaborates on Kamala Visweswaran’s linguistic and cultural association to her diasporic identity.

Collected Non-Fiction 1992-2002, disapproves of “the exoticization of India, its ‘vile beautification’” (Rushdie, 435) and argues that Indian writers reiterate India’s culture and tradition through several personalised forms of storytelling. Locating Salman Rushdie’s understanding of the ‘Indo-Anglian’ writing in the identified ‘West,’ Graham Huggan quotes,

“One important dimension of literature is that it is a means of holding a conversation with the world. These writers are ensuring that India, or rather, Indian voices (for they are too good to fall into the trap of writing *nationalistically*), will henceforth be confident, indispensable participants in that literary conversation.” (Huggan, 64)

By making writers that form diasporic linkages across India become a part of literary traditions around the world, both Huggan and Rushdie ascribe the literature of the Indian subcontinent with cosmopolitan traits. The writer, therefore, embraces the world at large with a “historically signified sense of belonging.”²⁴ (Ghosh, 19) In doing so, ‘migrancy’²⁵ becomes a central motif of their diasporic identity. However, while national and cultural displacements become fascinating concepts, narratives often fall short of portraying traumatic experiences of the migrant. For instance, Bishnupriya Ghosh situates Revathy Krishnaswamy’s criticism of Salman Rushdie’s migrant and cosmopolitan position as

²⁴ See Bishnupriya Ghosh’s book *When Borne Across*, where Ghosh outlines “The universalism in modern variants of cosmopolitanism (epitomized in the modern traveler, exile and avant-garde nomad) with its proximity to Western geopolitical epistemology...” (Ghosh, 19) and situates an all-embracing sense of the newfound world within which the ‘migrant’ seems to belong.

²⁵ See Andrew Smith’s essay, “Migrancy, Hybridity and Postcolonial Literary Studies,” (Page - 247-249)

“momentary indulgences in self-pleasuring destabilizations” (Ghost, 19) and argues, “migrancy remains a physically and socially painful experience for other (underprivileged) diaspora cultures and migrant peoples.” (Ghosh, 19) The migrant, whether celebrated for its worldliness or plagued by ongoing displacements, brings the idea of home into sharper focus. Writers continue to locate home alongside their precarious positions as English literatures from India rapidly gain popularity in the anglophone world, acutely questioning the authenticity of their experiences in postcolonial India. Concerns of home and belonging have, thus, remained an important facet of the forms of writing that places India as a nation in the worldview of global readership.

India, Diaspora, and the Literary Rehabilitation for Home

Writers hailing from the Indian subcontinent have expanded on the apparent liminality of home through stories of migration and assimilation, establishing it as a site espousing the complexities of belonging. They challenge traditional and conventional ideas of home, portraying it as a shifting, symbolic space that extends much beyond its geographical location that is consistently shaped by history, memory and the experience of migration.²⁶ Home, therefore, has remained a contested space that is deeply intertwined with power, intimacy and postcolonial experiences. For instance, Arundhati Roy winning the Booker Prize was declared India’s intervention into the global literary world, underscoring the

²⁶ See Mastoureh Fathi and Caitríona Ní Laoire’s book *Migration and Home* which highlights the social, cultural and political dynamics of home that shapes the experience of migration. The authors establish, “material aspects of home have meaning in relation to memory and nostalgia, everyday life and identity categories of gender, age and race, among others and in relation to social and emotional structures of migrants’ lives.” (Fathi and Ní Laoire, 69)

author's genuine experience of growing up in India. While Salman Rushdie's Booker Prize for *Midnight's Children* in 1981 is recognised as the focal point leading to the development of postcolonial literary traditions in India,²⁷ Roy's victory invokes a veritable attachment and kinship with home. Further, as Rushdie continues to be recognised as the voiceover for the postcolonial post-independent Indian nation and migrant, Roy unfolds the intricacies of her rooted Indian identity. In fact, Bishnupriya Ghosh asserts on an important difference between Arundhati Roy's and Salman Rushdie's Booker triumph, "Roy argued that India is an everyday experience for her, not the extraordinary, hyperbolic, and fantastic India vibrant in Rushdie's writing..." (Ghosh, 64) highlighting diasporas' relationship with home which is interceded between its authentic and imaginative portrayals. This intensifies their struggle in coming to terms with it. Thus, home remains an ambiguous form of identity-creation which remains deeply entrenched in the India's postcolonial present as well as its diasporic appendages developed by writers transnationally. Locating home in the theorisation of diaspora, Avtar Brah, discusses the aspects of "settling down" and "putting roots 'elsewhere'" (Brah, 182) as important paradoxes of diasporic condition. Analysing this innate sensibility of 'rooting' further, Brah situates the idea of home in two distinct categories: "a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory" (Brah, 193) as well as "the lived experience of a locality." (Brah,

²⁷ See Graham Huggan's book, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*, where, proclaiming 1981 as the "banner year for Indian Literature in English,"²⁷ (Huggan, 69) Huggan asserts, "...he [Salman Rushdie] has situated himself within a largely mainstream tradition of highly mobile cosmopolitan writers, a privileged group to which few resident Indians—and fewer still from non-English-speaking backgrounds (so-called NESBs)—have gained admittance." (Huggan, 70)

193) Thus, diasporic existence, oscillating between the material and metaphysical reality of home, develops social, political, and cultural orientations beyond its territoriality. Importantly, diaspora writers and their tenacity to develop linkages with the idea of home is strongly influenced by their position in the 'host' nation. For Chandrima Karmakar, diasporas from India inscribe an ambiguous relationship with home in literature to meticulously grasp the chasm of displacement,

“The first generation of immigrants among the pre-independence diasporics have a strong orientation to 'India' as an imagined civilisation. They have maintained contact with the political India, limited to their region of origin. The twice removed diasporics hailing from an ancestry of pre-independence diaspora maintain limited contact with existential India. Moreover, for them, the reason to remain in contact with existential India is to trace their 'roots'.” (Karmakar, 82)

Karmakar further argues that the dislocated diasporic identity emerges as a part of a transfiguration. Her placement of 'diasporic writings' is a testament to this in the lines stating, “Every piece of diasporic writing reflects the metamorphosis of the 'Indian' into a diasporic.” (Karmakar, 86) A critical examination of diasporic identities in Jhumpa Lahiri's memoir, *In Other Words*, undercuts this idea of a 'metamorphosis.' Lahiri identifies herself as a dislocated/diasporic subject 'adrift' between two languages, English and Italian, and amidst countless geographical locations, as a second-generation Indian diaspora writer. She elucidates her process of learning and writing in a new language as a form of exile in the lines,

“Those who don’t belong to any specific place can’t, in fact, return anywhere. The concepts of exile and return imply a point of origin, a homeland. Without a homeland and without a true mother tongue, I wander the world, even at my desk. In the end I realise that it wasn’t a true exile: far from it. I am exiled even from the definition of exile.” (Lahiri, 751)

For Lahiri, her Indian diasporic identity is ‘rootless’ and exists devoid of ‘points of origin.’ It counters Karmakar’s idea of ‘metamorphosis’ that identifies two distinct ‘points of origin,’ India and the intrinsically translative form of ‘diaspora.’ Further, in locating this ‘metamorphosis,’ Karmakar situates a complete transition of the ‘Indian’ identity to the diasporic. Contrary to it, negotiating her diasporic identity in between Italian and English languages, Lahiri advocates a connectivity, “My writing in Italian is, just like a bridge, something constructed, fragile. It might collapse at any moment, leaving me in danger. English flows under my feet. I’m aware of it: an undeniable presence, even if I try to avoid it...” (Lahiri, 544) Similar to Lahiri’s bridging of English and Italian, diasporas develops an overarching relationship with the idea of home through the act of writing which, in Jasbir Jain’s words is, “a connectivity as if being called back, answering a summon.”²⁸ (Jain, 9) Meena Alexander’s memoir, *Fault Lines*, is an important example of seeking such a connectivity. While Alexander traverses the challenges of moving across borders as, “a woman cracked by multiple migrations. Uprooted so many times she can connect nothing with nothing,” (Alexander, 3) she also ponders over her associations with home. In

²⁸ See Jasbir Jain’s *The Diaspora Writes Home: Subcontinental Narratives* (Page 9-11)

seeking her homeland, Alexander follows memories of her mother and grandmother, who emerge as embodiments of a space she remains largely unfamiliar with. Notably, Alexander's memoir, which outlines her journey of seeking a homeland, evolves as a collective imagination of maternal bonds that she has shared over the course of her life. Much like Meena Alexander, diasporas depict the idea of home exploring the multiplicity of its spatial, cultural, and transnational orientations.²⁹

Additionally, home and its reimagination³⁰ beyond an inherently feminine space is challenged as women navigate their diasporic existence alongside the precariousness of migration. Gendered experiences of home are marked by both nostalgia for a lost homeland and the necessity of reconfiguring identity in a new country, developing complex relations with the traditional idea of homemaking and constancy of movement. Therefore, women negotiate their corollary positions in migration processes by creating new ways of belonging in transnational spaces, where the boundaries of citizenship and identity are often blurred. However, bodies as well as narratives of women who have experienced the perils of border-crossing have been disparagingly underwritten in broader literatures of the Indian subcontinent. They have been associated with the image of a home that reassures national integrity, cultural sanctity and the promise of an

²⁹ See Carol Maloney's review of Rosemary Marangoly George's book *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth Century Fiction*, where she argues that George's understanding of the postcolonial idea of home reimagines the colonial, physical and geographical ideas of 'home' in the context of postcolonialism.

³⁰ See Kavita Daiya's book *Graphic Migrations: Precarity and Gender in India and the Diaspora* where Daiya's reading of female figures and gender inequalities during the time of the partition of India and the formation of Pakistan examines deep-seated ambiguities of home in Shauna Singh Baldwin's book *What the Body Remembers*.

apparently inevitable return. Positioned between the homeland and host-land, Indian diaspora women occupy a space where they navigate national, cultural, traditional and patriarchal ideologies. Their transnational experiences play a vital role in shaping narratives of the Indian subcontinent and the diasporic journeys that add to its vivacity.

Rooting Women and Finding Homes in the Indian Transnational Literary Focus

Home, as a space, has been sentimentally wound around women's lives, bodies, and narratives in colonial and postcolonial fiction. Although, often reinstated in marginalised spaces such as "the zenana, the harem, the colony, the closet, the Third World, the private," (Teverson and Upstone, 57) women seeped into nationalistic and socio-political narratives developing nuanced relationships with the imagination of home. Aparajita Sagar, in the essay "Homes and Postcoloniality," navigates the changing dimensions of home arguing,

"...homes, like other civic institutions, are sites for producing and reproducing bodies, borders, subject positions, discourses and ideologies, mechanisms of surveillance and discipline. Because of the formidable emotive charge it carries, the idea of home tends to erupt without warning in non-domestic sites where it might be least expected: the supposedly public sphere of Empire and nation." (Sagar, 237)

As vigorous institutionalisations continue to dominate the portrayal of home, the empire and the nation, largely governed by masculinist interpretations, separate it from the emerging idea of the world. Amidst such broader relocations of the idea of home, women

form alternative relations with the notion of homemaking. For instance, while Sandhya Rao Mehta, in *Exploring Gender in the Literature of the Indian Diaspora*, locates women as symbols of the nation, progenitors of family and bearers of culture raising important questions about the transnational nature of home,³¹ Deborah Chambers examines processes of homemaking³² that enables women to forge their postcolonial identities across borders. Importantly, with the expansion of the world beyond national borders and boundaries, home, epitomised by women, is often carried with them. Elizabeth Jackson agrees “diasporic situations can sometimes intensify the idea of men as negotiators with the external world and women as custodians of traditional culture within the home,” (Teverson and Upstone, 64) neglecting the challenges that women face in the process of migration. This symbolic portrayal of women is influenced by the evolving nature of postcolonial criticism: they are not only encapsulated in power structures and dominant devices but are also representations of the politics of cultural productions like literature and film. Such complexities in the relationship between women and changing notions of home, although often explored in the late twentieth century English literatures of the Indian subcontinent, seldom figure as central issues caused by territorial and cultural displacement.

Scope of research

³¹ See Sandhya Rao Mehta’s, *Exploring Gender in in Literature of the Indian Diaspora* (Page – 6-8)

³² See Deborah Chambers’ book *Cultural Ideals of Home: The Social Dynamics of Domestic Space* where Chambers expands on Tolia-Kelly’s study of British South Asian homes that are often furnished with “familiar paintings and photos from ‘back home’.” (Chambers, 178) by women. Women establish postcolonial histories, memories and contexts by refurbishing their homes across national borders.

The dense literary productions that examine migrations across the Indian subcontinent fall beyond the scope of this research. There is, therefore, a need to highlight the contentions that have influenced this study. An important aspect of the plenitude of writing from India that has emerged in the larger expanse of the 'West'³³ is the creative investment in mapping the idea of a postcolonial, independent India. Amitava Kumar, in *Away: The Indian Writer as an Expatriate*, rightly argues,

“...Indian – or desi – writers in the West return to India in what they write. This is not simply a case of nostalgia. Distance produces a shift in perspective, and the immigrant writers find that they are discovering not only the new country, but also the place that they have left behind. A new India is explored and mapped in the imagination of the writer abroad.” (Kumar, xiv)

The period after the publication of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* was marked by an emerging scepticism regarding national identity and consciousness. Adding to it was a deeper reflection on the migrant statuses and diasporic associations of writers as they move towards the globality of existence, cosmopolitanism, and cross-border readership. Gradually, the term 'postcolonial' developed its own ambiguities of (dis)placement in the context of literary productions in India. For instance, Harish Trivedi, in the book *Interrogating Post-Colonialism: Theory, Text and Context*, translates the term 'post-

³³ See C. Vijayshree's essay, "The Politics and Poetics of Expatriation: The Indian Version(s)" as a part of Harish Trivedi and Meenakshi Mukherjee's book *Interrogating Post-Colonialism: Theory, Text and Context* where she surveys Indian expatriate writing existing largely in the West.

colonialism' in Hindi (and Sanskrit) as "*uttar-upniveshavad*." The term develops into four distinct meanings: "what came after or obtained latterly, would be *uttar*- colonialism," "later stage of colonialism, i.e., neo-colonialism," "an advanced stage of colonialism, i.e., neo-colonialism" and "what is opposed to, or what resists, counterpoises or counteracts." (Trivedi, 237) Trivedi's translation and understanding of the term also stresses on the word '*uttar*' which means 'answers' in Hindi. My study incorporates such diverse meanings that the process of translation adds to the changing literary traditions of the Indian subcontinent by examining English literatures as an important carrier of meanings, traditions, cultures and literary characters across borders. Finally, postcolonial literatures continue to be influenced by the advent of globalisation. Contemporary postcolonial writers and theorists evaluate their relevance in the rapidly emerging period of globalisation which not only challenges existing national borders but also 'ruptures'³⁴ the past that has defined literature and culture. For instance, Paul Jay, in *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies*, interrogates the position of the nation-state in defining literature and argues,

"Globalizing literary studies must involve a radical dislocation of the traditional geographical spaces we have been using to organize work in both the humanities and the social sciences. [...] The locations we study do not exist apart from the

³⁴ See Arjun Appadurai's book *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Page – 2-4) where Appadurai argues that the 'modern moment' brought on by socio-cultural influences of western thinkers, theorists and social scientists, was experienced by the present forms of globalisation owing to cross-cultural interactions propelled by electronic media, people's movements and artistic ventures.

human act of measuring, delimiting, identifying, categorizing, and making boundaries and distinctions” (Jay, 74)

Globalisation, as an economic and cultural development, works along the existing postcolonial considerations of literature while expanding its explorative terrain to the ‘world.’ Pheng Cheah, in *What is a World: On Postcolonial Literature and World Literature*, advocates a fluidity of interaction that not only influences but also calls for a change in literary studies and their comparative dimensions. Cheah argues,

“Comparative activity makes no sense unless we are part of a common world. The world is therefore both the substrate and the end of comparison. Hence, an exploration of what constitutes a world should be prolegomenal to rethinking the agenda of both comparative and world literature.” (Cheah, 24)

The internationalisation of Indian literary enterprises, a prominent phenomenon throughout the twentieth century, furthered cultural interactions across the world. Much like the considerations of the theorists mentioned previously, postcolonial relocations and cross-cultural developments have enabled contemporary Indian writers to rethink their relationship with the Indian subcontinent and the socio-political spaces³⁵ they occupy. Home is one such space where the trauma of displacement is inscribed. In their

³⁵ See Maria Photiou and Marsha Meskimmon’s book *Art, Borders and Belonging – On Home and Migration* (Page – 1-4) which examines house, home and homeland as a concept that allows for an intersectional exploration of issues such as migration, globalisation, diaspora, belonging and gender.

narratives, contemporary Indian writers often portray it as a multifaceted concept encompassing physical space, emotional refuge, cultural memory, and the desire to return.³⁶ However, as diasporas, migrants, refugees and people experiencing various forms of dislocation grapple with a fractured sense of belonging, women – whether migrating or left behind – bear the brunt of maintaining the semblance of home.³⁷ Beyond the physical structures of home that are often long lost, they embody the continuity of cultures, traditions, aspirations and emotional attachments, linking migration and displacement to larger narratives of survival and resistance. For instance, Susan Stanford Friedman, in the essay “Bodies on the Move: A Poetics of Home and Diaspora,” discusses writing the experience of a ‘rupture’ or dismemberment of home from migrating individuals through Meena Alexander’s memoir, *The Shock of Arrival: Reflections on Postcolonial Experience*. As Alexander navigates the idea of home and her sense of dislocation evocatively in the lines “Trying to move between two worlds, the vision ends in a house filled with flames,” (Friedman, 207) Friedman examines the ways in which home is physically, emotionally and spiritually ‘severed’ in the process of migration. Central to her analysis of Alexander’s poem is the effort to locate women along routes of migration which

³⁶ See Gloria Anzaldua’s book *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (Page – 18,19) where the Anzaldua traces her individual, fragmented experience of her homeland through the lens of her Chicana identity. In the lines, “I am a turtle, wherever I go I carry “home” on my back,” (Anzaldua, 19) Anzaldua further resist the pressures that cultural narratives of home, roots and belonging exert on her identity as a woman of colour asserting, “though “home” permeates every sinew and cartilage in my body, I too am afraid of going home.” (Anzaldua, 19)

³⁷ See Susan Stanford Friedman’s essay “Bodies on the Move: A Poetics of Home and Diaspora” (Page – 195) where Friedman examines homemaking as a contested term through Anne Sexton’s poem “Housewife” highlighting that women are often remade by the homes they inhabit trying to make space and comfort within its walls for the men who ‘enter.’

she presents by juxtaposing such narratives with migrants like Saleema whose identities in both Pakistan and America force her to have a complex relationship with aspects of home and the “domains of intimacy and family in migration, dislocation and relocation.” (Friedman, 190) Further, Balli Kaur Jaiswal, in the essay “Imaginary Homelands and Moveable Feasts: An Indian Diaspora Woman Writers’ Perspective,” examines the lives of South Asian diaspora women, including herself as a diaspora writer, who have consistently formed linkages between home and the cultures of dislocation across borders,

“My endeavor was to heal this sense of being removed from the homeland, and to create a link between the past and present through an exploration of the lives of fictional women whose values and experiences were familiar to mine.” (Kaldas, 190)

The sense of dislocation deeply embedded in the relationships that women form with the homeland, developing transnational and intercultural ideas of home, often leads to an exploration of the self. It challenges gender norms and expectations, making such narratives a powerful space for rethinking women’s roles and voices. A distinctive and critically engaging study of the diasporic and transnational writings of the post-Rushdie (1981) period,³⁸ usefully underpinned by the intersection of gender presents a breadth of arguments that substantiates the research I undertake.

³⁸ See John C. Hawley’s book, *Amitav Ghosh: An Introduction*, where Hawley traces categorisation of Indian writing in English by situating Amitav Ghosh in the context, “In any event, Ghosh told Sundeep Dougal the following about how one might categorise him as a writer: I think of myself as an Indian writer in the first instance. By this I mean that my work has its roots in the experience of the people of the Indian sub-continent, at

Thesis Overview

In the late twentieth century, writers hailing from the Indian subcontinent flourished negotiating the private and public realms of a nation facing discord: Their writing often explores a deepened relationship with women characters who emerge as a unifying trajectory tracing the imagination of the homeland. The portrayal of women often became a site emblematic of national identity, offering an understanding of migration and displacement through literary engagements. The chapters in my thesis engage with writers who that have travelled and established their literary corpus in the geographical and socio-political terrain of the 'West' and developing as an important strand in India's literary traditions. The choice of primary texts for close-reading analysis was based on the emerging transnational and transcultural idea of home as well as the position of women in relation to the perpetuity of migration and border-crossing. While emerging diasporic associations, globality of literary engagements and cosmopolitan reinforcements that influence the Indian subcontinent form an integral part of this study, regional and national literatures, altered through their English translations, equally contribute to it. Chapter one focuses on Salman Rushdie's *Shame*, and Amitav Ghosh's *Shadow Lines and Gun Island* and the ways in which these authors navigate the idea of the nation, simultaneously developing diasporic and cosmopolitan appendages. The chapter examines diaspora relations and the reconstitution of home in female figures. In chapter two, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's translation of Mahāśvetā Debī's Bengali texts

home and abroad. I think I would be uncomfortable with any categorisation of my work that did not acknowledge this. In this sense, 'Indian Writing in English' seems to me to be a perfectly acceptable categorisation of my work." (Hawley, 166)

– *द्रौपदी* (Draupadi) and *दौलति* (Douloti) – is studied as a creative investment in mapping the idea of postcolonial India. The chapter develops on aspects such as the relationship between female bodies and a homeland in turmoil as well as the crossing over of female figures in literature across borders that define nation and language through diasporic associations. In fact, as Ipek Demir argues, “Diasporas, as translators, become authors and the ways in which they shape meaning and identity need to be interrogated closely,” (Demir, 43) through Spivak’s translations, this chapter reflects on the transnational reverberations that carry across regional Indian literatures and their disparities, inequalities and polarities owing to the English language’s global outreach. Finally, chapter three examines diasporic journeys and displacement as a process of representation. It examines finding refuge, home, and a sense of belonging in dislocated diasporic existence; and returning ‘home’ to the spatial locations and counter-locations as a process of narrativization in Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake* and Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss*. This research initiative is an attempt to engage with the intricacies of transnational and trans-cultural identity. They continue to emerge as a counter-narrative within the latticework of existing scholarships on the intersectionality of gender, essentially female figures, in literatures from the Indian subcontinent and its postcolonial and global expansions.

Chapter 1:

Gender and the Nation: Re-framing Women, Home and Indian Diasporic Writing

Postcolonial literatures and Transnational Legacies

Postcolonial literatures have challenged the stronghold of the British Empire and rippled sentiments of liberation, fundamentally locating the idea of the nation in their production. Such narratives developed as an overarching rebuttal in the form of 'nationalism' encapsulating the post-imperial aspirations and desires of the colonized. For Tamara Sivanandan, nationalism increasingly reconfigured and redefined colonialism's political motives and imposed demarcations³⁹ as "numerous kinds of resistance to colonial rule began to coalesce into organized, militant, and self-conscious independence movements in the Anglophone and Francophone worlds." (Lazarus, 44) While anticolonial struggles and nationalism was identified by Edward Said, in *Culture and Imperialism*, as a process of, "...restoration of community, assertion of identity, emergence of new cultural practices" (Said, 279) it was known to be restrained by Europe's dominant form and its political constructions – the bounded and bordered structure of the 'nation.'⁴⁰ For instance, linking

³⁹ See Tamara Sivanandan's essay "Anticolonialism, national liberation, postcolonial nation formation" where she argues that the grander projections of the First and Second World War essentially instil the nationalistic desire to reclaim one's land. Alluding to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Frantz Fanon and Edward Said, Sivanandan outlines the rapid creation as well as retention of nationalistic emotions in the Third World and argues, "Europe was thus subjected to a huge and disorienting change in perspective in the West/non-West relationship which it had not before experienced, confronted not just by activists and intellectuals from within the colonized world (Lazarus, 45)

⁴⁰ See Tamara Sivanandan's essay "Anticolonialism, national liberation, and postcolonial nation formation," where colonial assertions of national boundaries are an integral part of nationalism, "the particular administrative regimes and national boundaries that European colonialism created in its colonies were imposed, inorganic, and designed to serve the interests of imperial, colonial, and metropolitan domination (Davidson 1992; Mamdani 1996). Moreover, the political legacy of these particular structures and boundaries has often been disastrous." (Lazarus, 184)

nationalism to the imperial conception of 'nation,' Laura Chrisman, in the essay, "Nationalism and postcolonial studies," argues, "... anticolonial nationalism dooms itself to conceptual self-contradiction (Lowe and Lloyd), cultural inauthenticity (Miller), political failure (Spivak), and, inevitably, repetition of the dominatory modes of thought that led to its imposition in the first place." (Lazarus, 184) Thus, navigating the political reimagination of the 'nation' in colonised lands, Chrisman suggests that 'nationalism' and its need to develop an independent national and cultural identity is an inherently imitative, derivative, paradoxical and dominating form⁴¹ of its colonial forerunner. Nationalism, however, developed as a resistive force, with a motive larger than solely becoming a replication of the colonial structures that influence it. For instance, Edward Said, in *Culture and Imperialism*, locates resistance as an important part of the ongoing processes of nationalism and highlights its need to "restore the imprisoned nation to itself,"⁴² (Said, 275) by negotiating national territories,

"The history of the empire – punctuated by uprisings throughout most of the nineteenth century – in India; in German, French, Belgian, and British Africa; in Haiti, Madagascar, North Africa, Burma, the Philippines, Egypt, and elsewhere – seems incoherent unless one recognizes that sense of beleaguered imprisonment infused with a passion for community that grounds anti-imperial resistance in cultural effort." (Said, 274)

⁴¹ See Laura Chrisman's essay, "Nationalism and postcolonial studies," where nationalism is explored in relation to dominant colonial structures.

⁴² See Edward Said's book *Culture and Imperialism* (page-275-277) where resistance in non-Western, essentially Third World, regions developed through a representation of community, language, and diversified cultures.

Further, Said significantly penetrates the centrality of the Western idea of the nation by arguing, "...the history of all cultures is the history of cultural borrowings. Cultures are not impermeable," (Said, 278) situating varied cultural identities in the idea of the nation as a 'whole.' Similarly, Rabindranath Tagore, in his book *Nationalism*, identifies 'nation' as a "political and economic union of a people [...] which a whole population assumes when organized for a mechanical purpose." (Tagore, 9) Interestingly, for Tagore, the idea of the 'nation' is the homogenising, all-encompassing and imposing attributes that individual nationalisms attempt to counter. Tagore, however, affirms that the territorial potential of the 'nation' that reconstitutes the global world ought to be challenged by a greater consciousness of "the history of man" (Tagore, 99) that precedes and prevails the history of the 'nation' as "All national histories are merely chapters in the larger one." (Tagore, 99) Further, Edward Said, in *Culture and Imperialism*, reflects on Tagore's placement of India as an example for national progress due to its 'racial consciousness' and dismisses the Eurocentric idea of the nation as a monolith.⁴³ Evidently, for Said and Tagore, national frontiers are redefined by the diversities of race and culture which remain tied to the territories of the nation. Similarly, Aijaz Ahmad, in his book, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*, locates cultural differences as a part of the nationalist and anticolonial movements arguing, "nationalism is not a unitary thing, and so many different kinds of ideologies have invoked the nationalist claim that it is always very hard to think of nationalism at the level of theoretical abstraction alone." (Ahmad, 7) He goes on to dismantle the concept of a singular national culture and establishes, "each 'nation' [...]"

⁴³ See Edward Said's book *Culture and Imperialism* (page- 275-276)

has a 'culture' and a 'tradition' and that to speak from within that culture and that tradition is itself and act of anti-imperialist resistance.” (Ahmad, 9) In doing so, he investigates the category of 'Third World Literature'⁴⁴ that Fredric Jameson⁴⁵ identifies to have emerged from a significant colonial experience and stirring forms of nationalism and argues,

“Literary texts are produced in highly differentiated, usually very over-determine contexts of competing ideological and cultural clusters, so that any particular text of any complexity shall always have to be placed within the cluster that gives it its energy and form, before it is totalised into a universal.” (Ahmad, 23)

Nations have remained integral to dismantling imperialistic structures and growth of new cultural associations. In fact, Tamara Sivanandan, alluding to postcolonial theorist Neil Lazarus, argues,

“It is only on the terrain of the nation that an articulation between cosmopolitan intellectualism and popular consciousness can be forged; [...] the geo-political legacies of the previous 200 years provided a concrete basis on which the imperial powers – eager to retain influence even after independence – might be made to concede sovereignty.” (Lazarus, 49)

⁴⁴See Aijaz Ahmad's essay, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory' " (Page – 23, 24)

⁴⁵See Fredrich Jameson's essay, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism." (Page – 70, 71)

Therefore, nations, as colonial territories, are permeated by independent postcolonial communities, languages, cultures, and identities. Consequently, postcolonial literature becomes the platform on which the intricacies of nation-building are reiterated. Postcolonial writers embody the nationalistic motives of a developing counter- culture of resistance and the literatures they produce inscribe narratives of reclamation on which the formerly colonised reinstate their identities. Commenting on postcolonial writers and their relation to the histories of exploitation of the formerly colonised bequeathed upon them, Edward Said, in *Culture and Imperialism*, argues,

“The post-imperial writers of the Third World [...] bear their past within them- as scars of humiliating wounds, as instigation of different practices, as potentially revised visions of the past tending towards a post-colonial future, as urgently reinterpretable and redeployable experiences, in which the formerly silent native speaks and acts on territory reclaimed as part of a general movement of resistance, from the colonist.” (Said, 271)

Nations carry the remnants of the colonial past and the aspirations of a postcolonial future, developing into a platform on which changing socio-political relations unfold. However, it is imperative to discuss the postcolonial reformations of the nation outside a foreseeable future informed by anticolonial resistances and varied forms of nationalisms – territorial, cultural, and literary – influencing colonial boundaries.

Historically, narratives emerging in the colonial period promoted civilisation and progress, stimulating an overpowering proclivity towards the English national and cultural identity. For instance, Homi Bhabha, in *Nation and Narration*, investigates the nuances of narrativity in terms of the English weather that evokes the grandeur of the empire, sustains national identity as well as, in Bhabha's words, shows "immanent signs of national difference." (Bhabha, 320) He argues,

"It encourages memories of the 'deep' nation crafted in chalk and limestone; the quilted downs; the moors menaced by the wind; the quiet cathedral towns; that corner of a foreign field that is forever England. The English weather also revives memories of its daemonic double: the heat and dust of India; the dark emptiness of Africa; the tropical chaos that was deemed despotic and ungovernable and therefore worthy of the civilizing mission." (Bhabha, 320)

The establishment of the empire was laid out on the act of narration. It was further strengthened by incorporating the biases and prejudices associated with the centre/margin dichotomy. In fact, Edward Said, in *Culture and Imperialism*, probes into the positioning of the 'non-European' worlds in narratives. The novels that Said examines highlight characters such as Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*, the Indian nabob in *Vanity Fair*, and references of colonies and 'wilderness' in *Hard Times* and *Heart of Darkness* which have consistently supported the conquests of the colonial empire. Said also navigates the colonised lands in Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* where British India and colonised Africa respectively were viewed in literary conjunction with the

empire and situates the developing narratives of conflicts and struggles that led to their territorial and cultural assertions. The emerging genre of the novel has continued to intensify the distinctions between the 'centre' and the 'periphery' well beyond the period of colonisation. In fact, connecting the novelistic tradition originating in the colonial period to wider postcolonial concerns and contentions, Tim Watson, in the essay, "The Colonial Novel" defines the term 'colonial novel as "novels that, directly or indirectly, postcolonial fiction in English has made use of, whether through negation, imitation, negotiation, or appropriation." (Quayson, 16) The novel, therefore, mediates both the colonial and postcolonial appendages that it remains linked to. Exemplifying Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease* and V.S Naipaul's *A House for Mr Biswas*, Watson expands the horizon of colonialism into erupting anti-colonial and decolonial sentiments and argues, "what comes after the colonial novel [...] is not the postcolonial novel but rather an unfinished process of decolonisation." (Quayson, 33) Postcolonial literatures have emerged both from colonial processes of narration and the desire for a counteractive voice. For instance, Salman Rushdie, In *Step Across this Line: Collected Non-Fiction 1992-2002*, locates the literatures emerging from the former 'margins' of colonial rule in a centrifugal mobility. Commenting on Professor George Steiner's 'Eurocentric lament,' "it is almost axiomatic that today the great novels are coming from the far rim, from India, from the Caribbean, from Latin America," (Rushdie, 56) Rushdie critically analyses the "vision of an exhausted centre and vital periphery," (Rushdie, 56) on the geopolitical locale of the empire. It is on the seemingly invigorating potential of the colonised margins acknowledged by the speakers at the conference that Rushdie positions the postcolonial novel and states, "a new novel is emerging, a post-colonial novel, a de-centred,

transnational, inter-lingual, cross-cultural novel.” Rushdie further navigates the translative potential of the English language and asserts that the ‘Latin-American boom’ and the ‘gifted generation of Indian writers’ writing in the English language have garnered the limelight as “the ‘rim’ has begun to speak in its myriad versions of a language the West can more easily understand.” (Rushdie, 57) The emerging postcolonial novel depicts that displacements have played a significant role in enabling writers to chisel homes through narratives across geopolitical borders. Their understanding of postcolonial nation-building stems from an ambiguous and vacillating relationship between home and abroad, owing to the permeability of national borders. Trinh T. Minh-ha, in *Elsewhere, Within Here: Immigration, Refugeeism and the Boundary Event*, argues,

“...writers or the diverse Diasporas around the world live in a double exile: away from their native land and away from their mother tongue. Displacement takes on many faces and is our very everyday dwelling. (But to say this is hardly to say anything foreign to this age of new technology where, with the spread of wireless devices, people of the mobile world spend their time more in airports, airplanes and in their cars than at home.” (Minh-ha, 12)

The constancy and celerity of border crossing has intertwined the feelings of being at home and away from it. For instance, Trinh T. Minh-ha peruses her diasporic experience in the United States and her nuanced relationship with home, “Today, when I am asked where home is for me, I am struck by how far away it is; and yet, home is nowhere else but right here, at the edge of this body of mine. [...] The source has been travelling and

dwelling on hybrid ground.” (Minh-ha, 12) The sense of immediacy that Minh-ha develops with her idea of home is not always felt by communities that have dispersed from their homelands. Ato Quayson,⁴⁶ discusses the historically devastating and traumatic processes of ‘diasporization,’ a term encapsulating the migrations of Jews, Armenians, Romans, Turks and, most recently, Palestinians, which have been incorporated in the ‘nation-state’ for economic purposes. He argues, “the homeland is inserted into the domain of consumption in the form of tourism, archaeological sites, the sale of memorabilia, and the circulation of various tokens that signify attachment to the homeland.” (Quayson, 148) As colonial borders disintegrate due to the inclusion of the diasporic ‘homeland,’ the postcolonial space effectively reconstitutes formerly restricted national frontiers. Additionally, the contemporary globalised world flourishes in the light of diasporic resettlements and transnational migrations due to social mobility, education, and professional work which, in turn, disintegrate ‘home’ and its exclusionary and restrictive potential. Importantly, Ato Quayson in, *A Companion of Diaspora and Transnationalism*, locates the ideas of the nation, belonging and home in complex transnational processes arguing,

“By default of belonging to or residing in a nation-state that is itself constituted by the circulation of populations across borders, whether in Europe, Africa, South Asia, or Latin America, one is already connected transnationally in inclusive and exclusive, positive and negative ways.” (Quayson, 15)

⁴⁶ See Ato Quayson’s essay, “Postcolonialism and the Diasporic Imaginary,” as a part of *A Companion to Diaspora and Transnationalism* (page-148) where Marianne Hirsch’s term “post-memory of exile” is explored.

Therefore, to situate the idea of nation and an explorative study of border construction and national identity in postcolonial societies, it is fundamental to investigate developing diasporic relations.

Mindful Borders: Locating the Diasporic (Home)land

The twentieth century has seen a dramatic increase in the mass movements of people across borders, bringing the carto-graphed idea of the nation under scrutiny. Predominantly identified by borders, as “markers of sovereignty which inscribe the territorial limits of states,”⁴⁷ (Donnan, 1), nations have been reconstructed by developing routes across them. Cross-border relations have led to the dismantling of the physical and political territories of the nation, enabling communities to penetrate the very essence of border construction. For instance, John Agnew, in the essay “Borders on the Mind: Re-Framing Border Thinking” questions borders and their contribution to nation-building. He argues that borders, “have led to the fencing off of chunks of territory and people from one another” (Agnew, 176) but continue to “live on as residual phenomena that may still capture our imagination but no longer serve any essential purpose.” (Agnew, 176) Therefore, the evolution of post-colonial⁴⁸ thought, culture and literature has embraced, in Ethan Mark’s words⁴⁹, “a world without boundaries.” (Mark) Further deploying such

⁴⁷ See Hastings Donnan’s and Thomas M. Wilson’s book *Borders: Frontiers of Identity, Nation and State* where they explore borders as power structures and essential identifiers of a nation.

⁴⁸ The term ‘Post-colonial’ is used in the chapter to highlight the historical emergence and position of social, political and literary emancipation after colonisation.

⁴⁹ See Ethan Mark’s essay “Beyond the Nation? The Transnational and Its Limits.”

assumptions in academic institutions, Mark affirms that, “across academic disciplines, attention has turned to the transnational, the regional and the global, focusing on cross-border flows and dynamics that go ‘beyond the nation.’” (Mark) Thus, salient to the nation-building process, trans-national movement and migration is particularly highlighted by their continuous reverberations in postcolonial critical interventions. Trans-national spaces have been extensively deployed in terms of the fluidity of their relationship with the nation at large. For instance, Andreas Huyssen, in “Diaspora and Nation: Migration into Other Pasts” outlines the “unified or even mythic memory of the lost homeland, of the history of displacement, and the desire to return” (Huyssen, 150) as an extension of one’s diasporic identity. The quandary of home and belonging is central to postcolonial dislocations, often intensified by the bonds forged beyond national borders. Homi Bhabha, in *Nation and Narration*, distinguishing ‘heimlich’ and ‘unheimlich’- homeliness and displacement,⁵⁰ situates the sense of belonging and separation in the changing discourses of the nation,

“If the ambivalent figure of the nation is a problem of its transitional history, its conceptual indeterminacy, its wavering between vocabularies, then what effect does this have on narratives and discourses that signify a sense of ‘nationness’: the

⁵⁰ See Homi K Bhabha’s interview by Klaus Stierstorfer, “Diaspora and Home: An Interview with Homi K Bhabha,” where Bhabha explores the idea of ‘home’ in two separate contexts, “One- something to do with the normalized, the naturalized, the inevitable, the original. It’s there- the “thereness of your existence, even more than the “hereness.” It is always there; this is my home. I understand this landscape. I know these people. I know the language, and so on, [...] the other, it seems to me, is the Conradian idea that home is what you return to,” and locates diaspora in the “trajectory of home, and the continual tension of home.” (Stierstorfer)

heimlich pleasures of the hearth, the unheimlich terror of the space or race of the Other...” (Bhabha, 2)

Additionally, Edward Said, in his book *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, comments on the plight of ‘exile’ faced by refugees, expatriates and other displaced people, and their emotional detachment from the territorial, communal, and cultural assertions of home and nation,

“...just beyond the frontier between “us” and the “outsiders” is the perilous territory of not-belonging: this is to where in a primitive time peoples were banished, and where in the modern era immense aggregates of humanity loiter as refugees and displaced persons.” (Said, 177)

Arguably, while both Bhabha and Said engage with ‘home’ through national borders, they are acutely aware of the multiplicity of identities and locations formed due to steady dispersals and dwindling border constructions. For example, as Bhabha navigates a merging of territories and cultures to conclude his arguments stating, “the margins of the nation displace the centre; the peoples of the periphery return to rewrite the history and fiction of the metropolis,” (Bhabha, 7) Said’s exploration of exilic cultures lead to assertions of multi-locationality highlighting, “Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two...” (Said, 186) Thus, cross border migrations have increasingly contributed to the restructuring of national identities, accommodating intrinsic sentiments of home. In addition to reconciling physical

boundaries of nations across the world, diasporas reinvestigate the “domestic microcosm”⁵¹ (Helf, 3) of home. Home is idealised as a private space often pitted against the heart-wrenching experiences of dispersal and dislocation of diasporas. Interestingly, it often materialises through the female figure; women’s bodies have been emblematic of both a national identity and the innate desire for home amidst colonial expansions and postcolonial developments, linking domestic/private spaces to the developing postcolonial nation.

Women in Nation, Nation in Women: Colonial and Postcolonial Navigations

The idea of the nation has been wrought in masculine imaginations for centuries. While its colonial construction was politically imposing with stringent forms of coercion and control, and its postcolonial reconstruction, through emerging anticolonial movements, paved way for newer identities and cultures, the mapping of territorial borders catered to notions of masculinity and femininity.⁵² Further nationalist temperaments, central to the formation of independent nations, new cultural productions and postcolonial societies spanning the second half of the twentieth century, adhered to masculinist reimaginings.

⁵¹ See Sissy Helf’s *Unreliable Truths: Transcultural Homeworlds in Indian Women’s Fiction of the Diaspora*, (page 3-5) where the intricacies of home as a domestic as well as transnational space are elucidated.

⁵² See Nira Yuval-Davis’ essay, “Nationalist Projects and Gender Relations,” where Yuval-Davis locates gendered notions as an important structural component of the idea of the nation. She asserts that women as ‘biological producers’ of the nation become “bearers of the collective’ within these boundaries (Yuval-Davis 1980).” (Yuval-Davis, 12) Additionally, identifying nation as a ‘cultural construction,’ Yuval-Davis further argues, “gendered bodies and sexuality play pivotal roles, as territories, markers and reproducers of the narratives of nations and other collectivities. Gender relations are at the heart of cultural constructions of social identities and collectivities as well as in most cultural conflicts and contestations.” (Yuval-Davis, 16)

For instance, Cynthia Enloe, in *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, argues “nationalism, typically, has sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation, and masculinized hope,” (Enloe, 106) that have designated the roles of the women in nationalist struggles. Enloe highlights,

“On the one hand, thousands of women have discovered in nationalist movements a new public persona and an opening for new political participation. [...] an identity larger than that defined by domesticated motherhood or marriage. On the other hand, even when they have been energized by nationalism, many women have discovered that, in practice, as women, they often have been treated by male nationalist leaders and intellectuals chiefly as symbols – patriarchally sculpted symbols – of the nation.” (Enloe, 100, 101)

Nation emerges as a space created and navigated by men. Consequently, its domain is often maintained by masculine assertion and authority. In fact, Jeniffer Thomson, in the essay “Gender and Nationalism,” affirms that “Nationalist discourse often incites particular types of masculinity, many of which encourage violence. Men can be exhorted to act as “noble warriors” (Elshtain 1987; see also Banerjee 2006) to protect the nation.” (Thomson, 5) An important assertion of such kind is examined by Frantz Fanon in a few of his theoretical interventions on nationalism and decolonisation. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon’s argument, “decolonization is always a violent event [...] quite simply the substitution of one “species” of mankind by another,” (Fanon, 27) locates the dominant position of colonised masculine identities in nationalist struggles that aim to disassemble

the colonial structure of the nation. In his postcolonial reappropriation of the nation, Fanon is, evidently, dismissive of the contribution of colonised women;⁵³ It is the men in the colonised lands that assert and reclaim identities and territories from colonial encounters. However, Anne McClintock discusses Fanon's essay, "Algeria Unveiled," and locates the 'colonial conquest' of Algeria in the lines "piece by piece, the flesh of Algeria laid bare," (McClintock, 377) where the colonised land is both feminised and conquered. McClintock further argues that as a part of a nationalist emancipatory narrative, "Fanon ventriloquizes colonial thinking: "If we want to destroy the structure of Algerian society, its capacity for resistance, we must first of all conquer the women." (McClintock, 377) Interestingly, Fanon's nationalism focuses on the transfer of power rather than the complete rupture of it and for nationalists' women become the symbol of national and political consciousness, which, in McClintock's words, "serve as the visible markers of national homogeneity [...] subjected to especially vigilant and violent discipline." (McClintock, 378) Therefore, amidst the fundamentally masculinist perspectives and orientations of the nation, female bodies are reimagined as the embodiment of its territory, tradition, and culture. Women physically bore nationalist politics, consciousness, and the imminent displays of power, emerging as symbols of grandeur, hope and politically violent incitement in the nationalist memory. Stemming from the fierceness of anticolonial developments, women's bodies and socio-political roles contour the emerging idea of the nation in their endearing, protective and nurturing ideations.

⁵³ See Frantz Fanon's, *The Wretched of the Earth* where Fanon identifies the process of decolonization as an essentially masculine one arguing, "Decolonization is truly the creation of new men. But such a creation cannot be attributed to a supernatural power: The "thing" colonized becomes a man through the very process of liberation." (Fanon, 27)

Contouring India: Women, Nation and the Transnational Recuperation of Home

A masculine projection of the nation that has popularly circulated in the context of Indian nationalism is the figure of the 'mother' – nourishing and cultivating. Sumathy Ramaswamy, in the essay, "Maps, Mother Goddesses and Martyrdom in Modern India," studies the map as a pictorial conception of the nation on which the colonised often inscribe nationalist counternarratives. Specifically commenting on 'barefoot mapmaking,' which "...cheekily reliant on the state's cartographic productions, routinely disrupts it with the anthropomorphic, the devotional and the maternal," (Ramaswamy, 828) Ramaswamy situates the mother figure in the cartographic production of the nation arguing, "India's barefoot mapmakers are almost always male, generally Hindu..." (Ramaswamy, 830) whose contributions create anthropomorphic maps on which "the gendered body of Mother India comes to be "carto-graphed." (Ramaswamy, 830) Similarly, Patricia Uberoi, in the essay, "Feminine Identity and National Ethos in Indian Calendar Art," discusses the placement of the religious mother figure as a nationalist symbol in the wave of anticolonial movements in India,

"The powerful mother goddess (Durga/Kali) is an important figure in the pantheon, at once nurturant and destructive. This imagery tends to invade the secular domain whenever the theme of patriotism is involved: the earthly mother/the mother goddess/the Motherland/Bharat Mata all coalesce." (Uberoi, 45)

Colonial epistemologies as well as postcolonial and nationalist counternarratives have interlinked nation and its women, thereby retaining an idealised, quixotic, and unattainable idea of the nation. However, while markers of the homeland are associated with the female body, women struggle to locate themselves within the territorialities of the nation. Additionally, as female figures are reimagined as a part of the nation's geopolitical markers, they develop as voiceless subjects. For instance, for Susheila Nasta, the English language is patriarchal and imposed upon the histories and contexts of the colonised,

“...in a post-colonial context, whether African, Caribbean or South Asian, this language carries with it a whole history of patriarchal myths and symbols whether originally instituted by the colonial power or later by primarily male-dominated movements towards nationalism and independence. Thus, it is ‘father tongue’ too.”

(Nasta, xiii)

Women have been recuperated in colonial and nationalist narratives as enamouring and idyllic productions of the nation; they have increasingly shaped national identity. However, as nations become exposed to transnational migrations, the corporeal reality of the homeland is often sought in transitioning spaces. It is amidst such spaces of cultural exchange that the diasporic idea of home evolves. Indian diaspora literature focuses on home as a fulcrum that centres narratives of immigration and transnationalism. Recognised as a space for refuge, home, continues to be politically and culturally influenced by cross-border movements. On one hand, free-flowing discourses and consequent intermingling of cultures has brought the world closer, but on the other hand,

it has left the idea of one's origins to be imagined. Commenting on the Indian diaspora and the position of 'home,' Chandrima Karmakar⁵⁴ argues,

“There cannot be a gaping chasm between desire of 'home' and fulfilment of the same. 'Home' entails commitment. The commitment can either be with the place that one has left behind or with the place that one occupies. This is often not so in case of the Indian diaspora. They are generally suspended in an in-between (liminal) space between the two places. The simultaneous presence of an existential and a metaphoric 'home' places the diasporics in the 'interstitial spaces.’” (Karmakar, 81)

Home, for diasporas, is translative – it traverses territories, cultures, and literatures. Diasporic communities have connected nations seamlessly; borders, boundaries, and the innate sense of belonging have constantly evolved. In the aftermath of colonisation, the Indian subcontinent was an impassioned territory. The postcolonial development of the land collided with the birth of two nations – Pakistan and Bangladesh – and states like Kashmir and Punjab became tumultuous spaces where national identity and affiliation was consistently questioned. The female body continued to be positioned amidst such socio-political disruptions. It becomes increasingly rooted to established notions of nationality and origin. For instance, Nivedita Menon visualises the reconstruction of the national history of post-partitioned India through the brutalities inflicted on women in the newly formed territories of India and Pakistan,

⁵⁴ See Chandrima Karmakar's essay "The Conundrum of 'Home' in the Literature of the Indian Diaspora: An Interpretive Analysis."

“The government of India and Pakistan set up administrative mechanisms to recover these women and children born to them. However, many of these women had been absorbed into the families of the men who had abducted them and refused to return. Nevertheless, both governments intervened to ensure that as far as possible, abducted Hindu women were ‘returned’ to India and abducted Muslim women to Pakistan, regardless of their own desire in the matter.” (Boehmer, 329)

While Menon cites this as an example of feminist studies and its contribution to “uncovering the voice and agency of these women” (Boehmer, 329), it highlights the cardinal relationship that female figures have with nation and its borders. It also ascertains the centrality of female figures in Indian postcolonial re-constructions.⁵⁵ While women have been represented as foregrounding figures in the processes of postcolonial nation-building by Indian diaspora writers, their position amidst transnational interactions has seldom been explored.

Chapter Overview

This chapter critically comments on the ways in which female figures are linked to diasporic reimaginings of home amidst ongoing migrations across national borders. Navigating various contexts and connotations of home that resonate with diasporic

⁵⁵ See Kamala Bhasin and Ritu Menon’s book *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India’s Partition* (Page – 67-70) where the need to ‘recover’ women and negotiating national borders, patriarchal assertions and public sentiments played an important role in the political reconstruction of both India and Pakistan.

existence, the chapter locates female figures in Salman Rushdie's *Shame*, and Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* and *Gun Island*. With border-crossing emerging as a complex yet widely traversed issue in the literary endeavours of Indian diaspora writers, Rushdie's, and Ghosh's novels garner more attention and relevance as contemporary texts due to their scrutiny of the grand narratives of nationalism, history, culture, and postcolonial identity. In fact, the experience as well as aftermath of ongoing migrations in the late twentieth century is marked by the obscurity of location and the ambivalence of belonging. Interestingly, the authors situate female characters in relation to domestic spaces, significantly rooting them within the diasporic imagination of the nation. This chapter attempts to discuss the ways in which female roles and bodies perforate hegemonic portrayals of nation and historical and cultural identity, often promoted by prominent male protagonists in the literary works⁵⁶ of these authors. Additionally, women have remained integral to the territorial, cultural and political associations of home that diasporic individuals and communities consistently manoeuvre and have been considerably affected by mobilities across borders. Finally, they have challenged traditional notions of home, further reconfigured nation as a geographical space owing to the growing concerns of home in terms of local/national and global/diasporic relations.

⁵⁶ See Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, *Haroun and The Sea of Stories*, *The Moor's Last Sigh* and *Shalimar the Clown* situate the distinctive perspective of nation, narrative, and identity of Rushdie's male protagonists. Also see Amitav Ghosh's *Calcutta Chromosome*, *The Ibis trilogy*, and *The Hungry Tide*.

Chapter 1.1

Nation and Women(Scapes) in Salman Rushdie's *Shame*

People, Languages and Cultures in Motion: Reconfiguring Salman Rushdie's Nation

Diaspora writers imagined the postcolonial nation through the literary genre of the novel exploring ambivalences around mobility, displacement and the emerging instability of home.⁵⁷ It is in this ambivalence that diaspora writers from postcolonial societies attempt to reinstate the nostalgic memory of the 'lost' homeland. Thus, in various ways, the postcolonial novel is associated with processes of migration. Interestingly, Andrew Smith, in the essay, "Migrancy, hybridity and postcolonial literary studies" expands on "the relationship between storytelling and movement, developing an ongoing interaction between migrancy and narrative" (Lazarus, 260) arguing,

"In the world according to postcolonial theory, however, a strange expansion seems to have occurred. On the one hand, everyone seems to be in some sense a migrant. "Migrancy" is now ubiquitous as a theoretical term. It specifically refers to migration not as an act, but as a condition of human life. On the other hand, everything seems to be a story. [...] However, there is a sense in some later postcolonial theory that this concern with representations –with story or text – has swallowed up any interest in the world that is being represented." (Lazarus, 260)

⁵⁷ See Sara Ahmad et al's book *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration* where Ahmad locates colonial histories of travel and argues that "the imperial process are still lived and negotiated in the forming of spaces of inhabitation understood in terms of 'home' (e.g. nation or homeland)" (Ahmad et al, 7) in an attempt to understand its relationship with contemporary migrations.

Along their diasporic journeys, postcolonial writers continue to elucidate their position as 'migrants,' ironically representing the postcolonial nation through their narratives. The efflorescence of Indian writing in English after the publication of Salman Rushdie's book *Midnight's Children* was embedded in a similar process of reimagining the postcolonial nation. In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie's protagonist, Saleem Sinai's, personalised history is juxtaposed with the history of the independent India, projecting an imagination of the postcolonial nation in literature. In fact, Rushdie's idea of the "chutnification of history" (Rushdie, 459) is integral to the development of the novelistic tradition in postcolonial India. For instance, Nadia Butt, in "Chutnefying" Memory and History: Mapping Transcultural India in *Midnight's Children* (1981)" inspects Rushdie's placement of India's violent internal histories through his narrator, Saleem Sinai,

"Saleem explains: "Things – even people – have a way of leaking into each other' [...] 'the past has dripped into me so we can't ignore it' [...] As history pours out of my fissured body" (38). It is the "leaking of things and people" that Saleem highlights, from the beginning to the end, in his autobiography in order to bring out the changing cultural trajectories of the Indian subcontinent in the wake of the Partition." (Butt, 38)

National, and cultural histories of postcolonial India intermingle in Saleem's body; The midnight of 15th August 1947, therefore, did not separate histories, it recuperated them in

the 'translated figure'⁵⁸ of Rushdie's narrator where "Indian history is 'chutnified'⁵⁹ and preserved for future use (Rushdie 1981:442)." (Huggan, 72) As a postcolonial and expatriate Indian diaspora writer, Rushdie situates the act of storytelling in various contexts of migration in his novels. Aspects such as fluidity of space and cross-cultural interactions enumerate the intricacies of nations, borders, and national and cultural identities in his fiction and non-fiction works. Further, identifying himself as a 'migrant' writer in his influential book, *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie revisits his struggles with national identity,

"The Indian writer, looking back at India, does so through guilt tinted spectacles. (I am of course, once more, talking about myself.) I am speaking now of those of us who emigrated [...] We are Hindus who have crossed the black water, we are Muslims who eat pork. And as a result – as my use of the Christian notion of the Fall indicates – we are now partly of the West. Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures, at other times, that we fall between two stools." (Rushdie, 9)

⁵⁸ See Salman Rushdie's *Imaginary Homelands*, where Rushdie establishes, "(The word 'translation' comes, etymologically, from the Latin for 'bearing across.' Having been borne across the world, we are translated men..." (Rushdie, 17) Also see Salman Rushdie's *Shame*, where the figure of the narrator is explored in the context of translation, migration and border-crossing.

⁵⁹ The word, translated from the hindi language as pickle, evokes metaphors of consumption and taste. Graham Huggan, in *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*, argues, "Rushdie's parody of the reader-as-consumer is reinforced by gastronomic metaphors: people, places and events—the country itself—become an edible..." (Huggan, 72)

Alongside acknowledging his 'migrant' identity and, subsequently, locating himself as a part of the West, Rushdie goes on to disintegrate his writing process in *Midnight's Children*. The established dialogue between the author and his literary production, symbolised by Saleem Sinai, navigates the complexities of nation and history. Rushdie situates his perspective of India in the postcolonial context by highlighting, "my India was just that 'my' India, a version and no more than one version of all the hundreds and millions of possible versions." (Rushdie, 10) This multiplicity of imagined Indias, for Rushdie, brings out the flawed and fallible portrait of Saleem Sinai. He asserts,

"This is why I made my narrator, Saleem, suspect his narration; his mistakes are the mistakes of a fallible memory compounded by quirks of character and of circumstance, and his vision is fragmentary. It may be that when the Indian writer who writes from outside India tries to reflect that world, he is obliged to deal in broken mirrors⁶⁰, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost." (Rushdie, 11)

As Rushdie connects his unstable position as an expatriate writer with the unreliability of Saleem Sinai's narration, he simultaneously destabilises the enormity of 'History'⁶¹ in the developing idea of the nation where, "The reading of Saleem's unreliable narration might be [...] a useful analogy for the way in which we all, every day, attempt to 'read' the world."

⁶⁰ See Salman Rushdie's, *Imaginary Homelands* (page- 9-12), where he describes the fragmented vision of history and narrative in the allegorical form of broken mirrors that an expatriate writer inherits.

⁶¹ The term 'History' in uppercase denotes colonial histories that led to the development of postcolonial nations and identities as opposed to Rushdie's idea of history associated with memory, imagination and reclamation of the past.

(Rushdie, 25) Interestingly, as Rushdie localises the immeasurable concept of 'History', that is known to build the framework of postcolonial nations,⁶² into a 'remembered past,' (Rushdie, 10) he presents imagination and nostalgia, in process of storytelling, as a form of refuge despite its 'unsettling' fragmentation. For instance, in his essay "Out of Kansas," in *Step Across this Line*, Salman Rushdie traces his first experience of writing a short story at the age of ten where, alongside his "family's mazy journeyings between India, England and Pakistan" (Rushdie, 3) and his life in Kansas, he eventually discovers 'home' in the story of *Wizard of Oz*, "...there is no longer any such place as home: except, of course, for the home we make, or the homes that are made for us, in Oz, which is anywhere and everywhere, except the place from which we began." (Rushdie, 33) As Rushdie advocates the creation of home "anywhere and everywhere" he intensifies his ambivalent position in his own narrative. In fact, Timothy Brennan, in *Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation*, distinguishes Salman Rushdie as a Third World writer in "the in-betweenness" of the cosmopolitan – a creature, as Rushdie puts it, of 'translation'⁶³..." (Brennan, x) who has navigated the routes of postcolonial discourse and developed a variegated idea of the nation. Additionally, Brennan highlights the ways in which the novel, as a literary form, harnesses community building and nationhood by incorporating a plot trailblazed by the narrative 'hero,'

⁶² See Homi Bhabha's book *Nation and Narration* where Bhabha argues that nations have been contemplated by historicization and imagination arguing, "Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye. Such an image of the nation - or narration - might seem impossibly romantic and excessively metaphorical, but it is from those traditions of political thought and literary language that the nation emerges as a powerful historical idea in the west." (Bhabha, 1)

⁶³ See Salman Rushdie's, *Imaginary Homelands* (page, 11-12) where he discusses translation of texts, cultures and identities across borders in the process of globalisation.

“It was the novel that historically accompanied the rise of nations by objectifying the ‘one, yet many’ of national life, and by mimicking the structure of the nation, [...] In the words of Benedict Anderson, the novel depicts: the movement of a solitary hero through a sociological landscape of a fixity that fuses the world inside the novel with the world outside.” (Brennan, 8)

This juxtaposition of Salman Rushdie’s cosmopolitan and translated authorial position with Benedict Anderson’s ‘solitary hero’ fusing two worlds showcases an identifiably male perspective in the postcolonial novel. However, Evan Mwangi, in “Gender, Sexuality and the Postcolonial Novel” examines the placement of gender in the postcolonial novel demonstrating an alteration of perspectives - “the shifts from representation of mothers as symbols of the nation toward production of images that signal societies no longer enamored of the historical metaphors of the family institution or the sanctity of the nationstate.” (Quayson, 116) The transitions in women characters and their relationship with the nation is critical to investigate the nuances in the ways in which Salman Rushdie portrays postcolonial nation-building in his literature.

Bearing Women Across: Linking Female Figures to Salman Rushdie’s Transnational Aspirations

Translation and migration have remained interlinked in Rushdie’s narratives as national borders are increasingly questioned, even dismantled to some extent in his literary writings. In *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie argues, “The word ‘translation’ comes,

etymologically, from the Latin for 'bearing across'. Having been borne across the world, we are translated men..." (Rushdie, 11) Associating the term translation with movement, Rushdie develops a critical intersection in the study of diasporic relations formed across postcolonial nations, which brought about the intermingling of languages, cultures, identities, and narratives on a larger scale. Commenting on Rushdie's idea of translation,⁶⁴ Jenni Ramone argues, "Rushdie describes translation as primarily a migratory event [...] This idea, equating translation with migration – a key postcolonial concern – has been the focus of much of the work published on Rushdie." (Ramone, 7) Additionally, Stephen J Bell, in the book *Global Migrancy and Diasporic Memory in the Works of Salman Rushdie*, argues, "Rushdie's paradigm of translation as a kind of transactional process promises both transformation and preservation of meaning." (Bell, 125) Ramone and Bell discuss Rushdie's engagement with the term translation transcending diasporic concerns around roots and rootlessness; The term develops in relation to the expanding dimensions of movement. For instance, while, extrapolating from Rushdie's use of the word "carry across," (Michael, 77) Jenni Ramone locates the necessity of a "geographical boundary" which makes "physical movement of the body" possible, Stephen J Bell links the term 'metaphor' with Rushdie's assertion of "bearing across" (Rushdie, 11) highlighting an interpenetration⁶⁵ of ideas, images and meanings.

⁶⁴ See Jenni Ramone's book *Salman Rushdie and Translation*, where Ramone quotes Rushdie, "translation, from the Latin, means "to carry across". Metaphor, from the Greek, means "to carry across". So again this comes back to my preoccupation with the idea of migration. People are also carried across, . . . and I formed the idea that the act of migration was to turn people somehow into things, into people who had been translated." (Ramone, 7)

⁶⁵ See Stephen J Bell's book *Global Migrancy and Diasporic Memory in The Work of Salman Rushdie* (Page – 124)

Literary characters in Rushdie's narratives navigate their relationship with a changing nation by responding to the constant transference of meanings across multiple appendages of their postcolonial, diasporic and, often, peripheral identities. This aspect of migration further develops on the position of Rushdie's male and female characters. While men in Rushdie's narratives often reframe, revisit and restructure⁶⁶ the postcolonial nation against global renderings, women inhabit its interiorities, intricacies, cracks, crevices and liminal spaces.⁶⁷ However, Feroza Jussawala, in the essay "Scheherazade and Her Cousins: Rushdie's Women Handcuffed to Contexts," argues that Rushdie uses these very liminal spaces – "women's courtyard, drawing room, or family room" (Stadtler, 242) as well as their "separate, hidden, "purdah" lives" (Stadtler, 243) – to actively weave narratives around national, cultural, and postcolonial histories. Jussawala refers to some of Rushdie's prominent female characters⁶⁸ asserting, "None of these women is neglected or marginalized. Rushdie does not exclude women from historical narratives but actively inserts them." (Stadtler, 243) In addition to exploring narratives around postcolonial reconstructions of the nation, Rushdie navigates transnational contexts in his literature. Birte Heidemann, in the essay, "Nationalism and Transnationalism in Salman Rushdie's Novels," argues,

⁶⁶ See Birte Heidemann's essay, "Nationalism and Transnationalism in Salman Rushdie's Novels," in Florian Stadtler's book, *Salman Rushdie in Context* (Page – 176) where Heidemann refers to the male characters in Salman Rushdie's novels as 'émigré-heroes' that bring transnational experiences and expectations in his narratives.

⁶⁷ See Catherine Cundy's essay, "Rushdie's Women" (Page -13-15) where Cundy argues that women occupy harem, brothel as well as claustrophobic interiors of "labyrinthine mansions" (Cundy, 15) encumbered by the "desire for possession and control of women." (Cundy, 13)

⁶⁸ See Feroza Jussawala's essay, "Scheherazade and Her Cousins: Rushdie's Women Handcuffed to Contexts," in Florian Stadtler's book, *Salman Rushdie in Context* (Page – 243)

“They do so by means of their migrant characters who, having been hauled around like boxes, eventually begin to rewrite their life story, and it is within such a perpetual process of storytelling – box by box and line by line – that Rushdie’s transnational literature has taken shape.” (Heidemann, 179)

The aspects of migration and transgression within and across national borders, evocatively alluded to by Heidemann as a movement between ‘boxes’ and ‘lines’ in his narrative, is often exclusively developed by his male characters. They thrive in the disconnect between the Indian subcontinent and the traumatic split it has experienced due to colonial and political fluctuations. Rushdie’s own theorisation of translation goes on to shape the relationship between women and nation in his narratives: if men are ‘borne across’ the world forging diasporic routes, women appear to be removed from any such associations. They dwell more in spaces than in their transgressive potential. However, it is through his women characters that Rushdie traces a deeply embedded idea in the act of translation/migration – the profound impact of untranslatability. Women characters in Rushdie’s narratives remain essential to manoeuvring the borders that attempt to separate the private and public spaces alongside emerging transnational perspectives. They develop in the process of understanding the limits, breaks and reconfigurations faced by Rushdie’s translated individual during the course of narrating the postcolonial nation, constantly negotiating the relationship between home and that which lies beyond it.

Locating Salman Rushdie as an Indian diaspora writer and highlighting his postcolonial origin and stance on diasporic identity, this section would critically analyse his formative novel *Shame*. It would investigate the close-knit relationship between female characters in the novel and Rushdie's dynamic, fluid, and imaginative understanding of nation. Additionally, distorting masculine perspectives, historical and cultural locations, and spatial orientations, this section examines Rushdie's female characters in the light of the social, political and cultural formation of the nation and discusses their entrenchment in postcolonial and diasporic imaginations of the (home)land. Finally, this section would study the potent relationship between translation and migration that Rushdie builds in his novel, *Shame*, and reflect on the women characters as they develop in the postcolonial nation.

Textual Analysis

Female characters in Salman Rushdie's *Shame*, are inherently transgressive. Lying 'outside' the political locale of the nation, they attempt to shift the dynamics of nation-building. Commenting on Rushdie's novels, Amina Yaqin, highlights the author's protagonists' exploration of aspects such home and nation stating, "Rushdie's narratives too are about those unheimlich 'at home' places but are situated often within satirical treatments of the postcolonial nation." (Gurnah, 63) Yaqin's observation of Rushdie's protagonists provides an insight to women characters like Chunni, Munni and Bunny, and their reclusive lives, that the novel begins with. The formative structure of home is situated in a Cantonment district in isolation, steeped in colonial history,

“...imprisoned in the zenana wing where they amused each other by inventing private languages and fantasizing about what a man might look like when undressed, [...] This interminable captivity forged between the three sisters a bond of intimacy that would never completely be broken. They spent their evenings seated at a window behind a lattice-work screen, looking towards the golden dome of the great hotel and swaying to the strains of the enigmatic music...and there are rumours that they would indolently explore each other’s bodies during the languorous drowsiness of the afternoons, and, at night, would weave occult spells to hasten the moment of their father’s demise.” (Rushdie, 13)

Patriarchal oppression that confines the three sisters in ‘Nishapur’ – the name that Mr Shakil’s house was known as owing to their curious maternal bond and the ‘mysterious’ birth of Omar Khayyam – gradually incorporate all the women in the novel. Therefore, Bilquis Hyder’s arrival in Bariamma’s quarters after her wedding and her eventual movement indoors due to the fear of *loos* or hot winds; Good News Hyder’s suicide as she grew tired of her numerous children; and Pinkie Aurangzeb’s discarded body tethered to Iskandar Harappa’s desirability were spread over the landscape of a disintegrating nation. Further, women in Rushdie’s narrative become literally and allegorically bound to emerging postcolonial concerns of the nation: borders. Farah Zoroaster is one such character. Her proximity to the national border, where she enjoyed the “emptiness of the frontier,” (50) ties her to its ambiguities. She is quite literally entwined with the ostracising potential of the border separating two nations due to her presence in the novel as a marginal but visible daughter of a Pakistani elite. Her character aligns with the

borderlands of Pakistani society - visible, influential, yet outside the centres of power that are dominated by masculine aggression. Allegorically, she is deeply associated with borders and their liminality in the context of national identity. Farah's quiet yet persistent presence in the novel amidst discussions and brutal beheadings in the name of national purity subtly undermines the singularity of a national narrative. Additionally, Farah personifies a transitioning Pakistan – composed on the surface but representing histories of exile and displacement underneath. The narrator describes the frontier as “an unimpressive place: no wall, no police, no barbed wire or floodlights., no red-and-white striped barriers, nothing but a row of concrete bollards at hundred foot intervals.” (51) This description projects the structure of the frontier as a metaphor for the marginal women in the narrative and, in extension, the nation. In fact, the image of bollards that are equidistant from each other almost signify the fragments of speech and national identity that Farah Zoroaster inhabits having “lodged in Q.” (50), the remote border town upon which Rushdie juxtaposes his fictionalised Pakistan. Farah's association with the border is emblematic like the other women in the novel as she carries the broader pattern where women do not merely symbolise the nation but expose the cracks in foundation. Finally, the distant presence of a home at the frontier, disconnected from the rest of the country as trains fail to reach it, stands as an image of Rushdie's fictional post-partitioned Pakistan, which, much like Farah herself, is dislocated and diasporic. However, Farah is disempowered by virtue of her gender and is forcefully inserted into the narrative of the nation, embodying numerous diasporas and gendered narratives of migration that were assimilated in the process of postcolonial nation-building. Thus, Rushdie creates a

distinctive portrayal of crumbling homes through the women in the novel who gradually develop around the boundaries of *sharam*.

Counteractively, Rushdie's narrator, much like the author's origins, is acutely aware of his migrant position and its potential to reimagine the nation, the world outside of home, The narrator's assertion, "I, too, am a translated man. I have been *borne across*." (29) places him in an in-between space in the narrative, enabling negotiations, navigations and alterations of the boundary lines drawn in the name of shame. The narrator migrates between two meanings of shame: original and the one they are "forced to write and so for ever alter what is written" (38) placing 'sharam' as the word "for which this paltry 'shame' is a wholly inadequate translation" (39) and shamelessness as the opposite that interweaves countless migrant narratives forming Pakistan. The narrator's impression of Pakistan is imagined, rewritten and imposed on an existing past,

"It is the true desire of every artist to impose his or her vision on the world; and Pakistan, the peeling, fragmented palimpsest, increasingly at war with itself, may be described as a failure of the dreaming mind. [...] perhaps the place was just *insufficiently imagined*, a picture full of irreconcilable elements, midriffbaring immigrant saris versus demure, indigenous shalwar-kurtas, Urdu versus Punjabi, now versus then." (87)

In the narrator's imagination, he examines Pakistan as a landscape of intermingling cultures figuratively traced through women's clothing. The 'midriffbaring' saris and

indigenous shalwar kurtas paint an evocative picture of the established notions of shame in the society. This allows the uncertainty of the familiar and the unfamiliar, developing as a central conundrum in the novel, to form linkages with feminine images and female figures. In doing so, the narrator tends to undercut Catherine Cundy's impression⁶⁹ of *Shame* as a 'closed' text that fulfils Rushdie's "desire to tell a cautionary tale about the Pakistani *elite*." (Cundy, 44) In fact, the narrator's presence as an 'immigrant' in his own narrative passing through boundaries of shame and shamelessness lays bare the intertwined histories – of 'home' and 'away' – in postcolonial Pakistan. For instance, positioned against General Hyder whose origins were "in the enemy state across the border" (86) the narrator contemplates being a *mojahir* or immigrant in Pakistan,

"As for me, I, too, like all migrants, am a fantasist. I build imaginary countries and try to impose them on the ones that exist. I, too, face the problems of history: what to retain, what to dump, how to hold on to what memory insists on relinquishing, how to deal with change. And to come back to the 'roots' idea..." (88)

Whether the *mojahirs* played a role in devising the history of a newly formed Pakistan after the partition of India in 1947 remains debatable in the novel. The narrator, like Raza Hyder and Iskandar Harappa, progresses with a significantly personalised imagination of the nation. However, it is when Rani Harappa weaves a silent history sitting in her verandah and, as Amina Yaqin points out, reinterprets "Pakistani history from a woman's

⁶⁹ See Catherine Cundy's book *Salman Rushdie* (Page – 44, 45) where Cundy outlines the seemingly limited perspectives in Rushdie's novel *Shame*.

angle,” (Gurnah, 66) Bilquis Hyder is plunged into the streets, “stripped of history,” (63) confronting her ‘migrant’ identity as she is transferred from one patriarchal hand to the other, and Sufiya Zenobiya’s ‘bestiality’ and unpredictability interrupts the occasional flow of the narrative, that women pierce through this imagined nation. Rushdie sees postcolonial Pakistan from a distance; his *mojahir* view projects the violent history of partition surrounding Pakistan, a nation that confronts its forthcoming exile, upon the female characters in the novel. Importantly, as the narrator imagines the nation through women and their individual fates in the novel, their reinterpretations of the tumultuous events that continue to engulf postcolonial Pakistan are ultimately devoid of a voice and left to be translated. For instance, Hima Raza examines the women in *Shame* as “the keepers of *sharam* in a shameless society,” (Raza, 59) where Bilquis’s naked body covered with a green scarf symbolises the situation of the refugees, Good News Hyder’s fertility signifies the population explosion, and Sufiya Zenobiya embodies the political unrest of the time.⁷⁰ However, the women in the narrative are also literally and metaphorically removed from the nation’s political and cultural history and left to the strangeness of their surroundings. They become the embodiments of partition as well as the history left unclaimed by postcolonial Pakistan. Further, women in Rushdie’s narrative constantly shift their positions around the idea of shame. Rushdie’s narrator’s position as *mojahir* is distinctly privileged. He navigates the binaries of ethnic, cultural and political associations of language and society in postcolonial Pakistan, including words like *sharam*, “Three letters, *shin re mim* (written naturally, from right to left); plus *zabar* accents

⁷⁰ See Hima Raza’s essay “Unravelling Sharam: Narrativization as a Political Act in Salman Rushdie’s *Shame*,” where Raza quotes Salman Rushdie’s description of Sufiya Zenobiya in *Shame* as “the connection between shame and violence.” (Raza, 59)

indicating the short vowel sounds” (39) and ‘imported tongues’ like Sindhi, Urdu, Punjabi and English imposed on Pakistan’s history. Whereas women are displaced through shame’s ‘collective’ nature. For instance, Bilquis is never fully accepted in Raza Hyder’s family. Even though the story of her encounter with shame as “the Woman and her nudity in the Delhi streets” (76) who, despite everything, held on to her ‘dupatta’ (scarf) was narrated in her in-law’s home, Bilquis remains an outsider struggling to adjust to their ways. For Bariamma, Bilquis was at a horrific crossroads between shame and shamelessness whose presence threatened to destroy the essence of home, family and filial relationships that ultimately build a nation. In the lines, “Billoo Begum, begone. [...] come on, mohajir! Immigrant! Pack up double-quick and be off to what gutter you choose,” (85) Bilquis is left isolated and lost to the notions of ‘shame’ which forces women to cement a nation’s identity and aspirations. Further, Arjumand Harappa’s rebellion against her own body in an effort to “rise above her gender” (126) is an important example of the (mis)translations of shame. From binding “her breasts with linen bandages” (126) to dressing up in her father’s shirt, Arjumand attempts to defy the ways in which women’s bodies are known to succumb to “babies, pinches and shame.” (107) She crosses the very borders of bodily identity as well as the nation’s symbolic representation of gender. Finally, Sufiya Zenobiya’s monstrosity is feared and repelled by the society she lives in, making her a violent reminder of the disfigurement, distortion and transformation of a nation prone to political gambles and rampant power dynamics often carried forward by its male leaders. Therefore, as, in Elleke Boehmer’s words, “Rushdie’s national imaginary operates [...] as a specifically male construct, projected on to, yet ironically distanced from, archetypal embodiments of women,” (Boehmer, 26) it pushes the women aside in

terms of voice and agency, leaving them to constantly navigate the regressive potential of shame. Additionally, female characters remaining deeply unsettled in Rushdie's narrative intensifies the ambivalence of borders in postcolonial societies. It is where Rushdie's fictional Pakistan seeks to define itself – and where the definition is powerfully undermined. For instance, in *Shame* women encompass the nation's perils as well as its people, so much so, that "they constrict imagination of real suffering." (Goswami, 53) Rushdie narrates the conflicts, anxieties and tensions of Pakistan after partition through the women in his novel and, in doing so, he tends to engulf individual histories of honour killing and ethnic violence prevalent in a 'shameless' society. Embodying shame, the female characters in Rushdie's narrative not only develop as commentaries on the churning political landscape of Pakistan but also assert on their inability to move across barriers of confinement – domestic, linguistic as well as national. In fact, Sara Suleri Goodyear, in *The Rhetoric of English India*, rightly argues,

"The curiosity of shame thus becomes a figure for censorship, an area of repressed significance that represents the untranslatability of Eastern culture into a Western context. [...] Rushdie needs the mystification of untranslatability in order that his reading of shame can accommodate not merely secrecy but the loaded secrecy of the female body in an Eastern culture." (Goodyear, 207)

Female bodies stand beyond the complexities of shame and shamelessness, rootedness and rootlessness, and stagnancy and migration. They are an unwavering reminder of masculine reinterpretations of postcolonial nation-building and the transitioning idea of

the homeland. Ultimately, while Rushdie's migrant narrator comes "back to the roots," (88) the women in the narrative, despite their quiet transgressions, become the roots on which the idea of the nation reconfigures itself. Women, therefore, develop as notable inheritors of the private as well as public dimensions of home; Amidst perfunctorily domestic tasks⁷¹ – like weaving, as well as emotional diversions – like rage and destruction, they uphold the tangible reality of the homeland as political unrest persists.

In *Shame*, Salman Rushdie juxtaposes the fictional narrative of Pakistan over its realistic conflicts through his narrator, closely examining debates on history, nation and narration. Brendan Nicholls, in the essay "Reading 'Pakistan' in Salman Rushdie's *Shame*," rightly argues, "Shame's writing of the national past is revisionist. The past is shaped retroactively, taking on the political character of the present," (Gurnah, 112) thus locating the morphed reality of the postcolonial homeland. For instance, Omar Khayyam Shakil discovers this 'misshapen' narrative through his relationship with home. His migration away from home and the contemptuous relationship with his three mothers critically comment on the idea of the 'motherland' firmly rooted to the idea of home. Further, Omar's birth on his grandfather's deathbed and his entrapment in Nishapur signifies the underlying history, time and regenerative politics that led to the formation of Pakistan. Interestingly, the lines, "Omar Khayyam passed twelve long years, the most crucial years of his development trapped inside that reclusive mansion, that third world..." (30)

⁷¹ See Sandhya Rao Mehta's book, *Exploring Gender in the Literature of the Indian Diaspora*, where Mehta develops the links between women and the domestic space, "The ubiquitous image of knitting, stitching, quilting and cooking as a metaphor for the experience, and the narration of diaspora links it to the perceived feminine task of collecting, remembering and documenting memory and images of the past." (Mehta, 1)

distinguishes 'home' as an entity devoid of time, history or movement, and, perhaps from the perspective of the narrator's 'migrant' position, locates the stagnant reality of his mothers. In fact, identifying Nishapur as, "his walled-in, wild place, his mother country..." (31) Rushdie's narrator equates the walls of 'home' with the walls of Omar's mother's womb, a space he has to grow out of. Therefore, ambiguously situating the term 'mother-country' in Omar Khayyam's journey, the narrator asserts on his need to be plunged into the world 'outside.' In contrast to Raza Hyder – born with the umbilical cord tied around his neck and died with a noose tied around it – who symbolises the repressive and claustrophobic spaces of motherland and nationalism, Omar Khayyam's escape from his motherland is a metaphor for the free-flowing, *mujahid* narrative of postcolonial Pakistan. In fact, Brendan Nicholls argues, "Shame enters a more viable proposition: that the nation's historical, nominal and territorial untenability is a way of floating free of the past, of transcending national memory." (Gurnah, 113) Further, the narrator, establishing Sufiya Zenobia as the central focus of the narrative in the lines "This is a novel about Sufiya Zenobia, elder daughter of General Raza Hyder and his wife Bilquis [...] Sufiya Zenobia is about this novel," (59) situates Omar Khayyam at the margins. Sufiya Zenobia develops as the embodiment of shame and the postcolonial nation, which allows the narrator to proliferate a gendered perspective of the nation. The simultaneous (re)shaping of the nation's violent past of partition is reconstituted in Rushdie's literary portrayal of Pakistan: it forms close knit interactions with female figures that evolve by merging the lines between domestic spaces and national territories,

“I had thought before I began, that what I had on my hands was an almost excessively masculine tale, a saga of sexual rivalry, ambition, power, patronage, betrayal, death, revenge. But the women seem to have taken over; they marched in from the peripheries of the story to demand the inclusion of their own tragedies, histories and comedies, obliging me to couch my narrative in all manner of sinuous complexities, to see my ‘male’ plot refracted, so to speak, through the prisms of its reverse and ‘female’ side. [...] So it turns out that my ‘male’ and ‘female’ plots are the same story, after all,” (173)

The ‘story’ that the narrator highlights is, therefore, a culmination of gendered plotlines, instead of a monolithic form of nation building that the Pakistani elite associate with. Silenced by generational politics and oppressive regimes, the women are incorporated in the narrative dominated by political and patriarchal manoeuvrings. For instance, Rani Harappa weaving her memory and personalised history into eighteen shawls is a powerful portrayal of self-narration that blurs the lines between home and nation. The shawl reflects the interiorities of home on to the political space where female voices are nowhere to be heard. In Brendan Nicholls’ words, “The shawls articulate a suppressed memory of Iskander Harappa’s infidelities, violent conduct and abuses of political power.” (Gurnah, 115) While Rani Harappa voluntarily sews in the women in the narrative of the nation, Bilquis, Farah Zoaraster and Sufiya Zenobiya are forcefully inserted through acts of

violation.⁷² As their bodies are displaced, ostracised and penetrated⁷³ by patriarchal coercions and political domination, women continue to be obliquely associated with discourses of power. For instance, Omar Khayyam denuding Farah Zoaraster of consent and hypnotising her in the lines, “You will do anything that I will ask you to do, but I will ask you to do nothing that you will be unwilling to do,” (52) and Raza Hyder aggressively unclothing Sufiya in the lines, “Raza tore away the swaddling cloth; having penetrated to the baby within, he jabbed at its nether zones: “There! I ask you, sir, what is that?” (90) situates women as vulnerable subjects in the narrative of the nation. The narrator asserting on merging the “male and female plots” of his story identifies the nation, in its embryonic stage, as a narrative of procreation where both the male and female characters contribute equally which culminates into the literal ‘birth’ of Pakistan on the map. However, *Shame* vigorously and unequivocally reinstates the polarities of gender in the narrative and, consequently, the process of national reconstruction. It is these borders of *sharam*, home and nation withhold women and pushing them deep into the interiorities of home, that are physically encroached by a raging Sofiya. Her disfigured body prowling on the streets forms a grotesque image of repressed voices and suppressed histories that are as much a part of postcolonial Pakistan as the narrator’s reimagination. Commenting on the gendered narratives that develop in separate directions in the novel but are subjected to violent disjunctions in equal measure, Sara Suleri argues,

⁷² See Brendan Nicholls’essay, “Reading ‘Pakistan’ in Salman Rushdie’s *Shame*,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Salman Rushdie* (page 115-116)

⁷³ See Brendan Nicholls’essay, “Reading ‘Pakistan’ in Salman Rushdie’s *Shame*,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Salman Rushdie*, where he argues, “Many of the principal female characters in *Shame* are subject to acts of real or implicit or potential sexual violation.” (Gurnah, 113-115)

“Rushdie’s vision of the debased female shape replicates that which is inarticulate about the structure of shame. It breaks down the distinctions that Rushdie attempted to maintain between male and female narratives by accentuating instead the novel’s hidden fascination with violence, so that finally it too is complicit in the terrible aggressions that thus far it has sought to make solely the provenance of Pakistani history.” (Goodyear, 209)

However, as opposed to Rushdie’s male narrators that outline and reconstruct the borders of shame and nation, women, as regenerative figures, continue to preserve home beyond such impositions. For instance, Rani Harappa, Bariamma, Good News Hyder and Bilquis uphold the final residues of home against masculine projections and mojahir narratives piecing together its fragile interiors and dilapidated exteriors in a tumultuous nation. Further, Sufiya Zenobiya attacking and burning Omar Khayyam’s body allows the borders governing nation, gender, society and home to reinforce themselves as a final act of reparation. For Sara Suleri Goodyear, Rushdie’s *Shame* “envisaged history as the failed phallic emblem of a hanged corpse: its terror at its own representation forces the narrative to turn its violence on itself,” (Goodyear, 210) and this overturning of narrative voices – from ‘migrant’ male peripheral heroes to disparaged and voiceless female characters – is facilitated by women who are laid out as foundations of postcolonial imagination.

Rushdie's *Shame* elucidates diasporic identities and their complex relationship with the homeland through mythical female figures. Catherine Cundy, in *Salman Rushdie: Contemporary World Writers*, discusses the position of myth in Rushdie's literary works arguing,

“It is perhaps difficult for a western reader to comprehend the continuing degree of interplay between contemporary Indian culture and its mythical parallel. Rushdie's fiction is no exception in the way it interweaves contemporary and mythical ‘realities’, benefitting from what the writer himself has termed the cultural accumulation of myth. His characters commandeer the identities of mythic figures, such as are found in the pages of the Indian epic narratives the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*.” (Cundy, 3)

For instance, in *Shame*, Sufiya Zenobia is the creation of disparity and rage that emerges from a national turmoil; at birth, she blushes at her father, Raza Hyder's patriarchal and political imagination of the nation. Roger Y Clark, in *Stranger Gods: Salman Rushdie's Other Worlds*, notes that Sufiya is created out of the instances of ‘shame’ outlined by the narrator in the form of specific media accounts,

“In London “a Pakistani family murdered his own child, daughter, because by making love to a white boy she had brought such dishonour upon her family that only her blood could wash away the stain.” Again, in London, a teenaged “Asian” girl is

beaten by white boys, after which she feels shame rather than anger (s115, 117). The first instance illustrates the imposition of shame, the second the internalization of shame. In the main story, Sufiya is subject to both.” (Clark, 121)

Embodying the ‘shame’ that erupts on the streets, Sufiya Zenobia emerges as a symbol of retaliation and reimagination and begins to devour the masculine perspectives and political assertions that govern the nation. In an important instance in the novel, Sufiya is seen dismantling ‘male identities’ as election day looms in the background aiming for a directional form of nation-building. The narrator, assuring Rushdie’s readers that, “people had plenty on their minds without worrying about a few dead paupers,” (216) delves into the havoc wreaked in the lines, “The four bodies were all adolescent, male, pungent. The heads had been wrenched off their necks by some colossal force: literally torn from their shoulders.” (216) As Sufiya, igniting terror in Talvar Ulhaq and Raza Hyder’s minds, had the residues of her almost diabolical figure burnt alongside the “many fires” of election day, she confirms Gayatri Spivak’s criticism⁷⁴ of Rushdie’s narratives asserting, “women seem powerful only as monsters, of one sort or another.” (Mallot, 149) However, opposing the monstrosity that Sufiya is portrayed as, she prefigures into the Hindu mythical figure of goddess Kali who is known to behead demons. As Roger Y Clark argues,

⁷⁴ See J Edward Mallot’s book *Memory, Nationalism and Narrative in Contemporary South Asia*, (Page 148-150) where female figures in Salman Rushdie’s narratives and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s criticism around them are discussed.

“These severed heads suggest Kali for a number of reasons. First, the Hindu goddess would naturally remain incomprehensible to those who are immersed in an Islamic version of reality, to those who have forgotten the Indian centuries lie beneath them. Second, Kali’s status as a female, polytheistic deity makes her a fitting figure of opposition to Raza and his male-dominated, monotheistic State.”
(Clark, 124)

Therefore, as a ‘figure of opposition,’ the Kali form, although aptly reconstituted in Sufiya Zenobia, who focuses on the destruction of masculine forms that govern the nation, simultaneously reconfigures nation itself. Postcolonial Pakistan developed contouring its elite male figures – Raza Hyder, Iskandar Harappa, and Omar Khayyam – and, as Clark further comments, “Sufiya cannot understand her world, and Rushdie’s Pakistanis refuse to understand theirs.” (Clark, 123) Her transformation into creatures of uncontrollable rage and vengeance mirrors the explosive consequences of repressed histories and severed identities. She is emblematic of the partition itself which severed the subcontinent along drawn out borders. Sufiya Zenobia’s incomprehensibility of her surroundings and her presence as, “a rumour, a chimaera, the collective fantasy of a stifled people, a dream born of their rage,” (262) remains central to the process of rebuilding the nation. It is only after beheading Omar Khayyam, the protagonist of the novel who develops detached from the idea of ‘home,’ that Sufiya tames the masculine origination of the nation and Rushdie’s diasporic imagination of the homeland. She controls the dynamic of the nation imagined in terms of transference of power. Further, Sufiya’s demonic figure is directional in its chaos as it burns the composite structure of the house that had held generations of

women captive by traditional and cultural laws, symbolic of destruction as well as renewal of the homeland. Additionally, in Sufiya's attempt to burn the tangible presence of a political and national structure, the house, the narrator's vision is compromised, "I can no longer see what is no longer there," (286) thereby producing a blank canvas on which the nation can be recreated with the possibilities of a postcolonial future. Thus, in Rushdie's narrative, the conflicting *mojahir* perception of the nation is transcended to incorporate the metaphor of regeneration associated with female figures. Sufiya and the women before her reinterpret the nation through their bodies – violated, denuded, displaced and reinstated – and remain intertwined with the traditional and cultural assertions that define them as the bearers of the nation's forthcoming generations. The 'birth' of Pakistan is, therefore, shouldered by the women in the narrative. They remain tethered to the spaces they inhabit – be it nation, home or the confines of their own body – and in Feroza Jussawala's words, "are meant to make our here-and-now powerfully and magically Utopian Elsewheres, and they do so with passion, flair, and agency." (Stadtler, 249) However, the ambiguity around the term 'agency' continues to destabilise the female characters in *Shame*. While they are continuously reconfigured in the narrative of the nation as active agents that ultimately blur the boundaries between home and away, familiarity and foreignness and shame and shamelessness, they remain voiceless purveyors of patriarchal customs and rigorous societal norms that can only fully be escaped once home itself is burnt down.

Women characters in *Shame* become a part of the cross-border movements within and beyond Rushdie's postcolonial Pakistan – dislocated due to the partition of India. They emerge as central figures as the dichotomy of inside and outside as well as home and

nation are challenged. For instance, Bilquis left uncovered on the streets when her father's cinema burns, Bariamma's secluded harem space laid bare by Bilquis's vocal refusal, Good News Hyder's overflowing home left unconcealed by the growing number of her children and Sufiya's grotesque body revealing the conflicts within domestic spaces, finally merge home into the nation. In fact, in Jenni Ramone's words, "in *Shame*, the female body – veiled or unveiled, inside or outside the harem – becomes a performance." (Ramone, 59) As women characters in Rushdie's narrative evolve as central figures that face the devastating effects of the Partition of India alongside ongoing traumatic experiences of migration, their lives emerge in congruence with that of home and the postcolonial nation, dwelling in socio-political inconsistencies of territorial borders. Therefore, if in Jenni Ramone's words, "Frequently in Rushdie's work, home is imperfect since it becomes unfixed through the process of migration. It is also as uncertain as the nation itself," (Stadtler, 193) women are equally unhinged, migrating individuals who struggle to assimilate in the boundaries of rootedness and flight⁷⁵ – the two ways in which Rushdie ponders over the act of migration. Interestingly, Rushdie also attempts to understand migration as a contemporary metaphor,⁷⁶ placing words, meanings and identities in constant motion. It is this idea of migration that continues to evade Rushdie's women characters. They are left untranslated, caught in the fragments of speech, act and

⁷⁵ See Matt Kimich's essay, "Lost (and Found) in Translation: Crossing Borders in the Novels of Salman Rushdie," in Michèle Lurdos and Judith Misrahi-Barak's book, *Transport(s) in the British Empire and the Commonwealth*, where Kimich traces Rushdie's ideas around migration in his novels where borders and movements around it define the process of translation.

⁷⁶ See Stephen J. Bell's book *Global Migrancy and Diasporic Memory in the Work of Salman Rushdie* (Page – 133) where Bell explores the intermingling ideas of metaphor and migration in Salman Rushdie's works.

transcultural reception. For instance, Farah Zoaraster is left at the geographical border of the fictionalised representation of India and Pakistan, and later succumbs to the boundaries of shame as a rape victim who is forced into marriage. She speaks in fragments and pauses, leaving space for mistranslation and dislocation in the narrative of a nation that is itself confronting its broken people, walls and landmasses. In fact, manoeuvring the emergence of postcolonial Pakistan, the narrator himself confesses, “however I choose to write about over there, I am forced to reflect that world in fragments of broken mirrors, the way Farah Zoroaster saw her face at the bollarded frontier. I must reconcile myself to the inevitability of the missing bits.” (69) While Rushdie’s narrator navigates the missing parts of national history owing to his migrant position, Farah is reinvented in the process of physical movement and linguistic translation, where her missing speech elements – her private history of sexual violence – remains untranslatable – within the confines of *sharam*. Further, *takallouf* – the notion of “unspeakable and the untranslatable” (Stadtler, 45) – hinders the process of migration for the women in *Shame*. For instance, in the case of Raza Hyder and Bilquis Hyder’s marriage, the narrator warns, “when *takallouf* gets between a husband and a wife, look out,” (104) bringing the readers’ attention towards the untranslatability of Bilquis’s nakedness across the stringent boundaries of her private sphere – her body – to the sanctity of marital bond. Finally, Sufiya Zenobiya’s incomprehensible health condition that kept her within the confines of home was ultimately unspeakable. The boundaries of the harem, zenana or the internal quarters of home shrouded over her as strong agents of control and coercion. Jenni Ramone, in the book *Salman Rushdie and Translation*, discusses Rushdie’s attempt to

break down the barriers separating domestic spaces in relation to the process of translation arguing,

“Outside metaphorical language, remaining literal, the women in Rushdie’s harems and behind their veils remain un-described, not-possessioned by their male relatives. Rushdie’s texts transgress the gender boundaries set down by societal codes in order to reveal the women behind the veils and inside the harems. [...] The harem, then, no longer unsayable, is, by its rendering here, translatable.” (Stadtler, 45)

Even though, in Ramone’s words, the domestic spaces are ‘translatable’ in *Shame*, the women in Rushdie’s narrative are neither migrating across territorial, cultural and linguistic boundaries of shame, nor are they being translated to find newer meanings⁷⁷ of the forthcoming postcolonial nation. They appear as disjuncts, caesuras and fragments in Rushdie’s diasporic narrative about migration and (un)belonging. Much like Farah Zoaraster’s ‘broken sentences,’ Sufiya Zenobiya’s fissured identity as half beast, half human, Bilquis Hyder’s fractured bodily identity and Rani Harappa’s shattered pieces of history outlined on a shawl, women’s experience of migration and their diasporic relationship with Rushdie’s fictional Pakistan is never fully inserted in the narrative. Women remain entwined with the physical presence of domestic/private spaces; With veils lifted, zenana wings broken and homes burnt, women are translated only in terms of fear. They are demonised beyond their private space, and are not associated with

⁷⁷ See Stephen J. Bell’s book *Global Migrancy and Diasporic Memory in the Work of Salman Rushdie* (Page – 133) where Bell explores the intermingling ideas of metaphor and migration in Salman Rushdie’s works.

contemporary forms of mobility that Rushdie's male characters encounter – transgression of national borders and reimagination of homes in their diasporic existence.

Conclusion

Salman Rushdie's narratives, indispensable to late twentieth century diaspora literatures of the Indian subcontinent, situate diaspora relations as an integral part of postcolonial nation-building. In fact, in *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie reexamines the dissipating boundaries that define the Indian writer arguing,

“This word ‘Indian’ is getting to be a pretty scattered concept. Indian writers in England include political exiles, first-generation migrants, affluent expatriates whose residence here is frequently temporary, naturalized Britons and people born here who may never have laid eyes on the subcontinent.” (Rushdie, 17)

This ‘scattering’ of writers have insinuated postcolonial literatures with the congruousness between existing nation-states and the condition of migrancy. It has also contributed to vivid descriptions of postcolonial nation with interlinking borders and cross-cultural interactions. Additionally, as a ‘scattered’ Indian writer himself, Rushdie reiterates his sentimental relationship with the diasporic condition of his existence in various interviews. For instance, in an interview with Catherine Bush,⁷⁸ Rushdie expands on the distinction of the term ‘migrant’ stating,

“Immigrant has become a sociological word, whereas migrant seemed to me a truer word for what I was writing about; an immigrant is also an emigrant and the people

⁷⁸ See Salman Rushdie's interview with Catherine Bush “Salman Rushdie: An Interview by Catherine Bush.”

I'm writing about are as much emigrants as immigrants, as much defined by what they leave behind as by what they meet on arrival." (Bush et al, 8-9)

Developing as characters that are borderless and hybrid, Rushdie's male characters (and protagonists) carry sentiments similar to that of Rushdie in their desire to translate and re-create versions of the nations for themselves. For instance, in *Shame*, alongside the migrant narrator was his invention of Pakistan, "born in exile [...] borne-across or translated, and imposed [...] on history; a returning migrant, settling down on partitioned land, forming a palimpsest of the past." (Rushdie, 87) The male characters in *Shame* imbibe and propagate rootlessness which reconfigures nations, histories and contexts as translations – associated with growing contentions around fixity and movement.⁷⁹ Nation is, therefore, reimagined by the longstanding prowess of patriarchal imagination. Such masculine reproductions of postcolonial nations embed female figures in their deeply entrenched mythical, cultural and territorial assertions. For instance, women in *Shame* are dismembered by the havoc wreaked by partition and the formation of separate postcolonial nations, embodying numerous diasporic individuals and communities that were uprooted from their native lands. Thus, Rushdie's Pakistan is quite literally embodied by female figures who are precariously situated between exilic and assimilatory tendencies. Further, they are drawn from mythic and cultural inferences that gradually bring the idea of the nation into being. For instance, in *Shame*, women have the torments

⁷⁹ See Matt Kimich's essay, "Lost (and Found) in Translation: Crossing Borders in the Novels of Salman Rushdie," in Michèle Lurdos and Judith Misrahi-Barak's book, *Transport(s) in the British Empire and the Commonwealth*, where Kimich traces Rushdie's ideas around migration in his novels where borders and movements around it define the process of translation.

of a raging nation inscribed on their bodies. Bilquis, naked on the street with burnt eyebrows partially covered by her *dupatta* of modesty, appears to withhold the traditional and cultural aspects of a discordant nation from being laid bare under the scrutinising eye of the '*mojahirs*' that have begun to redefine it. While, ultimately unable to comprehend the newfound Pakistan, Bilquis recedes into her private space, Sufiya emerges as a hostile presence scarred by its internal discrepancies as she metamorphoses into a figure that is a terrifying culmination of the continuing atrocities on both the nation and its people. Additionally, women like Bariamma and Good News Hyder inhabit and uphold the domestic space where women's bodies silently build the nation by bearing children. Thus, women in Salman Rushdie's *Shame* develop as creators as well as procreators of Pakistan. As national territory is enforced by domestic spaces in Rushdie's diasporic literary narrative, female characters become the sole inheritors of the turmoil that plagues the process of postcolonial nation-building. However, the idea of home, split in the process of transnational interactions and literary engagements, continues to encumber women's identities, bodies and narratives. In fact, the finality of burning down Nishapur, a symbolic portrayal of breaking down the convoluted interiors of home where women withdrew, confronted and evolved, is central to the reading of Rushdie's female characters in *Shame*. By ultimately demolishing the literal roots of the narrative and the metaphorical roots of the emerging postcolonial nation, Rushdie's women, ironically, fall through its cracks; They remain untranslatable by the narrator who, with his vision compromised, sees but a demon that beheads Omar Khayyam. Therefore, even though domestic spaces are not inherently repressive in *Shame*, patriarchal and societal norms in the name of *sharam*, the internalised fear of shame experienced by women and

propagated by men, agonise, chastise, mute and withhold the women in Rushdie's narrative. Women in *Shame* are ultimately lost in translation. Rushdie's use of metaphorical language to describe transnational migration in fictionalised post-partitioned Pakistan, which at once liberate his male characters, leaves the women dispossessed beyond unstable boundaries of homes and ambiguous national territories. They are marginalised as rooted figures and left untranslated across the liminalities of frontiers. In each of these women Rushdie locates the frontier, not as a fixed line on a map, but as a contested site within their bodies, psyches and histories.

Chapter 1.2

Homes in Transition: Roots, Routes, and Women in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*

Nationhood and Trans-National Movement in the Post-Rushdie Period

Postcolonial writers hailing from India have generated as well as challenged nationalistic consciousness and fervour⁸⁰ on the emerging popularity of anglophone novels. Nation, for them, has increasingly become a space where remnants of the colonial past and the possibilities of the postcolonial future have simultaneously played out. However, the contemporary establishment of postcolonial literatures continues to affect the postcolonial writer's relationship with the nation and its almost impassioned counterpart, the homeland. In fact, Weihsun Gui, in the book, *National Consciousness and Literary Cosmopolitics: Postcolonial Literature in a Global Moment*, advocates the transition of the desire for a unified national identity into a 'global moment' that identifies nationalism as a "critical constellation of political, economic, and cultural forces that make up a social formation." (Gui, 1) However, Gui asserts, "Even with the increase in flows of people, capital, and culture around the globe, nations have not withered away," (Gui, 1) looking into the newfound idea of the nation critical of the colonial nation-state legitimized by imperialism,

"In separating the state from the nation, however, they regard the latter as a distillation of "concepts of consanguinity and folk heritage" that attenuates "the

⁸⁰ See the thesis introduction titled, "Introduction: Home and its Moorings: Placing the Indian Diaspora," where the relationship of Anglophone novels emerging from India and the idea of the nation, imagined and experienced transnationally, is discussed.

political meaning of 'nation' as indicating a group of citizens organized under a single government" (505); furthermore, "these notions of ethnolinguistic consanguinity" are "of declining significance today, when the contingent tie between language, literature, and nation is coming undone in the face of the global movement of peoples and books" (506)." (Gui, 199)

Referring to the idea of the nation "coming undone," Gui essentially focusses on the cross-border movements that have widened the scope for political and cultural relations. In the changing terms of the nation, postcolonial writers have held on to their growing recognition in the literary markets where their narratives have re-evaluated their position amidst instigating anti-colonial sentiments. It is in this dynamism and multi-locationality that twentieth century Indian diaspora writers precariously situate themselves, interpreting, challenging, and exploring the idea of the nation. Narratives emanating from the Indian subcontinent have navigated the struggles of postcolonial authorial positions as they come to terms with the globality of literary markets. For instance, Dirk Weimann, in *Genres of Modernity: Contemporary Indian Novels in English*, studies the placement of South Asian narrative in the prevalent contentions of global movement by highlighting "the possibly transgressive implications of a gesture in which the postcolonial writer appropriates the metropolitan as always already appropriated by the postcolonial." (Weimann, 1) The concern raised by Weimann interrogates the position of postcolonial writers as their narratives surpass national and cultural borders as well as the divisions of the Western metropolis and its 'margins.' In addition to negotiating their postcolonial identities and transnational positions, the Indian diaspora writer is relentlessly

contemplating postcolonial India. Amitava Kumar, in *Away: The Indian Writer as an Expatriate*, investigates the literary tradition of the novel that gradually captured the Indian diasporic imagination and literary tradition,

“While in the years following independence, it had been the short story, more than anything else, that had served as the vehicle for newly independent India’s literary expression, in the diaspora, the novel had emerged in recent times as the form of choice. Isn’t it telling that just when India erupted in a series of separatist struggles, and Indians migrated abroad in large numbers, our writers in the West revived the genre of the omnibus novel? This choice would appear an affection, if not also the result of arrogance, but we can more sympathetically also easily grasp its pathos.”

(Kumar, xvi)

Interestingly, as Kumar ponders the association of the literary tradition of the novel with the lugubriousness of diasporic displacements and sense of loss, he highlights the “manic energy of Rushdie’s imagistic prose,” (Kumar, xvii) situating Rushdie as one of the popular figures writing about the new postcolonial identity and migrant sensibility.⁸¹ In fact, the publication of Salman Rushdie’s novel *Midnight’s Children*, in 1981 is recognised as a “banner year for Indian Literature in English.”⁸² (Huggan, 69) Commenting on

⁸¹ See chapter “Nation and Women(Scapes) in Salman Rushdie’s *Shame* and *The Moor’s Last Sigh*” where Rushdie’s position as postcolonial and migrant writer is explored.

⁸² See Graham Huggan’s, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (page- 69)

Salman Rushdie's position as a postcolonial writer, Graham Huggan, in *The Postcolonial Exotic*, argues,

“...he has situated himself within a largely mainstream tradition of highly mobile cosmopolitan writers, a privileged group to which few resident Indians—and fewer still from non-English-speaking backgrounds (so-called NESBs)—have gained admittance.” (Huggan, 70)

While writers and theorists⁸³ have been critical of Rushdie's contribution to literatures produced in India, *Midnight's Children* soon became integral to the newfound narrative and history of the Indian subcontinent. For instance, Satish C. Aikant, in the essay, “Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*,” navigates the distinctive reconstruction of society and nation in *Midnight's Children* arguing,

“Rushdie's is not a case for a ‘native’ version of truth, but he opens up the discursive terrain for several alternative versions. This, perhaps, answers an emergent society's need for renewed self-description and continual assessment, displacing the established categories through which such a society is constructed.” (Huggan, 219)

⁸³ See Graham Huggan's book *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*, where Huggan's is critical of Rushdie's position in the literary tradition of the Indian subcontinent locating a ‘fixation’ with an “instant celebrity, that conveniently forgets several thousand years of Indian literary history (Huggan 1994b: 24).” (Huggan, 70)

Rushdie's *Midnight Children* develops a nuanced and variegated narrative of the national history that situates the postcolonial contestations of the Indian subcontinent. It is, therefore, imperative to locate the new literatures in English in the period that came to be known as the post-Rushdie period after the publication of his book, *Midnight's Children*, as it develops in the changing contexts of Indian diaspora literature.

As *Midnight's Children* opened new routes for national and cultural imagination, it countered the euphoria of nationalism and anti-colonialism that envisioned the Indian nation. The imagination of the Indian nation, therefore, was interspersed in intercultural and inter-lingual debates⁸⁴ beyond national borders. Rosemary Marangoly George, in the essay "The Cosmopolitan Club," questions the positioning of the novel in postcolonial India, "Are Rushdie and others in the cosmopolitan club no more than "chamchas" of the West?" (George, 103) Capturing this essence of the twentieth century and acknowledging the global flows, upcoming writers⁸⁵ continued to portray the postcolonial Indian nation in

⁸⁴ See Nadia Butt's essay, "Chutnefying" Memory and History: Mapping Transcultural India in *Midnight's Children* (1981)" where Butt draws from Ralph J Crane's statement, "Rushdie [...] uses *Midnight's Children* as a metaphor for world civilization, not just Indian or British civilization," (Butt, 40) and argues, "By branding Rushdie's novel as a metaphor for "world civilization," Crane, in reality, does not seem to focus on the original impulse behind Rushdie's preoccupation with East-West encounters in his fiction. The main idea of the novelist in his narration is not to represent the "history of the world," but to present "India" as a hodgepodge, a chutney, of several cultures and languages; in short, to use a powerful home-grown trope of transcultural dynamics, active in the Indian ethos." (Butt, 40)

⁸⁵ See Bill Ashcroft's essay, "Re-writing India" in *Writing Anew: Indian-English Fiction 2000-2010*, where Ashcroft argues, "*Midnight's Children* won the Booker Prize in 1981 and we can follow the trajectory of subsequent Indian Booker Prize winners, the inheritors of Rushdie's prize-winning revolution, to understand how India came to be 're-written': Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (winner in 1997), Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008)." (Sen and Roy, 29)

their narratives. One of the important contributions to these newly emerging transnational interactions through literature is made by the Indian origin author, Amitav Ghosh.

Amitav Ghosh and the Transnational Imagination: Nations, Borders and Movements

Indian diaspora writer Amitav Ghosh has often attempted to understand the national, territorial, cultural and interpersonal borders and the consistent movements across them. From one of his earliest novels, *The Circle of Reason*, published in 1986, to his latest, *Gun Island*, published in 2019, Ghosh reflects on the arbitrariness of borders and the ways in which it connects people and places over larger spans of historical period, cultural interaction and contemporary movements. Borders emerge in Ghosh's narratives in more ways than one; Ghosh's own experience with dispersal across generations of his family⁸⁶ and his personal journeys to various countries including The United Kingdom and Egypt develop the initial ideas of using the novel as a form to explore "different sorts of connections." (Boehmer and Mondal, 31) Additionally, borders not only develop as transnational connections but are also central to the movements of ideas, cultures, people and places in Ghosh's narratives. In an interview with Chitra Sankaran, Ghosh asserts that, as a bilingual writer, he merges the borders between languages, cultures and meanings in his literary engagements arguing,

"I feel writers like me, writers like say, bilingual Arabs and so on . . . in today's world, we are the "universal" people because we have access to wider modes of

⁸⁶ See Amitav Ghosh's book *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (Page – 4, 5)

experience, modes of thought and modes of culture. [...] I think that's why people read us, because they recognize this. They recognize that what we offer to the reader is a much greater dimension of experience; a much greater dimension of history; a much greater vision of the plurality of the world." (Sankaran, 8)

The universality of his position as a diaspora writer that Ghosh addresses is important to consider in his exploration of borders and border-crossings in his novels. Ghosh's use of the term "universal" to refer to his position as a diasporic writer is often seen as a privileging position, where borders of hierarchy and segregation seem to merge into a unified vision of mobility accessed by the upper echelons of society. In fact, Rituparna Roy, in the book *South Asian Partition Fiction in English: From Khushwant Singh to Amitav Ghosh*, argues that "Ghosh's is an essentially idealistic vision of a world without borders." (Roy, 113) However, Ghosh uses his diasporic position as a writer to bring out a cumulative history of borders across caste, class, cultures and traditions that have governed processes of migration for centuries. In conversation with Elleke Boehmer and Anshuman Mondal, in *Networks and Traces: An Interview with Amitav Ghosh*, Ghosh responds to the globality of movements arguing,

"To me it's absolutely astonishing that across the entire nineteenth century, as millions and millions of Indians are whisked off here and there around the world, you don't find a written trace of these movements [...] – no ordinary migrant who has explained themselves on paper or created any kind of trace. [...] Fiction, then, allows us to reach for that trace." (Boehmer and Mondal, 31)

Ghosh's observation locates one of the central issues around border-crossing in his fiction— that of silent histories. Borders play an integral role in Ghosh's fiction to navigate migration routes and recuperate histories around cross-border mobilities that often remain hidden in colonial, national and postcolonial histories. For instance, the intermingling of identities across boundaries of caste and class, all caught in the process of migration, in Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*. Further, borders, in Ghosh's fiction, often insinuate silences around socio-political events; They make the violence, chaos and trauma around such events harder to translate within and beyond national borders. For instance, while Ghosh's *Shadow Lines* examines the silence around riots and internal conflicts within the nation, his *Gun Island* recuperates countless histories and contemporary instances of cross-border migrations that are left undocumented. In fact, in conversation with Chitra Sankaran, Ghosh discusses the interesting interplay of silence around historical and cultural events that he attempts to understand as a writer,

“...there are so many sorts of events which are constantly, as it were, wrapped in silence. [...] it does interest me very much, especially as a writer, you know you are in the business of producing words and there is a kind of paradox when you're addressing something which is explicitly silent.” (Sankaran, 12)

However, in the context of silent/unread histories, Ghosh's fiction seldom prefigures women's migratory experiences in his transnational imagination. While women remain central to Ghosh's narratives, as migrants, refugees and diasporic individuals, they

develop in close association with ideas of home, nation and belonging. Women characters do not evolve within the contentions, aspirations and cosmopolitan traits associated with transnational migrations: their position as active agents in the ongoing process of crossing national borders are often misread and their mobile figures remain as silent observers in Ghosh's fiction. *The Shadow Lines*, a late twentieth century novel that navigates the national, communal, cultural and postcolonial histories of migration, crucially develops as the intersection between women and transnational mobility.

Centring the traumatic event of India's partition, Amitav Ghosh ponders over the intermingling of nations, borders, and communities in his influential novel *The Shadow Lines*. While the narrative stands as an exploration of the illusory frontiers that govern nation, identity, imagination, and narrative, it is engrossed in the monumental history of the partition of India. Ghosh is particularly keen on the individual's potential to transgress political and cultural boundaries and locates his imagination of postcolonial India in the perviousness of its borders. Commenting on the title of the novel, *Shadow Lines*, Anshuman A. Mondal, in *Amitav Ghosh: Contemporary World Writers*, notes,

“The shadow lines of the title are accordingly both subjective and objective; experiential and political; they are those invisible borders that mark the transition from youth to maturity, the past from the present, and those intangible but deeply felt markers of identity that mark oneself off from others, one's own 'community' from others', the correlates of which constitute the material borders of political entities such as nation-states...” (Mondal, 9)

Ghosh's narrative forms interconnections and linkages that significantly contribute to his narrative process. The omniscient narrator is the fulcrum around which these connections build. He remains unnamed, becoming the locus through which other characters and narratives are created. Importantly, Ghosh's narrator is positioned in the growing globality of postcolonial India where maps, scales and 'lines' are imagined and imposed on the larger context of the world, with the novel emerging as a "meta-form that transcends the boundaries that circumscribe other kinds of writing."⁸⁷ (Hawley, 166) However, in addition to grand narratives of national and postcolonial imagination, aspects like gender, culture, society, and home remain equally fissured. Importantly, female figures in the narrative have been aligned with the physical borders of the nation and the metaphysical borders of memory, surrounding the imagination of the nation. They, therefore, develop in relation with the spatial, temporal, and imaginative associations of home and nation. This section would critically analyse Amitav Ghosh's *Shadow Lines* in the context of female characters – Thamma (or grandmother), Ila and May Price – who are subjected to consistent border constructions and reappropriations within the narrative. It would attempt to locate home in the consistencies as well as fragments of storytelling, identity creation and nation-building.

Textual Analysis

⁸⁷ See J.C. Hawley's book *Amitav Ghosh: An Introduction*, (page - 166) where Amitav Ghosh's position on the novel is quoted.

The Shadow Lines interweaves history and memory into the narrative of the nation, making seemingly measurable distances between national territories, communities and individuals appear disconcerting. Alongside the partition of India and formation of Pakistan and Bangladesh, the historical background that Ghosh's narrative draws from is communal discord. His essay "The Ghosts of Mrs Gandhi"— a poignant portrayal of the communal riots that erupted in India in 1984 after the assassination of Prime Minister Mrs Indira Gandhi— was, Ghosh asserts, "were profoundly important to my development as a writer."⁸⁸ In fact, the connections Ghosh makes with memory and storytelling and the "urgency of remembering the stories we have not written,"⁸⁹ form the idea of the nation in *The Shadow Lines*. Nation is, therefore, invented;⁹⁰ The unnamed narrator presents national histories as anecdotes that belong to a consistent process of recollection⁹¹. In fact, Suvir Kaul, in the essay, "Separation Anxiety: Growing Up Inter/National in The Shadow Lines," rightly argues,

⁸⁸ See Amitav Ghosh's article, "The Ghosts of Mrs Gandhi."

⁸⁹ See Amitav Ghosh's article, "The Ghosts of Mrs Gandhi."

⁹⁰ See Anjali Gera's essay, "Des Kothay? Amitav Ghosh tells Old Wives Tales," as a part of the book *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Companion*, where Gera argues, "Ghosh's emphasis on the 'invented' nature of places echoes Ernest Gellner's reading of nations almost verbatim; 'a place does not merely exist, that it has to be invented in one's imagination (27)" (Khair, 110, 111) Also see Benedict Anderson's "Imagined Communities," as a part of the book *Nations and Nationalism: A Reader*, where Gellner's argument on nation and nationalism is highlighted, "Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness; it invents nations where they do not exist." (Spencer and Wollman, 49)

⁹¹ See Suvir Kaul's essay, "Separation Anxiety: Growing Up Inter/National in The Shadow Lines" in Amitav Ghosh and A.N Kaul's edition of *The Shadow Lines* where aspects of memory-making are explored. Kaul asserts, "Do you remember? – in *The Shadow Lines*, this is the insistent question that brings together the personal and the public. It shapes the narrator's search for connections, for the recovery of lost information or repressed experiences..." (Kaul, 125)

“As the repository and archivist of family stories, stories told by grandmother Tha'mma, by Tridib, by Ila and finally by Robi and May, the unnamed narrator of *The Shadow Lines* is constantly engaged in the imaginative renewal of times, places, events and people past.” (Kaul, 125)

In addition to situating the narrator as the excavator of stories and histories, Kaul locates the narrative process in intricacies of confabulation: “its partial answers, its digressions, its looping, non-linear, wide-ranging narrative technique...” (Kaul, 126) The idea of the nation is articulated rather than mapped. It effectively contrasts the Eurocentrism associated with the history of partition and the establishment of postcolonial India that develops in the form of bordered nation-states. In fact, the placement of the Barthelomew's Atlas and its direct relationship with the conversations the narrator has had with Tridib, his perceptive uncle, is central to the spatiality of the nation. Anjali Gera, in the essay, “Des Kothay? Amitav Ghosh tells Old Wives Tales,” examines the portent presence of the map in Ghosh's narrative arguing, “Ghosh's rewriting of the European travelogue implicates the map, as a particular way of seeing, in disrupting the colonized sense of place.” (Khair, 112) The narrator's relationship with the world is a deeply sentimental one that he inherits from Tridib, who encourages him to imagine “with precision.” (Ghosh, 29) He acutely differentiates between ‘fairylands’ and ‘real places,’ and negotiates between border mapping and border crossing⁹² in his “poky little flat in Calcutta,” (Ghosh, 29)

⁹² See Meenakshi Mukherjee's essay, “Maps and Mirrors: Co-ordinates of Meaning in *The Shadow Lines*,” where Mukherjee deduces the subjective and objective contentions that develop a ‘sense of place’ in Amitav Ghosh and A.N Kaul's *The Shadow Lines*, “a

“Tridib had given me worlds to travel in and he had given me eyes to see them with [...] the café’s in the Plaza Mayor in Madrid, or the crispness of the air in Cuzco and I could see those named which were to me a set of magical talismans because Tridib had pointed them out to me on his tattered old Bartholomew’s Atlas...” (Ghosh, 24-25)

Space, in Ghosh’s narrative, is connected and Tridib’s flat in Calcutta is pivotal to this connection. It expands the territorial limits of existing nation-states which are laid out on the all-encompassing motif of the map. They are transfigured into imagined spaces that transcend the temporalities of history and the perpetuity of borders. For instance, Ghosh’s narrator shifts the centre of imagination from Tridib’s flat to Khulna, where Tridib died facing violent riots, and traces a ‘remarkable’ circle that mark the contentions of national identity,

“...within the tidy ordering of Euclidean space, Chiang Mai in Thailand was much nearer Calcutta than Delhi is; that Chengdu in China is nearer than Srinagar is. [...] It showed me that Hanoi and Chungking are nearer Khulna than Srinagar...” (Ghosh, 285)

realignment of the sense of geography happens through an acknowledgement of the subjective space that all human beings inhabit [...] and also by plotting the different points of the globe accurately measured pages of the Barthelomew’s Atlas...” (Mukherjee, 256)

Ghosh's narrator reimagines the world in "amazing circles" and is astonished by nations that appear to come together only to ensure the continuance of borders, fragmenting the hopes and aspirations of humanity. Further, the narrator is quick to realise that the spatial demarcations of the nation run deep, and communal disharmony affects national histories. For instance, drawing from another circle with "Milan as its centre and 1200 miles as its radius," (285) Ghosh's narrator ponders the interconnections of communities over imaginary spaces,

"I tried to imagine an event, any event, that might occur in a city near the periphery of the circle (or, indeed, much nearer) – Stockholm, Dublin, Casablanca, Alexandria, Istanbul, Kiev, any city in any direction at all – I tried to imagine an event that might happen in any of those places which would bring the people of Milan pouring out into the streets." (285)

The 'event' that makes individuals and communities assert their rights on the streets, obliquely reced in narratives and (un)written histories, is communalism. In fact, Anshuman A. Mondal identifies the communal borders that have been a part of the division of the Indian subcontinent as "an Other that secretly resides within the Self" (Mondal, 100) that remains unfathomable to Ghosh's narrator⁹³ arguing,

⁹³ See Anshuman A. Mondal's book *Amitav Ghosh: Contemporary World Writers*, (page-99) where Mondal interrogates communalism as "the 'other thing' of which the narrator of *The Shadow Lines* cannot speak." (Mondal, 99) and examines its resonating potential across nationalist histories.

“Far from being nationalism’s Other, ‘communalism’ was by and large implicated in, and even a determinant of, the development of early Indian nationalism. It is this existence of a strong strain of communitarian sensibility that led, perhaps inevitably, to a nationalist historiography which accentuated those communal divisions.”
(Mondal, 100)

Violent protests challenging the location of Prophet Muhammad’s hair reverberated in Khulna, Calcutta and Kashmir and was bizarrely situated in the narrator’s geopolitical mapping. Locating the riots in 1964 amidst “whole shelves of books on the war – histories, political analyses, memoirs, tracts – weighty testimony to the eloquence of war,” (272) Ghosh’s narrator obscures the boundaries between memory-making and nation-building. The co-ordinates of Calcutta, in India, and Khulna, in East Pakistan further converge in the narrator’s memory as Malik states, “these riots here happened in Khulna, in East Pakistan, across the border from Calcutta. [...] It’s really very strange that you should remember a riot that happened in Pakistan.” (274) The novel reflects on parallels between India and Pakistan, Calcutta and Dhaka and even East and West London, highlighting that borders are psychological as much as geographical shaped by memory, politics and perception. Additionally, for Ghosh, borders become more than arbitrary in postcolonial societies, they form a culmination of hidden and unclaimed histories. For instance, borders seem to entangle the narrator through their symmetry as both Calcutta and Khulna, divided by national boundaries, are equally embroiled in and devastated by communal rifts,

“The simple fact that there had never been a moment in the 400-year-old history of that map when the places we know as Dhaka and Calcutta were more closely bound to each other than after they had drawn their lines – so closely that I, in Calcutta, had only to look into the mirror to be in Dhaka, a moment when each city was the inverted image of the other.” (286)

The interplay of mirrors and inverted images in *The Shadow Lines* intensifies the ‘looking-glass border’ (219, 228, 286) metaphor that Ghosh uses to suggest that spaces are linked to each other through common histories and cultures like reflections in a mirror. Therefore, national borders cannot distinguish communities and individuals from one another as memories reinvent these spaces and reconstitute national identity. For example, Tridib’s death in Dhaka, a city that was once a part of undivided India, occurs in what has become a foreign nation (Bangladesh) due to partition. This incident in the novel challenges the idea that a line on the map cannot separate communities or change identities. These spaces mirror each other – what happens on one side of the border often echoes on the other – underscoring a shared colonial past and cultural continuities thereafter. Additionally, contradicting centuries of map-making, Ghosh’s narrator uncovers the possibilities of border-crossing. Anshuman A. Mondal, stating, “*The Shadow Lines* probably represents Ghosh’s most direct confrontation with nationalism and national identity,” (Mondal, 87) affirms that national identity develops in the movements across territorial and intergenerational borders. In *The Shadow Lines*, the narrator’s upbringing is increasingly punctuated by the experience of dislocation. In fact, the primary

figures of cosmopolitanism⁹⁴ for the narrator were Mayadebi and Tridib who emerge as travellers defying traditional and spatial relations. As relationships that tie people to families and communities are equally binding, by refusing to refer to Mayadebi as “Mayathakuma” (Maya grandmother), Ghosh’s narrator situates her beyond borders, “I could not bring myself to believe that their worth in my eyes could be reduced to something so arbitrary and unimportant as a blood relationship.” (3) While Mayadebi escapes the restraints of filial relationships, Tridib moves amidst spaces as a familiar figure that is peculiarly displaced. In fact, the narrator establishes Tridib in a transcendence in the crowds of Gole Park,

“...when he was the centre of everybody’s attention, there was always something a little detached about his manner. [...] he was happiest in neutral, impersonal places— coffee houses, bars, street-corner addas – the sort of places where people come, talk and go away without expecting to know each other any further.” (11)

Tridib’s “reservoirs of abstruse information” (10) takes the narrator around the world navigating inter-national borders. His engaging conversations about “Mesopotamian stelae, East European Jazz, the habits of arboreal apes, the plays of Garcia Lorca,” (10) make spaces boundless, and nations imaginary. However, John Mee, in the essay, “The Burthen of Mystery: Imagination and Difference in *The Shadow Lines*,” argues, “Tridib’s

⁹⁴ See Elizabeth Jackson’s essay, “Cosmopolitan Attitudes and Cosmopolitan Identities in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines*,” (Page – 173) where Jackson situates the theorisations of cosmopolitanism. According to the varied understanding of cosmopolitanism, Tridib emerges as the curious, ‘culturally open’ traveller.

aspirations to think across the differences of time and space are interwoven with a powerful sense of the materiality of location. He thinks *across* cultures rather than *beyond* them,” (Khair, 91) Mee adds an important dimension to cosmopolitanism in Ghosh’s narrative – that of positionality. In fact, examining Ghosh’s literary works, Inderpal Grewal argues,

“Cosmopolitanism provided a means to forge connections with regions with similar colonial histories and to imagine a “world without Europe” and without invidious nationalisms; cosmopolitanism existed in trading communities that lived without violence before the coming of Europeans. Yet this version was not so far from the European conceptualization of cosmopolitanism in which it did not create “world citizens” but produced traders who worked together despite national boundaries and nationalisms.” (Krishnaswamy and Hawley, 183)

Issues of cosmopolitanism are exemplified in Tridib’s character as he oscillates between the extravagance of “his journey to England” (15) and the assumption that “he’s a nut – he’s never been anywhere outside Calcutta.” (15) Tridib manipulates personal and political spaces; his imagination ascertains his multi-locationality as he reinvents places and reconfigures livelihoods across borders. For instance, when Queen Victoria, Ila’s mother, re-tells a horrific experience at their house in Colombo, Tridib insists that the narrator imagine the minute details of their life:

“Did you notice that Ila’s house had a sloping roof? [...] imagine what it would be like to live under a sloping roof – no place to fly kites, nowhere to hide when one wanted to sulk, nowhere to shout across to one’s friend.” (35, 36)

Tridib’s imagination not only transcends national frontiers but also imbibes a sense of worldliness in him as distant places are close and unbounded. While the assertion, “a place does not merely exist, [...] it has to be invented in one’s imagination,” (26) transfigures the narrator into an enigmatic perpetrator of his uncle Tridib’s cosmopolitan attitudes, his trans-national position is an extrapolation of memories rather than first-hand experiences. His actual expeditions are a re-enactment of Lionel Tresawson’s voyages, Tridib’s experience with May, and Ila’s life in London to name a few. Therefore, the narrator, much like nations connected through ‘looking glass borders,’ is connected to the characters in the novel through family stories, silences and emotional legacies. His retrospective narration connects personal memory with collective history, showing that individuals live with the emotional residue of borders long after they are drawn. Contrary to Tridib’s notion of “inventing what we saw,” without which “we would never be free of other people’s inventions,” (39) the narrator’s experiences are ‘invented’ through the transparency and mimetic potential of borders that form the seamless fabric of the narrative. For instance, the act of remembering⁹⁵ is a particularly enabling idea which transpires the immediacy and adjacency of the narrator’s experiences. Imagining Tridib as an eight-year-old travelling to England, the narrator says, “I have come to believe that

⁹⁵ See Suvir Kaul’s essay, “Separation Anxiety: Growing Up Inter/National in Amitav Ghosh and A. N Kaul’s edition of “The Shadow Lines” (page- 126, 127) where Kaul traces the intricacies of memory in *The Shadow Lines*.

I was eight too when Tridib first talked to me about that journey. [...] I had decided that he had looked like me.” (3,4) Mirroring Tridib’s trips to seemingly distant lands, the narrator attempts to retrace his steps through historical events in London. Further, Nick Price develops as a “spectral presence” (61) in the “mirrors of [...] boyhood” (186) that consistently challenges the narrator along the illusory borders of his consciousness. In fact, Anshuman A. Mondal examines the tension between the narrator and Nick’s position in terms of colonialism and masculinity as Nick appears “always bigger and better, and in some ways more desirable [...] always a head taller.” (49)” (Mondal, 90). The narrator builds relationships transversely, manoeuvring nations and cultures through the interconnections of cartographic and reflective lines that support the nuances of his postcolonial cosmopolitan identity. Thus, borders of place, space, city, map, and atlas are perforated by questions of identity, subjectivity, history, and imagination, asserting that lines imposed on human life have constantly been challenged. Ghosh’s narrator establishes the cursoriness and inconsequentiality of borders associating emphatic personal meanings through, “a longing for everything that was not in oneself, a torment of the flesh, that carried one beyond limits of one’s mind to other times and other places, and even, if one was lucky, to a place where there were no borders between oneself and one’s image in the mirror.” (36) Ghosh’s narrative uses the unnamed narrator to understand the illusory frontiers that both segregate personal and political reimaginings and create a simultaneous possibility of worldliness within the boundaries of national, domestic, and gendered spaces.

Cosmopolitan perspectives in *The Shadow Lines*, develop as an introspection of private and public spaces along the borders of post-imperial relations built by independent India. Ghosh's cosmopolitan context, stressing on universal access, renders nation-states and nationalist consciousness as dated and discontinued and develops "as an intellectual, ethic or political project that can better express or embody genuine universalism."⁹⁶ (Cheah, 21) It engages with the dialectical relationship that global flows have with intrinsic ties of the bounded nation-state and the emotive production of home. Writers and theorists have attempted to understand emerging cosmopolitan temperaments in postcolonial societies and their relationship with the anchorage of home. For instance, Kwame Anthony Appiah, in the essay "Cosmopolitan Patriots," expands on the idea of a 'rooted cosmopolitanism' or 'cosmopolitan patriotism' arguing,

"...the cosmopolitan patriot can entertain the possibility of a world in which everyone is a rooted cosmopolitan, attached to a home of one's own, with its own cultural particularities, but taking pleasure from the presence of other, different places that are home to other, different people. The cosmopolitan also imagines that in such a world not everyone will find it best to stay in their natal patria, so that the circulation of people among different localities will involve not only cultural tourism (which the cosmopolitan admits to enjoying) but migration, nomadism, diaspora." (Appiah, 618)

⁹⁶ See Pheng Cheah's book *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation*.

The attachment of every cosmopolitan to their origin – their home – destabilises the ideas on which cosmopolitanism continues to retain itself: finding a home in the world.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, the inversion of such an idea locates the investments of home along postcolonial developments, cross-cultural linkages and humanistic potential for acceptance and empathy⁹⁸ In fact, Shameem Black, in the essay “Cosmopolitanism At Home: Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines*,” asserts on the vantage point of home and locates cosmopolitanism as “less invested in a traditional idea of feeling “at home” in the world and more committed to recognizing “the world” through the home.” (Black, 45) Black’s study of *The Shadow Lines*, further establishes that “Those who immerse themselves within kinship networks and family spaces ironically emerge as the most flexible cosmopolitan thinkers, while those who evade the power of the domestic also fail to flourish as transnational citizens.” (Black, 46) Interestingly, while Tridib, and the narrator incorporate both the national and trans-national dimensions of the world in the narrative, the domestic space is increasingly feminised and develops as a contradictory force that such amenable cosmopolitan identities struggle to grapple with. Further, Elisabeth Jackson, in the essay “Cosmopolitan Attitudes and Cosmopolitan Identities in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines*” argues,

“In this era of increased migration, many people self-identify as bicultural, culturally hybrid, or members of diasporas, but how do we describe the identities of people

⁹⁷ See Graham Huggan’s book *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* and Bishnupriya Ghosh’s, *When Borne Across* where cosmopolitanism is examined in the context of establishing a dialogue with the world.

⁹⁸ See Kwame Anthony Appiah’s essay, “Cosmopolitan Patriots” (Page- 617,618) where Appiah’s anecdotal take on the idea of “citizens of the world” is explored.

who have grown up in so many different places around the world that they have no answer to the question, “Where are you from?” These people have cosmopolitan identities, and as such, they are often Othered, stereotyped, and excluded...” (Jackson, 174)

Ila, the cross-border migrant in Ghosh’s narrative, is increasingly stereotyped as the ‘rootless cosmopolitan,’ and often denied a voice. Additionally, other female characters, like Thamma (narrator’s grandmother) and May, are problematised as alternatives to the free-flowing attitudes of cosmopolitanism. The position of the female characters contrasts the post-nationalist need to build communities.⁹⁹ While male characters like the narrator and Tridib reminisce the construction of a world beyond borders, home and nation – spaces against which wars have been waged and frontiers have been erected – are associated with women. Comparably, Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* delineates the idea of the nation through shifting parallels of migration and settlement while female characters are tangentially reworked into physical and cultural attributes of the home/land or ‘Des.’¹⁰⁰ It is, therefore, imperative to locate them in the context of the postcolonial nation-building process in the narrative.

⁹⁹ See Tabhish Khair’s book *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Companion* (page- 118,119) where Anjali Gera’s essay comments on cosmopolitanism in Amitav Ghosh’s narrative.

¹⁰⁰ See Anjali Gera’s essay, “Des Kothay? Amitav Gosh Tells Old Wives Tales,” as a part of Tabhish Khair’s book, *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Companion*, where the linguistic and cultural associations of the term ‘Des’ is explored. Translating the Bengali term “Des Kothay?” in English as “where is your country?” Gera argues, “Country can denote both region and particular village,” (Khair, 109) and establishes the female figures like Thamma and Ila as the progenitors of the nation that scribe the idea of home in *The Shadow Lines*.

Opposing the multiplicity of national and cultural reconstructions chronicled by Ghosh's narrator, female characters seek out a personalised and paradigmatic idea of home. For instance, Thamma circumscribes home in an evocative portrayal of nationalist sentiments. She inscribes borders as vivaciously and efficaciously as Ghosh's narrator questions them. For her, nations are forged in the volatility of warfare and border construction which leads her to fiercely condemn Ila's migrant identity,

“It took those people a long time to build that country; hundreds of years, years and years of war and bloodshed. Everyone who lives there has earned his right to be there with blood: with their brother's blood and their father's blood and their son's blood. They know they're a nation because they have drawn their borders with blood.” (96)

For Thamma national borders were imagined and drawn by men; the consanguinity of the nation was retained by masculine assertions of valour and bloodshed. However, Thamma's desire for freedom situates her in the longstanding traditions of nationalism in Bengal which developed “clandestine networks” (46) producing “home-made bombs with which they try to assassinate British officials and policemen,” (46) and incorporated extraordinary histories of Khudiram Bose, Bagha Jatin, and the unknown boy from Dhaka. However, beyond the larger historical contexts that develop the idea of the nation, Thamma roots the idea of the nation in the intense steadfastness of home. For instance, she appreciates Robi for his muscular physiology and urges the narrator to play cricket promoting the physicality of the body without which “you can't build a strong country.” (9)

Nation-building, for Thamma, begins at home and, having witnessed a disputed and divided household growing up, she outrightly embraces its physical presence as a critical part of creating the national bonds and ties. Further, as Thamma's enforced will to make her grandchildren diligent upholders of the nation and home progresses, she becomes the embodiment of a mother figure that refuses to negotiate with any outside influence, be it Tridib's idle travelling or Ila's 'foreignness.' In fact, the narrator, referring to her as a "placental presence," (147) intensifies Thamma's position as the progenitor of the radical and emotional confines of home and nation. Therefore, much like Ketu H. Katrak's argument, in *Politics of the Female Body: Postcolonial Women Writers of the Third World*, "Mothering is located within specific historic times and spaces, [...] between reproduction and production," (Katrak, 210) Thamma's mother figure is sustained as the link between the private space and the publicised national identity, a position, ironically, strengthened by her displacement. Thamma's matriarchal presence is an embodiment of home that engulfs the splitting of the two nations – India and East Pakistan. For instance, her need to bring her uncle back to India, a country she re-created as her own develops a complex understanding of national borders in Ghosh's narrative. Interestingly, while Thamma travelled to India after partition and her uncle chose to stay in Dhaka, the borders forming their individual national identities became lines of belonging that tend to connect generations fortified by familial bonds and blood relationships. The borders that Thamma assertively believes in are not essentially territorial, but boundaries that contribute to the process of homemaking in the deeper recesses of a turbulent national history. It is by navigating Thamma's search for "trenches [...] or soldiers or guns pointing at each other, or even just barren strips of land," (185) that form the borders of the nation and her dismal

acceptance in the question, “What was it all for then [...] if there isn’t something in between?” (186) that Ghosh destabilises the narrative of the nation. Thamma struggles to belong and her reality beyond borders is enfeebled, so much so that her identity is entrenched in the stability of her family – her idea of home. She is, therefore, established as a fierce propagator of the idea of home, beyond which the collapsing national borders giving way to global influences stand to be meaningless. While Thamma develops as a foregrounding figure of nationalist consciousness and freedom, Ila and May become the threads that highlight postcolonial India’s inter-national exposure and contribute to the nuanced idea of home.

While both Tridib and Ila have unique cosmopolitan traits, Tridib is admired as an explorer whereas Ila is depicted as a critique of cultural Eurocentrism and the simultaneous construction of postcolonial migrant identity. For instance, Ghosh’s narrator presents a sartorially exotic portrayal of Ila as she travels ‘home’ to India which is, in Emily Jackson’s words, “non-western but also attractively elite.”¹⁰¹ In fact the narrator expresses disappointment as she appears “dressed in a simple white sari with a red border like any Bethune College girl on her way to a lecture.” (23) Under the narrator’s constant scrutinizing eye, Ila is unsettled, constantly devoid of the cultural affiliations of postcolonial

¹⁰¹ See Emily Jackson’s essay, “Cosmopolitan Identities and Cosmopolitan Attitudes in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines*,” where Jackson quotes from Ghosh’s novel and argues that the narrator outrightly expresses “his feelings of intrigue and attraction to Ila’s “western” appearance as a young adult: “She looked improbably exotic to me, dressed in faded jeans and a T-shirt – like no girl I had ever seen before except in pictures in American magazines.” (79) If Ila is exoticized by the narrator as “western,” she is exoticized simultaneously but differently by her housemates in London who refer to her as “our own upper-class Asian Marxist” (95)” (Jackson, 177)

India. Further, Ila stands between the historical revolutions in the West and the voiceless histories of the “backward world” (129) and becomes an embodiment of the Eurocentric perspectives that diasporas and migrants like her grow up with,

“...there’s a joy merely in knowing that you’re a part of history [...] You wouldn’t understand the exhilaration of events like that – nothing really important ever happens where you are.

Well of course there are famines and riots and disasters, she said. But those are local things, after all – not like revolutions or antifascist wars, nothing that sets a political example to the world, nothing that’s really remembered.” (128)

Ila’s understanding of political and cultural changes across nations is biased and influenced by her limited perception of antecedental cross-border history. In fact, for Emily Jackson, “It might also be a parody of widespread prejudices against people like Ila, who are often assumed to have a narrow and ignorant Eurocentric mindset.” (Jackson, 178) Ghosh’s narrator, therefore, places Ila as an alternative perception of the national and communal insurgencies that have shaped the postcolonial condition of India, a brutal yet silent face of history that Ghosh’s penmanship struggles to confront. Ila’s position as a postcolonial migrant develops in idiomatic and personalised narratives. For instance, as Ila shares the story of Magda, her personal experience of racial discrimination and seclusion comes to the fore. In fact, her loneliness in the massive history of the world as an ‘Indian’ that Nick Price was ashamed to be associated with is key to her displaced identity. However, while, in Ila’s story, Magda was walked home by a companion like Nick,

Ila herself was perpetually seeking to belong in the shifting spaces of her existence. For instance, “The Yearbooks of the International Schools of whatever city she happened to be living in at that time” (27) were filled with stories like that of Magda’s rescue, from where “she herself was unaccountably absent.” (28) Further, as Anjali Gera locates *The Shadow Lines* in the constraints of the “native and migrant psyche,” she argues, “Ghosh contrasts settled places with new places of migrancy,” (Khair, 118) and delves into the complexities of the displaced migrant identity,

“Thamma’s family, still bearing the traces of displacement, attempts to settle down in a new land by constructing a new place-identity in relation to built urban places. Their home in their rented accommodation in South Calcutta provides the growing boy a stable sense of place. Ila, the migrant post-colonial, must mark a locality in her shifting spaces by charting a personal pattern...” (Khair, 118)

Against Thamma’s invented abode and the narrator’s comfortable upper middle-class upbringing, Ila seeks refuge by connecting the fixed points of her migrant identity – along the Ladies at the airport and the Underground – which remain constant along her transitioning spaces. *The Shadow Lines* propagates the idea of cosmopolitanism that spans the globe and advocates a universal sense of belonging through its male characters. Ila, who travels and experiences such a universalism, stands out to be a vehement purveyor of the fixities of home. In fact, the narrator’s trivialization of Ila’s migrant identity and the fraught conditions of her rootlessness by claiming, “the inventions she lived in moved with her, so although she had lived in many places, she had never

travelled at all,” (26) depicts the inability of both Tridib’s and the narrator’s imagination to comprehend Ila’s migrant perspective. Commenting on the idea of travel, Emily Jackson argues, “the two men place far greater value on their own perspectives gleaned through imaginative travel than on their female cousin’s perspectives and experiences learned through actual travel.”¹⁰² (Jackson, 178) Importantly, while Thamma reinvents nation and national identity by affirming a patriarchal language of nationalistic freedom, Ila contemplates nation through her Eurocentric lens and deems culture as an oppressive system that she consistently renounces. For instance, what transpired after Ila, Robi and the narrator visited The Grand Hotel was a deeper understanding of Ila’s hapless cosmopolitan identity,

“Do you see now why I’ve chosen to live in London? Do you see? It’s only because I want to be free.

Free of what? I said.

Free of *you!* she shouted back. Free of your bloody culture and free of all of you.”

(109)

However, in her search for freedom, Ila recognises western lifestyle and consciousness as her only channel of evasion which, Jon Mee argues, is merely “a means of escape from the specific cultural practices that oppress her within her own culture.”¹⁰³ (Khair, 103) While Ila’s was a “freedom that could be bought for the price of an air ticket,” (110) she

¹⁰² See Emily Jackson’s essay, “Cosmopolitan Attitudes and Cosmopolitan Identities in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines*” (177, 178)

¹⁰³ See Tabish Khair’s book *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Companion* (page 103, 104)

fails to see the limitations of the “western enlightenment”¹⁰⁴ and, contrary to her prerogative, remains committed to a troubled marriage with Nick Price. Thus, Ghosh’s narrative situates Ila’s desire for the stability in her search for an ultimate confinement. Her idea of home, although transcending nations and cultures, languishes irrevocably in an unhappy marriage. It is, paradoxically, guided by the very cultural values that her trans-national existence attempts to elude.

Female characters in *The Shadow Lines* have effectively engaged with their changing socio-political positions in the nation-building process. Rajeshwari Sundar Rajan,¹⁰⁵ notes that Ila and Thamma exemplify “two of the characteristic forms of twentieth century diaspora: Ila is the post-colonial cosmopolitan, while her great-aunt is – though she refuses the term – a refugee.” (Ghosh et al., 289) May Price, on the other hand, houses the remnants of the turbulent colonial past that showcases itself in India’s postcolonial future. As a British woman who works for welfare organisations like Amnesty International, she is relentlessly focalised, by male protagonists in the narrative, as the exotic outsider – both in terms of the nation and the narrative. For instance, in a nation that is coming to terms with its internalised communal and cultural conflicts, May’s desire to think beyond them is unique and often isolating. Her moralistic way of life is projected in two different, almost identical, scenarios in the narrative as Tridib’s imminent death is pictured in the unruly presence of a dying and abandoned dog. As she releases the dog

¹⁰⁴ See Jon Mee’s essay, “Imagination and Difference in *The Shadow Lines*,” as a part of Tabhish Khair’s book, *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Companion* (page 103) where Mee discusses Ila’s desire for freedom as “she narrates herself out of India to be free of its story of a ‘proper’ role for women...” (Khair, 103)

¹⁰⁵ See Amitav Ghosh and A.N Kaul’s edition of *The Shadow Lines*.

of its misery and tries to use the same strength and determination amidst the riots in Khulna, she not only becomes the last piece of puzzle in Tridib's tragedy but also in the macro-politics of a disputed postcolonial nation. In fact, May becomes the archetype of the saviour of the nation who is struggling to grasp the gaps in India's geopolitical space: "I could have gone right into that mob and they wouldn't have touched me, an English memsahib, [...] I was arrogant enough to think I owed him his life, but I know now I didn't kill him [...] He gave himself up; it was a sacrifice." (308) By referring to Tridib's death as a 'sacrifice,' May is able to create an emotional angle¹⁰⁶ around Tridib's character who had so far been distant and aloof in the narrative. Further, May first appears in the novel as an 'English Memsahib' when Tridib narrates the "story of his journey to England" (13) to the people at Gole Park, overtly sexualised by them: "And what's she like? a voice asked. Sexy?" (14) Ongoing discussions about her physical features – her voice, her shoulders, and her face – contribute to the process of locating her as an 'other' in an Indian society steeped in colonial history. Unlike Thamma and Ila who share filial bonds with Tridib and the narrator, May's physicality links two separate journeys: she is seen by Tridib and remembered by the narrator, becoming a metaphor for travel and cross-border relations. Additionally, May's presence develops as an alternative force to the narrator's imagination that drives the narrative of *The Shadow Lines*. Pooja Sancheti, in the essay "Recovering May Price: A Longitudinal Reading of Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*," locates

¹⁰⁶ See Suvir Kaul's essay, "Separation Anxiety: Growing Up Inter/National in Amitav Ghosh and A.N Kaul's edition of *The Shadow Lines*." (Page – 133)

“In many ways, May is the one who remembers. She readjusts the narrator’s exaggerated impression of Nick Price, faithful as it was to Ila’s fantasy version of Nick that she relayed to the narrator. May’s corrections span minor physical details (Nick has straw-coloured rather than yellow hair [Ghosh, SL 58]), his ambition (he wanted to become a chartered accountant rather than travel the world [58]), and, of course, a witness’ account of the racist attack on Ila [...] in terms of conflicting forces in the narrative, she remembers, while Tridib and the narrator are more prone to imagine.” (Sancheti, 111)

While Thamma and Ila are considerably distanced from the tragedy of Tridib’s death, May’s physical presence evolves as the narrator’s only access to it and becomes the literal conclusion of *The Shadow Lines*. The “final redemptive mystery” (309) that she provides delivers the narrator of his apprehensions as they “lay in each other’s arms quietly,” (309) developing as a metaphor for the recuperating potential of home in tandem. However, May’s ironic position embodying the finality of return, while locating her as a gendered portrayal of home, raises important issues around sexual violence and lack of voice. In fact, Pooja Sancheti rightly argues, “while the novel nobly tackles tricky issues of communal violence, death, and the messiness of memory, [...] its treatment of gendered violence is less nuanced.” (Sancheti, 105) Largely, *The Shadow Lines*, as a dialogic reimagination of the postcolonial nation, is an interaction between two men beyond the generation gap that separates them. May emerges as the foundation of such interactions; Her body transcends intergenerational and intercultural barriers to propagate patriarchal narratives that ultimately distort the rudiments of the colonial nation-state.

Tridib's letter to May, though romanticising the reunion of two lovers, projected unsolicited sexual desires and fantasies onto her body. The sheer lack of consent that leaves May speechless and shivering depicts the ways in which she is silenced in the narrative. Further, the narrator, on his trip to London, makes sexual advances on her which the narrative is quick to discard, yet again denying her the voice and the defences required to respond to such rampant sexualisations. May, unlike Ila – who sought home in temporary stoppages, and Thamma – who reinvents home on the land that has offered her refuge, both inhabits and houses the obscurities of home amidst postcolonial and transnational migrations. In doing so, the women character arcs in the narrative attempt to converge their personal and cosmopolitan journeys into nuanced ideas of home. Additionally, women in Ghosh's narrative, developing as opposites of each other¹⁰⁷ and deeply entrenched in the narrative of the nation, mirror the close ties they have with the relatively mobile male characters. It is because of the male characters' ability to traverse illusory borders forming personal and interpersonal connections that women are significantly rooted: converging binaries of personal and political journeys, nation and trans-national engagements and home and away. Thus, female characters in Ghosh's narrative become the pillars on which a reimagination of postcolonial India is deemed possible and, later, tend to bear tenacious roots of home within the convolutions of the narrative.

¹⁰⁷ See Pooja Sancheti's essay, "Recovering May Price: A Longitudinal Reading of Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*" (Page – 111, 112)

In *The Shadow Lines*, Amitav Ghosh's idea of the nation proliferates in the fluctuations of the storytelling process. Ghosh's narrative alternates between his omniscient narrator's personal opinions and the overlapping movements of people and their individual stories across illusive borders. The narrative, much like the idea of the nation, is charted on the existing inconsistencies of colonial mapmaking where Ghosh impinges the commonly excluded cross-cultural and diasporic journeys that have contributed to the formation of postcolonial nations. The two parts dividing *The Shadow Lines* – 'Going Away' and 'Coming Home' complicate the "'classical' mapping of the world into East and West" (Khair, 19) and introduce innumerable relationships formed due to cross-border interactions as integral to the nation-building process. Interestingly, Tabhish Khair, in *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Companion*, argues,

"The irony is that his characters come and go in so many directions that the narrator is obliged to pose the question, what is home, and is there such a thing as a discrete homeland separable from one's experiences elsewhere?" (Khair, 19)

Khair interrogates the presence of concrete and tangible ideas of home in *The Shadow Lines* that effectively respond to the distress of being plucked from one's homeland and exposed to transnational and diasporic existence. Homes are etched as the foundational aspect of the postcolonial and national identity as they navigate and chart internal conflicts and aspirations. In fact, Meenakshi Mukherjee, in the essay "Maps and Mirrors: Co-ordinates of Meaning in *The Shadow Lines*,"¹⁰⁸ observes, "Maps in this novel are not

¹⁰⁸ See Amitav Ghosh and A.N Kaul's edition of *The Shadow Lines*.

confined to the atlas; floor plans drawn in the dust by children playing Houses provide a clue to past and future reality..." (Ghosh and Kaul, 260) Homes, therefore, form the internal structure of the novel as well as develop the external framework that sustains the narrative. Further, Shameem Black, in the essay "Cosmopolitanism at Home: Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*," locates the substantial idea of home well beyond its physical and structural limits arguing,

"In Ghosh's work, the idea of home emerges most forcefully as a doubled form of physical and social architecture. Houses, flats, roofs and domestic artefacts shape the inner world of the novel, while the bonds of extended kinship networks provide metaphorical structures within which the characters develop over time" (Black, 46)

Further, as homes are reconstituted in the interior domain of the novel, women emerge as the propagators of its inveterate presence that reinforces national and cultural identities. For instance, Thamma, uprooted from her homeland painfully succumbs to the lacuna in language in her search for home in Dhaka. As the narrator enthusiastically points out Thamma's erroneous understanding of "coming and going" in the lines, "Tha'mma, Tha'mma! I cried. How could you have 'come' home to Dhaka? You don't know the difference between coming and going!" (187) it is evident that it is not Thamma's journey towards home but her complicated sense of place and identity that makes her desire for home through language onerous,

“...what my grandmother was looking for was a word for a journey which was not a coming or a going at all; a journey that was a search for precisely that fixed point which permits the proper use of verbs of movement,” (188)

In addition to language, Thamma’s search for home in Dhaka oscillates on the expanse of memory and reality. For instance, in the deeper entrails of her memory, Dhaka emerges in her invention of the ‘upside-down house’ which develops as her refuge from the turbulent times in the past when litigations had divided her house. Further, in the wake of the partition, Thamma’s house is occupied by Muslim refugees from India which undermines her position as a resident trying to assert her claims on nation, home and sense of belonging that is long lost. In fact, as Tridib refers to her as “as foreign here as May,” (230) Thamma’s presence as a former native and a present-day tourist in Dhaka stands to uncover the contentions of her postcolonial identity. Thamma’s search for Dhaka, therefore, is her unending quest for a fixed and rooted identity that is encapsulated by the comforts of the domestic space which she oftentimes interchangeably associates with the idea of the nation. In Ghosh’s narrative domestic spaces increasingly produce layouts of the postcolonial nation. For instance, Ila’s game of Houses, for Anjali Gera, is a game that requires one to “suspend disbelief,” (Khair, 116) where with a rearrangement of lines and imagination “We can choose to build a house wherever we like.” (86) Interestingly, such rearrangements are conspicuous in the narrator’s storytelling process as individual occurrences and episodic retelling of stories contribute to the development of postcolonial nations. Both Tridib and the narrator have attempted to thwart the political borders of the nation with a reconstruction through narratives. As Ila creates a story about

Magda and Nick Price while playing Houses and Thamma creates a story about her old house in Dhaka, their fictive representations are given due diligence by Tridib in the lines, “Everyone lives in a story [...] because stories are all there are to live in, it was just a question of which one you choose...” (224) However, the agency to choose their stories seem to lie with the men. For instance, the old man refusing to move from his home in Dhaka is one of the most prominent displays of the narrative of the nation and its steady restructuring,

“I don’t believe in this India-Shindia. It’s all very well, you’re going away now, but suppose when you get there they decide to draw another line somewhere? What will you do then? Where will you move to? No one will have you anywhere. As for me I was born here, and I’ll die here.” (264)

Women, in *The Shadow Lines*, are quite literally wrought in the act of writing which contours the national and cultural sensibilities of the men who inscribe them. For instance, in a letter he wrote to May, Tridib invents a story about meeting her as “strangers-across-the-seas [...] in a place without a past, without history...” (177) where May is deeply embedded in Tridib’s perspectives and textual progressions. In fact, she asserts, “It was an intrusion, a violation of her privacy,” (177) and her trembling body symbolises her reluctant recuperation in Tridib’s story. Further, while the narrator is able to erase Ila’s blueprint of a house, she is not necessarily free of his story. As Ila struggles to be free of repressive cultural affiliations the narrator affirms, “You cannot be free of me because *I am within you...* just as you are within me.” (110) Shameem Black, in the essay,

“Cosmopolitanism at Home: Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines*,” rightly argues, “the male characters in *The Shadow Lines* often find domestic engagements to be liberating sources of cosmopolitan power,” (Black, 47) and the narratives that connect all the characters in *The Shadow Lines* form the most prominent domestic structure that effectively intertwines the women. While the narrator is “happy to be bound” (110) and romanticises the metaphor of the domestic space, the women in Ghosh’s narrative attempt to recreate spaces to support their potential for liberation.

Female characters continually negotiate cultural, patriarchal, and romantic assertions of home in *The Shadow Lines*. While Thamma’s national and cultural identity is relocated across political borders and is gravely fractured in the quest for her ‘Dhakaian’ origin, the borders on her mind remain steadfast and are refuelled by war and bloodshed. Having sold her chain to support the war, Thamma advocates, “We have to kill them before they kill us; we have to wipe them out. [...] We’re fighting them properly at last, with tanks and guns and bombs.” (291) Further, Ila is bounded by terms like ‘whore’ condemning her migrant identity to mere patriarchal control as well as the narrator’s unrequited love that, unlike his predilection, held her “hostage” (138) within his political and cultural assumptions. Additionally, Ila’s game of Houses reappears in Raibajar as the mirroring borders of the narrative trace years of unfulfilled love and Ila is once again reconfigured in the narrator’s story as continuing infatuation. While Thamma and Ila navigate home and national identity in the narrative, May conjoins it. She translates the silences that emerge as “a gap, a hole, an emptiness in which there are no words” (267) in the narrator’s mind where an untraced history of communal violence and Tridib’s death

resides. The clandestine textual evidence of communal violence and the foreboding reticence of Tridib's death were all provided with an apparently fitting conclusion by May in Ghosh's narrative. Jon Mee, however, disapproves of the finality of May's version of Tridib's story arguing, "Given that the novel is carefully constituted in terms of a 'clamour of... voices', translations between different personal cultural and historical experiences, why should this last one be given an ultimate authority by readers?" (Khair, 106) Amidst other narratives about Tridib's death, May's personalised narration apparently overpowers the historical and political directions of Ghosh's narrative as her presence emphasizes on the absurdity of borders. Listening to her account, the narrator is finally able to see through the illusions of borders that divide and yet trap people in repeating cycles of violence, grief and longing. Additionally, the final image of Tridib's death in May's narration is like a moral echo – a reminder of what is lost when fixed boundaries and false heroism of sacrifices instead of empathy and solidarity across them. May's account of the incident, however, is not a closure in the traditional sense. What it brings to a close is the narrator's long obsession with Tridib's death. The novel ends with a sense of quiet devastation, not a resolution. Further, May herself becomes the link through which nationalist reconstructions were embraced and cosmopolitan postcolonial identity developed alongside a renewed understanding of regional, communal, national and trans-national borders. For instance, her narration of the violence around Tridib's death pierces through the fantasy around cross-border interactions, revealing the real consequences of imaginary divisions. Finally, May's account is also important in terms of the unconsummated lover that connects her to both Tridib and the narrator. The act of accessing her at different timelines by two different men is a cross-border journey that

emerges in the novel. Rajeshwari Sundar Rajan, in the essay, “The Division of Experience in *The Shadow Lines*” argues, “Both Tridib and the narrator do finally possess May. But the terms of consummated love remain unspecified; it is imbued with transience and desperation, not by any assurance of permanence or fulfilment.” (Ghosh and Kaul, 290) Thus, May has the potential to develop as an embodiment of home both through her body and her experience as a witness to a personal tragedy. However, it is May’s presence as the decisive voice that the novel ends with which ultimately reappropriates her as an epitome of the refuge and resolution associated with home. Breaking the evident discontinuities of Ghosh’s narrative where the trajectories of “Going Away” and “Coming Home” are multidirectional and fragmented, May emerges as a fixed point that deploys a sense of redemption to the raised questions on national identity and border construction. Thus, women in *The Shadow Lines* create and embody the peculiar slants of individual journeys, restitution, hope and recuperation that are associated with the idea of home amidst diasporic conditions.

Conclusion

Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* is indeed a textual record of voices in the narrator’s mind that navigate nation against the backdrop of cosmopolitanism. In fact, for Inderpal Grewal, ‘the second half of the twentieth century’ propagated,

“a new discourse of cosmopolitanism as a form of belonging that placed through the articulation of displacement; it understood its place in comparison with others. [...] but it also inserted persons across the world into the consumption of literary texts

as a source of aesthetic and artistic value, which in turn gave readers and buyers a new cultural capital.” (Krishnaswamy and Hawley, 181)

The apparent ‘sense of place’ or belonging in the global orientations of the world fostered by cosmopolitanism is evocatively depicted in *The Shadow Lines* through the characterisations of Tridib and the narrator. However, cosmopolitanism is as emplaced in the narrative as nations, communities and cultures – figuratively sustained by the very borders Ghosh’s narrative attempts to surpass. It is within these borders that the characters in the novel consistently navigate the idea of home, entwined with national identity, postcolonial developments and cross-border interactions. Ghosh situates women characters in an incompleteness and incoherence; It can be associated with an inherent sense of rootlessness and developing diasporic consciousness in the narrative. With Thamma’s unrelented search for her version of Dhaka and Ila’s desire to locate herself along her journeys, Ghosh portrays women as unanchored subjects of the postcolonial nation. Additionally, women in *The Shadow Lines* have been subject to the narrative’s inadequacies, as it develops into a partial and fragmentary rewriting of characters whose stories are sieved through the narrator’s own presuppositions. Therefore, when Thamma reinvents her identity as a nationalist promoting territorial borders and Ila contradicts the narrator’s prerogative in the lines “I only talked like that to shock you, and because you seemed to expect it of me somehow,” (231) their itinerant personalities evolve untampered by the narrator. In fact, it is beyond the narrator’s imagined postcolonial nation and conjured sense of vitality and refuge in domestic spaces that the women in the narrative fiercely seek the idea of home. Therefore, home develops encroaching the

boundaries that sustain territorial, cultural, temporal and narratorial realities and, owing to its translative potential, often elides borders of language and comprehension. While the physical structure of houses, maps, floorplans and filial relations appear to bind the narrative together, restructuring its movements, fallacies and journeys, women characters remain as preservers of the idea of home beyond borders. They develop as a concurrent and auxiliary parts of the narrative that sustain cosmopolitan identities and their undulating connections to the imagined homeland. Further, much like the foreboding silence around Tridib's death and, in extension, around communal violence within the nation, women's narratives grapple with the lack of voice and agency. Characters like Ila and Thamma are identified as mere contortions of the narrator's idea of cosmopolitanism who are hardly given a chance to explain their transnational positions. Additionally, May is imbued with an, in Pooja Sancheti's words, "obscene meekness" (Sancheti, 107) on the face of sexual violation. She is never able to fully confront the narrator or Tridib about her discomfort in situations where she is identified in terms of her exotic appeal. This disconcerting 'silence' that permeates Ghosh's female characters in the narrative is integral to their position in postcolonial India. Amidst the excavated communal histories that were otherwise shrouded in silence, the emotional and visceral journeys of female characters in post-partitioned India remain marginal. However, women's narratives and their distinctive ideas of home equally contribute to the process of postcolonial nation-building that Ghosh invents through his multi-directionality in his storytelling. Their silent movements across communal, cultural, national and interpersonal borders remain integral to the transnational reimagining of home and the (im)possibilities of return that plague Ghosh's masculine figures symbolising migrancy and cosmopolitanism.

Chapter 1.3

Eroding Homes: Navigating Women Across Borders in Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island*

Locating Climate Migration: Beyond National Frontiers

Border-crossings in the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries have challenged unilateral assumptions of migration,¹⁰⁹ contributing to a paradigmatic shift in diaspora discourses. Scholars engaging with contemporary diasporic re-settlements have increasingly focused on the integral role that migration plays in capturing the essence of their existence. For instance, Sukanya Banerjee, in the book *New Routes for Diaspora Studies*, studies Chinese communities and their transnational networks to uncover the “messiness, unevenness and meaningfulness of migration.” (Banerjee, 72) Banerjee’s exploration of ‘migration stories’ contributes to an understanding of pattern and perpetuity in terms of migration as it continues to develop into “an open-ended, sometimes circuitous, process that entails crossing multiple national borders over an extended period of time.” (Banerjee, 72) Further, Suman Gupta and Tope Omoniyi, in *The Cultures of Economic Migration: International Perspectives*, revisit the anxieties that often govern processes of migration including socio-cultural issues, political disruptions, and polarisations in identity that result in xenophobia and inequality. As scholars delve deeper into the complexities of contemporary migration, its relationship with histories of colonial empire building, nation-state borders and postcolonial restructuring begins to be rendered

¹⁰⁹ See James Clifford’s book *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Page – 250) where Clifford examines the changing contexts of diasporic migrations advocating that “decentered, lateral connections” link diasporas as much as a “teleology of origin/return.” Clifford argues that interconnections between diasporas develop through “shared, ongoing history of displacement, suffering, adaptation, or resistance.”

rudimentary. There are stories, meanings, geopolitical consideration and aspirations attached to processes of migration. For instance, Avtar Brah, in *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contested Identities* notes,

“At the heart of the notion of diaspora is the image of a journey. [...] The question is not simply about who travels but when, how, and under what circumstances? What socio-economic, political, and cultural conditions mark the trajectories of these journeys? What regimes of power inscribe the formation of a specific diaspora?”
(Brah, 179)

The questions that Brah proposes highlights issues that often build on the notions of upward mobility and economic growth, contributing to emerging trends of migration. Additionally, extensive research on the undulating potential to cross national borders have focused on the ways in which migration continues to develop international exchange propounded by globalisation.¹¹⁰ For instance, contemporary movements across borders are increasingly associated with ‘geographies of power,’¹¹¹ ‘transnational contacts,’¹¹² as

¹¹⁰ Scholars like Pnina Werbner (1990), Arjun Appadurai (2001) and Leila Simona Talani (2011) explore belonging through the lens of globalisation and the distinctive routes of migration that define contemporary lives.

¹¹¹ See Katy Gardner’s essay, “Desh-Bidesh’: Sylheti Images of Home and Away,” exploring Desh (Home-country) and Bidesh (away from home) in terms of the power relations that govern migration processes along these lines, as well as the continuity and connectivity between these two places which leads to increased migrations in search of economic growth and empowerment.

¹¹² See Ulf Hannerz’s book *Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places* where Hannerz explores the growing interconnectedness across borders through “kinship, friendship, collegiality, business, pursuits of pleasure, or struggle for security” (Hannerz, 29)

well as 'familiarity and connectivity,'¹¹³ redefining the politics of place and identity that supplemented them. Therefore, the constancy of migration has urged diaspora studies to venture beyond the dualities of origin and destination, home and abroad, and dislocation and settlement assumed to be central to it. Directions and patterns of contemporary migrations have also prompted scholars of diaspora studies to focus on the figure of the migrant and the geopolitical interactions due to which they have a complex relationship with the idea of home. For instance, David Ralph and Lyn A. Staeheli, in the essay "Home and Migration: Mobilities, Belongings and Identities," discuss the relationship between people's movements and their idea of home which is often a signifier of the larger political dynamics that continue to govern their movements,

"...while they may share some common characteristics in terms of how they understand home, a refugee's experience of home is likely to differ from that of an elite business traveller's, the political exile's from the non-domiciled tax exile's, the asylum seeker's from the tourist's and soon. [...] much of the domestic and emotional work involved in the making of that place we call home is performed by unpaid, unrecognised female migrant labour (Espiritu 2003; Pratt and Yeoh 2003)."

(Ralph and Staeheli, 520)

¹¹³ See Deborah Chambers' book *Changing Media, Homes and Households* where Chambers identifies a 'transnational family' which is "characterised by a woman from the global south who migrates for employment to the global north and who leaves behind her children. This leads to a new category of transnational motherhood (Hondagneu- Sotelo and Avila 1997) that entails the management of the relationship through long-distance communication." (Chambers, 6)

Further, Amitav Ghosh, in *The Nutmeg's Curse*, traces various kinds of migration patterns within and beyond the Indian subcontinent delving deeper into the lives of people crossing borders and their relationship with home. Internal migrations have remained an important part of the Indian subcontinent's migration patterns where, Ghosh argues, "a huge demographic churn has been under way for some time, with enormous numbers of migrant workers moving from the country's poorer eastern regions to major cities, and other relatively prosperous areas." (Ghosh, 180) Ghosh refers to internal migrants as 'circulatory migrants' who prefer to "make some money over a short period and then go back home." (Ghosh, 180) Internal migrants have a consistent connection with their native lands. They intend to return with more financial stability as well as stories of adventures and aspirations.¹¹⁴ On the other hand, migrants that travel across national borders form a completely different relationship with home. They often struggle to establish connections with their native lands and are vulnerable due to border rules and regulations.¹¹⁵ Home, therefore, remains a distant reality for them with the desire for return emerging as a strong and personal connection linking them to the homeland they have left behind. As interactions of people, commodities and cultures on a transnational landscape become increasingly popular, the precarity of migrants and their livelihoods across borders continue to draw more attention. Mastoureh Fathi, Caitríona Ní Laoire, in the book, *Migration and Home*, rightly argue,

¹¹⁴ See Amitav Ghosh's book *The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis* (Pages- 180,181)

¹¹⁵ See Amitav Ghosh's book *The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis* (Page- 181)

“Public and political concerns have crystallized around the figure of the migrant, imagined as a person ‘out of place’, triggering international policy concerns about migration management, increased securitisation of borders, as well as rising xenophobia in many contexts, reflecting anxieties that are, at their core, about ‘who belongs where’ and ‘who can belong where’.” (Fathi and Ní Laoire, 1)

The figure of the migrant and their apparent placeless-ness, that Fathi and Ní Laoire discuss in the context of cross-border migrations, is crucial to understand emerging concerns due to climate change. Climate induced migrations have become prominent since the late twentieth century adding a nuanced perspective to diasporic existence and the changing idea of home. Sennan Mattar and Enyinnaya Mbakwem, in the chapter “Climate migration: The emerging need for a human-centered approach,” identify the difference between the terms ‘migration’ and ‘displacement,’ highlighting, “ “migration” and “displacement” are not synonymous terms, with a migrant simply being an individual who has left their residence to settle elsewhere whilst a displaced person is an individual “forced” to leave their residence at least temporarily.” (Jafry, 479) Additionally, individuals and communities displaced due to climate related upheavals often succumb to the unpredictability and multi-directionality of their movements. The reasons that govern their decision to move are economic, political as well as cultural where the impetus is to establish a meaningful abode and reinstate the interpersonal relationships that they had established in their homeland.¹¹⁶ People who have been forced to move from their places

¹¹⁶ See Jack Bittle’s book *The Great Displacement: Climate Change And The Next American Migration* (Pages- 6-9)

of origin due to environmental factors like droughts, floods, cyclones or hurricanes rendering them uninhabitable have a consistent struggle of seeking refuge.¹¹⁷ Writers and theorists have often written about the loss and ambiguous nature of home owing to experiences of displacement. For instance, Sam Durrant, in the chapter “Intra/Extraterritorial Displacement: Introduction,” in *Refugee Imaginaries: Research Across Humanities*, reiterates the poet Hoffman’s imagination of a refugee carrying his door with him, reading it as “as a ‘metonym for home’, an ‘exosomatic mooring’ that provides a kind of psychic resilience against the experience of homelessness.” (Emma Cox et al., 208) Further, David Farrier, in *Postcolonial Asylum: Seeking Sanctuary Before the Law*, examines the asylum as a way for displaced communities and individuals to rebuild their lives in the host-nation. However, Farrier is conscious of the fact that the process of seeking asylum is “their induction into a condition of waiting, uncertainty and dependency.” (Farrier,) Home, therefore, emerges as a personal, emotional, visceral and imaginative experience stretched far beyond its physicality. It is seen more in terms of a conscious effort to unite individual aspirations with communal harmony than a mere shelter against rain, wind and snow. Identities are wound around the idea of home which develops as an anchor, a primal support and an external framework that eases the chaos and indiscretion arising from ecological shifts, catastrophes and resulting displacements. Climate induced migrations unpack traditional assumptions of home and question its existence, multiple associations and impending loss, positing climate change as an important ecological moment that needs to be narrativized. In fact, reframing climate

¹¹⁷ See Emma Cox et.al edited book *Refugee Imaginaries: Research Across Humanities* (Page – 501) exploring the refugee experience of home.

which is measured on a scientific scale, Adeline Johns-Putra and Kelly Sultzbach, in *The Cambridge Companion to literature and Climate*, argue that climate is an “emotionally and ethically violent” (Johns-Putra and Sultzbach, 1) term that interacts with “human experiences, emotional responses and memories.” (Johns-Putra and Sultzbach, 2) They assert that literary engagements with the present-day climate crisis help to greatly navigate human agency and its lasting impact on the environment. Additionally, Pramod K Nayar, in *Vulnerable Earth: The Literature of Climate Crisis*, expands on the role of narrative in representing the climate crisis for the larger audience. Nayar argues that literature or narrative “has been central to not only the documentation of disasters but also the *imagining* of future disasters, alternative worlds and an environmental ethics that promises justice to human and the more-than-human.” (Nayar, 2) It is, therefore, important to understand the ways in which climate change and planetary disruption is inscribed in contemporary fiction.

Narrating Climate, Narrating Movement: Amitav Ghosh’s Literary Engagements

Contemporary anglophone fiction has remained largely linked to anthropocentric progressions and projections.¹¹⁸ The constant need to pit human beings against their natural surroundings have promoted capitalism,¹¹⁹ colonialism and industrialisation, thereby, disturbing the ecology that equally incorporates non-human entities – forests, landscapes, water bodies and other species. Such socio-political developments are narrated through literary endeavours across the world making humanities discipline in

¹¹⁸ See Amitav Ghosh’s book *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (Page – 117-122)

¹¹⁹ See Arundhati Roy’s Interview with Nermeen Shaikh, “Democracy Now.”

academic institutions play an important role in discussions around the burden of human aspirations on the environment. While increasing environmental exploitation owing to the advent of modernity has been explored in earlier writings like William Wordsworth's poem "The Excursion", Charles Dicken's *Hard Times*, Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of The Seven Gables*, and Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, climate fiction, as an emerging genre in the anglophone world, has taken cognisance of the growing awareness, concern and the imminent aftermath of climate change. If Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* and *The Living Mountain*, Richard Power's *The Overstory* and Shubhangi Swarup's *Latitudes of Longing* engage with climactic variations, Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy and Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods* explore the dystopian element of ecological crisis and a drastically changing world. Climate concerns have been laid out in various genres, like the ones previously mentioned, which attempt to represent ecological transitions in the current tradition of the novel. Alluding to the incorporation of environmental issues in the genre of the novel, Adam Trexler, in *Anthropocene Fiction: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change*, points out that the central question is "how climate change [...] changed the capacities of recent literature." (Trexler, 13) Trexler ascribes a genre-bending potential to the devastating and catastrophic elements of climate change which has gradually been incorporated in the emerging novelistic tradition of 'climate fiction.' It grasps the potential and upcoming challenges of modernity, industrial growth and use of natural resources with the intention to negotiate the intricacies of the human-environment relationship. Further, Axel Goodbody and Adeline Johns-Putra focus on the characterisation of climate change in climate fiction arguing, "...it occurs in the climate change novel as something, whether individually or collectively, that affects

psychological, emotional, physical, or political experience, and relates directly to readers' lives." (Johns-Putra, 234) The relationship between literature and climate change develops on our ability to confront a changing environment – whether it is to represent the uncertainty¹²⁰ and improbability of the climate crisis or interpret climate-related transitions and ecological catastrophes as everyday occurrences.¹²¹ However, narrating climate change is also relevant to engaging with one of the pressing issues faced by nations today – that of migration and diasporic interconnections propelled by ecological shifts and, owing to these changes, the development of an increasingly transnational worldview. Centring on migrations within and beyond the Indian subcontinent, Amitav Ghosh, prominent Indian diaspora writer, ventures into the genre of climate fiction by refocusing postcolonial diaspora narratives beyond traditional land-based concerns and gradual terra-centric transformations. He addresses climate induced migrations and their impact on national identity, border construction and the ethnic and cultural roots of displaced individuals and communities. Ghosh's approach to the climate crisis in literature is characterised by historical contexts and contemporary urgency. He emphasises that understanding history – such as colonialism, border-crossing, urbanisation and their lasting effects – is important to examine the ecological crisis effecting communities and the societies they inhabit today. In his popular non-fictional account *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, Ghosh develops interesting linkages between human activity, demands and desires and the visible changeability of nature. He

¹²⁰ See Marco Caraciollo's book *Contemporary Fiction and Climate Uncertainty: Narrating Unstable Futures* (Page- 11,12)

¹²¹ See Justyna Poray-Wybranowska's book *Climate Change, Ecological Catastrophe and the Contemporary Postcolonial Novel* (Page- 2)

asserts “the climate crisis is also a crisis of culture, and thus of imagination. Culture generates desires – for vehicles and appliances, for certain kinds of gardens and dwellings – that are among the principal drivers of carbon economy,” (Ghosh, 13) against which climate change is ‘improbable’ and ‘uncanny.’ This unpredictability of nature has rendered spaces unfit for human settlements promoting both internal and international migrations or prolonged periods of displacement. Additionally, referring to his ancestors as ‘ecological refugees’ who were forced to leave their homeland in Bangladesh, by the Padma River, and settle in India, by the Ganges, due to a giant storm, Ghosh foregrounds the longstanding role of climate change in India’s nation-building process. The sudden movements in water bodies that began these journeys for his ancestors are foremost to shaping Ghosh’s understanding of climactic variations and their impact on international borders. Further, Ghosh’s recent critique of colonisation and industrialisation in *The Nutmeg’s Curse* traces western imperialism’s contribution to the climate crisis. He argues that the exploitation of natural resources, a cultural impact created by imperialist and capitalist systems, continues to shape global environmental challenges like climate induced migrations. Taking an example of Khokon, a resident of Bangladesh who faced hardships due to the changing weather conditions and later travelled to Sicily in search of employment and a better livelihood, Ghosh argues that climate crisis is not an isolated incident. It is affected by ‘global power dynamics.’ Ghosh’s sharp critique of power structures assert that climate change has not been the prominent reason for cross-border migrations; Human interactions with the environment have always produced nascent histories of migration like that of Khokon whose journey was affected majorly by other

factors.¹²² However, Ghosh fails to shed light on the countless women who are equally if not worse affected by climate change and migration in his non-fictional accounts. Additionally, women characters in his climate related fiction are peripheral figures whose contribution to the narrative are not given the kind of attention that his male protagonists get. The analysis of women characters in *Gun Island* is crucial to confront climate-induced migrations, newfound diasporic associations, and changing ideas of home.

This section would examine Ghosh's *Gun Island* to study the intersection of gender and climate change and delve into the ways in which his women characters are affected by changing diaspora relations. It would investigate the idea that while Ghosh brings attention to the environmental destruction in the Indian subcontinent that has displaced whole communities and populations within and beyond its domestic and national borders, the impacts of these forces on individual female characters are neither of central focus nor do they become a part of the larger narrative of migration and border-crossings. Finally, it would examine peripheral women characters in the novel whose voices and lived experiences play a critical role in enduring and combating the climate crisis.

Textual Analysis

Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* examines the interplay of diaspora relations and border constructions through a narrative that is constantly in motion. Locating migration as a central event that ties the characters in the novel together, Ghosh questions the

¹²² See Amitav Ghosh's *The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis* (page 157) where Ghosh explores additional political, cultural, resource related and employment related factors that result in the displacement of many South Asian migrants.

absoluteness of national frontiers against transitioning national identities, cultural affiliations, environmental upheavals and geo-political concerns. Ghosh delves into the circuitous nature of his storytelling by introducing his protagonist Deen, an Indian origin Brooklyn-based rare book dealer, as one of the many “foreign-settled Calcuttans” (Ghosh, 4) who “take wing and fly back to overwinter in the city.” (Ghosh, 4) The ease with which Deen emerges as a migrant who chooses a suitable time to travel across continents and is able to return to his native land during a period of seasonal change is an important contrast to the numerous other border-crossings in the novel. Deen is oblivious to the imperviousness of national frontiers. As someone with the means, skills, work opportunities and aspirations to travel from India to Los Angeles, to Venice and finally to the Mediterranean, he embodies one of the many diaspora relations that the Indian subcontinent has established beyond its borders. However, in *Gun Island*, Ghosh reflects on nations and the intricate linkages they form with beings that travel across them. From Tipu, who becomes a part of the “people moving industry” (Ghosh, 60) in order to find the right professional prospects outside the Sundarbans to Rafi, who is well aware of the perils of fishermen in the Sundarbans, Ghosh’s novel is teeming with individuals for whom the national border is a distant opportunity. Borders, therefore, are an important gateway to understanding inter/national mobility. Avtar Brah argues that borders are “embedded within the concept of diaspora” (Brah, 194) and “indeed, it is not possible to address the concept of diaspora without considering its relationship to the idea of borders.” (Brah, 194) Further, Lucinda Newns establishes that the border “has a material presence in the landscape, in the form of physical barriers and checkpoints, and a sociopolitical presence through its impact on and determination by economic, linguistic and ethnic differences

within and across it.” (Newns, 1099) However, Deen’s meeting with Tipu is a reminder about the futile nature of such colossal frontiers shaping landmasses as well as worldviews. Tipu’s proud proclamation that travelling across the Indian border to Bangladesh is as easy for him as it is of Deen to travel from Brooklyn to India, significantly distorts them. What separates and, in many ways, defines, the movements of people across national borders are legal processes that govern them. For instance, passports, for Deen, “weren’t just pieces of paper or plastic; they possessed a certain kind of sacredness that attached also to the institutions that issued them.” (59) The issuance of papers that both evidence one’s national identity as well as their reasons for transnational travel is, for Deen, the only way to forge diaspora relations. Whereas, for Tipu, the landmasses and the waterways have a hostility to them which promote unrelenting and desperate measures resulting in cross-border movements. Explaining the reasons behind countless young people from the Sundarbans choosing to travel great distances through alternative means like ‘connection men’, Tipu asserts,

“the fish catch is down, the land’s turning salty, and you can’t go into the jungle without bribing the forest guards. On top of that every year you get hit by a storm that blows everything to pieces. [...] Even the animals are moving – just ask Piya. If you’ve got any sense you’ll move and to do that you need someone who can help you find a way out.” (61)

For Tipu these journey are a “point-to-point service,” (63) almost as if he is building human connections against the stronghold of national boundaries, with internet access and

suitable narratives to support livelihoods beyond borders. In fact, Ashish Saxena, in the essay “Globalisation and the Transnationalism of ‘Dalit’ Identity: Probing of Modern India,” rightly argues that “transnationalism as a phenomenon across nations focuses on citizens who, though migrating from poor to rich countries, manage to construct and nurture social fields that intimately link their respective homelands and their new diasporic locations.” (Sahoo and de Kruijf, 177) Importantly, online platforms have remained a means to form diasporic interrelations beyond the barriers of caste, class and culture, an opportunity that Tipu effectively uses for providing livelihoods to young people from the Sundarbans. An interesting example of this is Palash who had the desire to travel to Finland from his native place in Dhaka. His aspiration stemmed from the images and visuals circulating on the internet that he had access to through his phone, creating a distant and fantastical reality sought beyond borders, “My friends and I thought of Finland as everything that Dhaka was not: quiet, clean, cool, uncrowded – and of course our first cellphones were Nokias made in Finland, so we always had a soft spot for the country.” (266) Ghosh presents Tipu as an embodiment of numerous such channels that have enlarged the scope of transnational interactions – volatile landscape of the Sundarban forests, nexus of *dalals* or ‘connection men,’ connection houses, and the desires that trigger large-scale movements. Tipu’s strong aversion to passports reflects on the limitless world fathomed outside of national borders, where diasporic journeys start “with a phone and voice recognition technology” (62) and stories of environmental degradation and persecution give rise to migration patterns transcending caste, class and economic barriers. In fact, John Thieme, in *Anthropocene Realism Fiction in the Age of Climate*

Change, investigates *Gun Island* as more than a climate change novel by situating the role internet plays in transnational migrations arguing,

“...while they have been displaced from their homeland by the impact of climate change, the Bengali migrants seeking to find a new life in Europe have also been taken over by the demons of the Internet, which promises to act as a great leveller between people of different countries and backgrounds.” (Thieme, 152)

Ghosh urges his readers to access marginalised stories around migration which are often left behind in the discussions on climate-induced movements from South Asia. Drawing from Deen’s grandparents who left Bangladesh and “once they got moving they never stopped” (63) as well as the people of the Sundarbans who crossed borders aided by social media platforms, Ghosh traces journeys across timelines situating alternative migration routes at the heart of the postcolonial nation-building processes. Networks of cross-border journeys, much like the vastness of the internet, also connect Ghosh’s narrative across spatial, temporal and mythical spaces. For instance, contemporary routes of migration, like those taken by Tipu, Rafi, Deen and even Piya, are juxtaposed by the image of a unifying journey undertaken by the Gun Merchant in the seventeenth century. Acknowledging that “Tipu’s was not an unusual story; over the last couple of years there had been a huge increase in reports of teenage boys and young men leaving home without informing their families,” (183) the narrative lays the Gun Merchant’s story as the foundation on which such present-day scenarios unfold. For instance, the story of the Gun Merchant trying to escape Manasa Devi’s wrath takes him on the journey to

Venice linking the same countries that present-day migrants cross. For instance, Deen and Cinta, in their attempt to decipher the countries mentioned in the Gun Merchant's story, establish that "*Taal-misrir-desh*" and "*Rumalir-desh*" leading to "Banadiq" or "al-Bunduqeyya" actually translate to Egypt, Turkey and Venice, the countries that map numerous migrating patterns. Further, Esroy Gumus, in the essay, "Is Mankind Victim or Victimiser: Environmental Refugees in Amitav Ghosh's Gun Island," traces the similarities between the Sundarbans and Venice, navigating the ways in which spaces are interspersed, merged and translated,

"In addition to the similar layouts of the landscape that the Sundarbans and Venice have, "an estuarine landscape of lagoons", Ghosh indicates that they suffer from similar ecological problems (Ghosh, Gun Island 162). While the inhabitants of the former have to struggle with tides and dampness, the inhabitants of the latter have to get used to slowly rising water which is primarily caused by human activities."

In *Gun Island*, the lines that connect Sundarban forests and the landscape of Venice go beyond the similarities between their geographical setting and ecological temperaments. The Gun Merchant's story is used as a medium that enables cultures, myths and metaphors to travel between the two places alongside individuals. For instance, when Cinta traces the Gun Merchant, a dark-skinned Bengali's, journey from his home in eastern India to Venice, she stresses on the intermingling of cultures in the "most cosmopolitan place in the world." (142) The image of the Gun Merchant interacting with people from "Levant, North Africa and Mali" (142) in Venice reflects on the present-day

scenario as Bangladeshis were identified as “the second largest group coming into Italy.” (146) Additionally, Lucia’s favourite storybook on the Sundarbans that encouraged her to “dream of that forest” (126), although a commentary on the rift between stories and lived realities of the Sundarbans, is yet another example of cultures interweaving across landscapes through stories. Further, the mythical figure of Manasa Devi in the Gun Merchant’s story navigates the borders separating humans and animals yet again creating linkages between the two landscapes. Ghosh examines Manasa Devi’s character as “an intermediary” (153) who balances the “unseen boundaries” (153) between snakes, that symbolise the natural world, and the Gun Merchant, who symbolises human agency. In her role as an equalizer, she makes human and animal encounters as a connecting link between the forests of Sundarbans and the city life of Venice. For instance, on his search for Manasa Devi’s shrine in the Sundarbans, Deen, alongside Rafi, attempts to trace the symbols on the wall and uncover the Gun Merchant’s story. Some of these, including the one with a “circle [...] overlaid with criss-crossing lines,” (71) create the images of spiders that followed the journey beginning in Eastern India and came to a conclusive end in Venice. Therefore, the Gun Merchant being bitten by a poisonous spider that followed him to Venice and Rafi narrating this story to Deen in the ghettos of the same city interlinks two distant lands. Deen’s realisation that snakes, and in extension spiders, bark beetles, shipworms, wildfires and other natural calamities affecting present-day human settlements and journeys, are the constituents of Manasa Devi affirms that she is a symbol of planetary unrest where all forms of life are on the move. Animals that appear in different parts of Venice throughout *Gun Island* are a metaphor for all the movements across national borders as a result of humans interfering

with nature's course. Therefore, their border crossings are more than a commentary on gradual planetary changes, they are also a reflection of nature's abrupt transitions that hold the possibility to overturn well-known habitats and cultures of survival.

The correlations that the novel draws between contemporary migrants, and Venetian travellers are also established in terms of similar connections built across centuries: of hopes, aspirations and, above all, survival. The individual desires that fuel these journeys and the relevance of cross-border migrations have continued over time. For instance, Cinta's question about who "great Venetian travellers [...] would have more in common with? [...] Us twenty-first-century Italians [...] Or these *raggazi migranti* who take their lives in their hands to cross the seas," (220) inserts the marginal narratives of migration into the narrative of the postcolonial nation. She asserts that all these migrations were fuelled by the search for home beyond defined boundaries of land and sea. As a result, borders that have so far fiercely guarded aspects such as citizenship, rights and the traditional and cultural idea of the homeland, are now forced to confront the changing dimensions of home: it was flooded, destroyed and subject to disappearing livelihoods as well as found flashing on the screens of phones at a distance. Reflecting on the patterns of colonial migrations when indentured labourers and coolies were sent to work on plantations, Deen traces similar brutal and unforgiving conditions faced by climate migrants today. However, he notices a 'vital difference' of human agency in the latter,

"Rafi, Tipu and their fellow migrants had launched their own journeys, just as I had, long before them; as with me, their travels had been enabled by their own networks, and they, like me were completely conversant with the laws and regulations of the

countries they were heading to. Instead, it was the countries of the West that now knew very little about the people who were flocking towards them.” (279)

The decision to begin such gruelling journeys across waterways is a prominent factor that links present-day refugees, yet again, to the Gun Merchant. The Gun Merchant, in his desire to chase profits, channelled pathways through cities and through his stories that have reappeared in various forms. His story, though set in a colonial backdrop, is remembered as the story of a man who attempted to detach from the devoted figure of Manasa Devi. Present-day migrant journeys are mirrored in the Gun Merchant’s story as their idea of fragile and futile borders that, ironically, withhold more than aid transnational interactions, ultimately create a detachment from the geographical space of the nation. They forge homes beyond numerous boundaries governing former colonial and ongoing international politics and their individual journeys inadvertently uphold planetary consciousness. Therefore, examining the inversion of colonial concerns and postcolonial anxieties around migration, *Gun Island* questions both the perpetuity and precarity of national borders. In fact, in the final chapters of the novel, its characters encircle the Blue Boat bringing refugees like “Eritrans, Egyptians, Ethiopians, Sudanese and maybe some Bengalese as well,” (173) launching the narrative into a critical dialogue around immigration, asking what constitutes nation in the aftermath of climate migration? If the nation is built on rootedness, the blue boat is ephemeral and nomadic. It represents a possible future where climate refugees become an important part of transnational interactions, territories become unstable, and survival depends on mobility, cooperation and care across differences. The blue boat and people like Rafi and Tipu who undertake

such journeys, thus, become epitomise the reinvention of diasporas. In establishing a contrast between his diasporic protagonist, Deen, and refugee figures like Tipu and Rafi, Ghosh reexamines the relationship as an identity as an Indian, Bengali diaspora writer. In an interview with Chitra Sankaran, Ghosh expands on the nuances in his diasporic identity arguing,

“In Delhi, I could be a Bengali diasporic. I would feel diasporic there much more intimately than I would feel a part of the Indian diaspora, because I am not actually a part of the Indian diaspora. I think of myself as an Indian expatriate who will quite soon, I hope, be able to live in India again.” (Sankaran, 10)

The interconnections between Ghosh’s regional identity as a Bengali, and national identity as an Indian develop simultaneously. Identifying as an Indian expatriate, Ghosh associates himself, and his protagonist Deen, with the ambiguities that stem from their transnational positions. In this sense, both Ghosh and Deen are like “bhutas.” (104) As diasporic individuals crossing the seas to another country, their identities are translatable and, in many ways, equally precarious as they carry the remnants of their roots in the nation and (un)settle in transnational setting. Deen traces the roots of this term in *Gun Island*, highlighting that they lie in a “basic but very complicated Sanskrit root “bhu” meaning “to be” [...] “Bhuta” also refers to the past, in the sense of “a past state of being” [...] the same word means “existing” and “existed”.” (104, 105) As ‘bhutas’ they can not only migrate/translate between meanings, identities and places but also carry the simultaneity of these transitions with them. For instance, the Bengali diasporic identity

that Ghosh mentions in his interview is something that Deen explores in Venice where Bengalis “do everything – they make pizzas for the tourists, they clean the hotels, they even play the accordian at street corners.” (146) Therefore, identities are both merged and disjointed in the process of migration as cultural affiliations that ‘existed’ meet new, present-day, ‘existing’ forms. Similar movements and emerging connections in *Gun Island* – putting humans and non-human species in motion – between spaces, meanings and identities, therefore, remain crucial to Ghosh’s narrative process fuelling debates, ironically, around the fluidity of identities as opposed to the impermeability of national frontiers.

Ghosh’s *Gun Island* is also a commentary on India’s internal borders that have seen the movement of people from the rural areas of the Sundarbans region of West Bengal to more affluent cities and towns. As a region hit by two cyclones – Bholá and Aila – people in the Sundarbans have experienced destruction of communities, dispersal of the youth and the invasion of unwanted communities of human traffickers. Ghosh traces the internal borders across the Indian subcontinent on the basis of caste, class and gender. As traffickers transferred “able-bodied men to work sites in faraway cities” (49) and “women off to distant brothels,” (49) the boundaries that govern these movements become intensely stringent against diverse communities within the country. In fact, for Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee, the ‘pernicious logic of borders’ (Mukherjee, 112) becomes graver in the postcolonial nation-state where it promotes “communalization of communities, killed millions and made refugees or alien residents of millions more people who were now suddenly designated to bear the burden of the mutually exclusive national territories of

Pakistan, India, and after 1971, Bangladesh.” (Mukherjee, 112) Connecting the landmasses of India and Bangladesh, the Sundarbans are at the brink of such border constructions as they become the prominent means of interactions through trade, politics and, recently, people. For instance, when Tipu was moved to a boarding school in Kolkata he was faced with comments like “only servants and whores came from the Sundarbans” (51) which showcases the caste and class-based prejudices that form a large part of the communal and national politics in the Indian subcontinent. However, Manasa Devi’s shrine which was attended to by a Muslim boatman who originally lived on the other side of the Raimangal river represented the ways in which internal communal beliefs were often blurred by the moving waterways of the Sundarbans region,

“...the dhaam was revered by all, irrespective of religions: Hindus believed that it was Manasa Devi who guarded the shrine, while Muslims believed that it was a place of jinns, protected by a Muslim pir, or saint, by the name Ilyas.” (15)

The appearance of the Muslim *majhi* or boatman forms interesting correlations with Deen encountering the Bangla language in Venice. In fact, internal communal borders almost physically merge on international waters as Deen ponders over the possibility of mistaking the “Venetian lagoon for the Sundarbans” (147) and metaphorically merge when he encounters his mother tongue, Bangla, in Venice emerging as a ‘global language.’ Further, Ghosh’s narrative loops around the contentious idea of diasporic home through the frequent occurrence of the ‘immemorial question: *Desh koi* – where’s home?” (163) in his conversations with other Bengalis in Venice. It proliferates a nuanced understanding

of home outside the intimacy of one's language and the familiarity of one's national and regional landscape. Ghosh effectively critiques the purity associated with the idea of national identity by dotting his narrative with Deen's journeys across the world, forging new ways to connect diasporas from the Indian subcontinent to the nation's diverse ethnic, social and cultural fabric. Additionally, the ecological variations that have affected the course of human movements in and around the Indian subcontinent also charted new routes for non-human species. For instance, according to Piya, a cetologist based in the Sundarbans, dolphins were looking for a new habitat due to the increased salinity of water bodies. There was also an increase in 'oceanic dead zones' (104) which significantly reduces the growth of new life in various regions. Further, bark beetles were eating into trees in Oregon; shipworms gnawing through Venice were "literally eating the foundations of the city;" (251) and yellow-bellied snakes existing in the water bodies of Los Angeles are incidents that exemplify constant movements, ultimately showcasing fractures in the frontiers constructed around nations. Ghosh's narrative asserts that for non-human entities borders are ultimately futile; Their migrations critique the unbalanced and skewed position of borders that have significantly and almost unfairly hardened against human migration.

Interestingly, while migration and border crossing form an important part of the novel, human migration remains a primarily masculine venture. Women hardly become a part of the journeys that men chart along giant and threatening water bodies – whether on ships in the seventeenth century, on aeroplanes or on rickety boats in the postcolonial present – to develop diasporic relations.

The migratory movements that run throughout the course of Ghosh's *Gun Island*, are seldom associated with the women characters. On the contrary, as the Sundarbans develop as a hub for constant migrations within India, women emerge as vulnerable subjects. Moyna, who bridges the distance between Lusibari and Manasa Devi's shrine within the Sundarbans for Deen, reiterates their poignant situation: "The Sundarbans have always attracted traffickers, because of its poverty, but never in such numbers as after Aila; they had descended in swarms, spiriting women off to distant brothels..." (49) Additionally, migration encompasses Ghosh's narrative as a larger theme in which women like Piya and Nilima are equally affected. Piya is the only female character that runs parallel to Deen and Ghosh in terms of migration as she travels from Oregon to the Sundarbans. However, Piya's transnational connection to her roots in India is a unique one; It develops through her passionate interest in her work around dolphins. She studies their migrating patterns, family dynamics and changes in their behaviour much like the author himself as he attempts to understand changing diaspora relations in the twenty-first century. Describing Piya's association to India in an interview with Chitra Sankaran, Ghosh asserts,

"Piya is a person who actually feels no sense of connection toward India and feels a sort of hostility toward Indian culture, but who does discover this other way of connecting with India. That too is increasingly common. When you look at young Indians who are in the diaspora, their connection to India doesn't come from feeling connected with the old culture. It comes from feeling connected with the new culture . . . with films or with music" (Sankaran, 9)

Instead of cultural shifts, Piya is connected with changes in the environment; She brings to light the ecological transitions affecting both human and non-human lives in postcolonial India. Ghosh's narrative connects her deep interest in preserving dolphin pods in the Ganga River as well as Moyna and Tipu's relationship in the Sundarbans after Fokir's demise,¹²³ to the larger context of cross-border migration. Piya's diasporic association with India is equally rooted and discordant, her isolating journeys across vast rivers and seas attempting to reimagine the (im)possibilities of a transitioning postcolonial homeland. Therefore, while male journeys happen across spatial and temporal boundaries, women in Ghosh's narrative are in a continuous process of understanding new perspectives in a changing world. John Thieme, in the book *Anthropocene Realism Fiction in the Age of Climate Change* uses Piya as a lens to understand contemporary climate induced variations,

“Piya, who remains the voice of scientific empiricism to the end, says that, while she has never heard of anything like the bioluminescence they have just seen happening before, ‘animal migrations are being hugely impacted by climate change so nothing is surprising now’, and they can expect to ‘see more of these intersecting events in the future’ (309). In her view, then, the old norms no longer obtain in the new age of meteorological and geological change.” (Thieme, 153)

¹²³ See Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* for more information on Fokir, Moyna and Tipu's (or Tutul's family) which is where Piya's character was first established.

Ghosh, much like John Thieme's observation, uses Piya's ability to scientifically and rationally study non-human forms as a lens to almost reconcile various migrating worlds – humans, spiders, dolphins and snakes. In fact, while Ghosh's novel ends with a spectacular vision of "storm of birds circling above, like a whirling funnel, and the graceful shadows of leviathans in the glowing green water below," (282) depicting that non-humans traverse international borders despite the strong surveillance around them, Piya navigates the deeper recesses of these interactions. As someone who studies dolphin pods and their habitats, Piya explores the ways in which dolphins are displaced by the ecological tensions and human impacts. Navigating Rani, a female dolphin whose habitat has been affected by rising temperatures on earth, Piya presents an image of the ecological changes that urge both human and non-human populations to move,

"There she is, perfectly adapted to her environment, perfectly at home in it--and then things begin to change, so that all those years of learning become useless, the places you know best can't sustain you any more and you've got to find new hunting grounds. Rani must have felt that everything she knew, everything she was familiar with--the water, the currents, the earth itself--was rising up against her." (106)

Piya attempts to read Rani's migration as that of an ecological refugee, drawing interesting linkages between Rani's dislocation and the slowly disintegrating homes in the Sundarbans. The changes in Rani's environment that makes it unfamiliar and even hostile for her to survive is likened to the gradual transitions in the Sundarbans that forced Rafi and Tipu to leave their homes. For instance, Rafi admitting to Deen, "things were

changing so much, and so fast, that I wouldn't be able to get by here ... one day I would have no choice but to leave" (95) is a poignant reality that resonates with numerous migration patterns that arise due to the sense of feeling distant and displaced from the nation, almost as if migrating individuals and communities have always stood against it. Further, while Piya wilfully travels across nations driven by her ambition and work, much like Deen and the author himself, Rani's situation is a crucial reminder of the ways in which women like her have been marginalised by a fiercely patriarchal and nationalist postcolonial setting. Piya navigates the intricacies of an upcoming world where climate related changes, while reshaping the way we understand geo-political relations, continue to disassociate women from twenty-first century national and transnational orientations. For instance, narrating a situation where her entomologist friend was demonised and threatened for warning against the havoc caused by bark beetles, Piya exclaims, "Can you believe it? It's like we are back in the Dark Ages – women being attacked as witches!" (109) Although the novel is quick to abandon this insight, it stands as an apt metaphor of the nation versus migrant debate as women continue to be seen as outsiders or migrants within the narrative of the nation. Additionally, they are feared, ostracised and abandoned by the same agent – the prowess of the internet – that otherwise aids transnational migrations. Women like Piya's entomologist friend, who had to recover from the strong backlash against her, alongside other migrant narratives that the novel touches upon, is another example of a migrant who is seeking home amidst the political, cultural and ecological shifts redefining the idea of the nation. Piya, as an Indian origin, diasporic individual, unearths these clandestine migrants that equally contribute to the larger narrative of climate migration. Further, if Piya explores hidden migrating figures affected

by climactic variations, Nilima acts as an archivist of these changes. As Deen's discussant in the process of accessing the conversations around climate change in the Sundarbans, Nilima makes him aware of the social, political and cultural transitions due to violent ecological changes. For instance, in her account book labelled 'Cyclone Relief Accounts, 1970' Nilima explores the unstable borders through the Sundarban delta during the Bhola Cyclone,

“Eight days earlier – on November 12, 1970, to be precise – a Category 4 Cyclone had torn through the Bengal delta, hitting both the Indian province of West Bengal and the state that was then called East Pakistan (a year later, it would become a new nation, Bangladesh [...]) The situation was aggravated by a steady flow of refugees from East Pakistan. For several months people had been coming across the border, into India, in order to escape the political turmoil on the other side; now the flow turned into a flood, bringing many more hungry mouths into a region that was desperately short of food.” (14)

Ghosh's narrative confronts the arbitrariness and illusory effects of borders through Nilima, who leads Deen through the disruptive potential of climate change. Further, Nilima is the one who beckons Deen to the shrine which later develops and connects all the other plotlines in the narrative. As someone living at the brink of the interactions between India and Pakistan, Nilima emerges as a repository of the marginal yet strong cultural belief systems around Manasa Devi's shrine fuelled by ecological disasters. Recounting one such incident for Deen, Nilima says,

“Shortly before the storm’s arrival, as the skies were turning dark, the shrine’s bell began to ring. The villagers had rushed there taking whatever food and belongings they could carry. Not only had the shrine’s walls and roof kept them safe from the storm, it had continued to shelter them afterwards.” (14)

Nilima appears in the narrative much like the landmass of the Sundarbans which ultimately gets engulfed by the rivers surrounding it. However, her presence continues to provide the narrative its necessary directions. Cinta, like Nilima helps to steer Deen in the right direction by bridging a critical gap between Deen’s rational and scientific approach to life and the incomprehensible presence of nature beyond it. In Cinta, the natural and the ‘supernatural’ intermingle seamlessly, giving the narrative its wavering course. For instance, when Deen contemplates visiting the shrine of Manasa Devi in the Sundarbans, Cinta’s dream about a certain *jatra* or performative storytelling show in Kolkata almost confirms his doubts. Cinta appears in the breaks and pauses both in Deen’s narrative and his travels. In fact, for John Thieme, “*Gun Island* is filled with minutiae that endorse Dinanath’s credibility as a narrator. He provides brief insider information on parts of central Kolkata and, in the Venetian chapters, in more extended passages that benefit from Cinta’s expertise, [...] breathe life into the geography and history of particular parts of the city.” (Thieme, 143) Female characters like Nilima and Cinta appear to manoeuvre the narrative as Deen, travelling to different parts of the world, attempts to tie the climate change novel together. Therefore, if individuals translating and migrating across are ‘bhutas’ - ‘being’ in the past and the present at a given moment, like Tipu after he gets

bitten by a snake or 'becoming' "conjunctions and disjunctions in the continuum of time space and being," (156) like Rafi and Deen who find familiarities in a foreign land, female characters are the translators that drive these large scale movements. An important example of this is Manasa Devi's character and its perpetual and overpowering presence as the narrative crosses boundaries of land, language, culture and reality. Her presence is felt as deeply by Rafi and Tipu, who embark on a sea-faring journey in the twenty-first century climate crisis as it once was by the Gun Merchant when a similar ecological disruption struck the world. She, therefore, carries both the dualities of the term 'bhu', realistically and figuratively. For instance, Although, in Ghosh's narrative, "Manasa Devi of the legend was [...] in effect a negotiator, a translator – or better still a *portavoce* – as the Italians say 'a voice carrier' between two species that had no language in common and no shared means of communication," (152) her role as the progenitor in the narrative in addition to translator is of utmost importance. For instance, in the novel Deen sees a statue of the Minoan snake goddess in Venice and is stunned by how closely she resembles Manasa Devi. This similarity emphasis on deeper cultural continuities that span continents and epochs. It also decenters Euro-American narratives around climate crisis and suggests that environmental change and displacements are not new, they have been woven into the very fabric of human cultural memory. Manasa Devi, therefore, has been a part of the continuities of numerous such climactic changes, variations and beginnings. As Ghosh's *Gun Island* reflects on changing local environments and the volatility of nature transcending mythical and geographical landscapes, women characters in the novel carry male figures with dislocated histories and severed roots to their desired destinations. Women's role as the medium that often stabilises the ongoing

crisis of home with families and communities undergoing rapid disenfranchisement and instability in terms of the homeland comes to the fore through these characters. They work around masculine reimaginings and seek out the underbelly of postcolonial migrations, exploring challenges, hopes and development in 21st century India. Importantly, while Piya, Nilima and Cinta are steady voices re-routing the novel's course, standing as a metaphor for the unpredictable movements in the deltaic region of the Sundarbans, Manasa Devi is The story of the Gun Merchant is one of the most important translatable aspects of Ghosh's narrative, reinvented, retold, juxtaposed and reassembled over contemporary scenarios of cross-border migration and refugee crisis, It is a crucial piece connecting Deen's journeys from the Sundarbans to Los Angeles, to Venice which is effectively held in place by women characters like Nilima, Cinta and, most importantly, Manasa Devi – all established as translators between present-day issues of roots and rootlessness and the unstable idea of home.

Migrant male characters – as *rifugiati and immigrati* – form the crux of Ghosh's narrative, spread out over the spatial and temporal expanse transnational interactions. From the Gun Merchant, who, due to the adverse effects of the seventeenth century 'Little Ice Age' went on a voyage to different parts of the world, to Tipu, who, following a similar course of action centuries later, makes his way to Venice on the Blue Boat, migrants in Ghosh's narrative share translatable histories. For instance, Asis De, in the book *The Routledge Handbook of Refugee Narratives*, argues,

“The novelist’s treatment of refugees and cross-border migrants takes a giant leap as he includes the twenty-first century European “refugee crisis” (2015-16) alongside the economic migrations of young South Asians with the support of international trafficking networks. [...] As most of the characters move across the borders of multiple cultural spaces, Ghosh takes the freedom of using an expansive multilingual vocabulary, even accommodating words from the registers of cyber technology and social media.” (Gandhi and Nguyen, 107)

Migrants like Lubna, who lost everything in the process of migration, and Palash, who have still held on to the dream of living in Finland, continue to connect the dots in Ghosh’s *Gun Island*. Journeys made by the Gun Merchant, Tipu, Rafi, Palash and Lubna all culminate into the final emergence of the Blue Boat in international waters: “that tiny vessel represented the overturning of a centuries-old project that had been essential to the shaping of Europe.” (279) The Blue Boat in *Gun Island* is also a culmination of male journeys across raging seas. The only woman on the boat, an Ethiopian woman, is portrayed as a silent saviour of the refugees by bringing migrations due to non-human forces close to the vessel. Birds flocking northwards in the sky and bioluminescent beings in the ocean create a spectacle that ultimately leaves the Ethiopian woman mute, distant and marginal. She, however, charts the course of numerous migrant journeys, much like Manasa Devi, as the figurative interlocuter between two worlds constantly in motion. Therefore, while women are not a part of the large-scale cross-border movements, they play an important role in the act of negotiating the narrative. They are the people that refugees, migrants, travellers and diasporas like Deen encounter and then negotiate the

directions and decisions in the narrative. Further, the places, like Calcutta, Los Angeles, and Gun Island, that form individual chapters in the novel, are connected by the women characters that play an important role in manipulating Deen's decisions – Nilima and Piya in Calcutta, Cinta and Gisa in Los Angeles and Cinta in Gun Island or Venice. Even Lubna's migration from war torn Syria pushes Deen to move from observation to ethical responsibility. Deen, who is initially detached from the lived experiences of climate change, is made to grapple with them when he encounters people like her. She also, therefore, helps catalyse the novel's shift from locating 'migrants' and 'refugees' as mere labels towards solidarity and empathy. However, women characters forming sequestered connecting links in the entire transformative pattern of Deen's movement in the novel and navigating the gradual ebb and flow of the narrative, ultimately remain absent from the narratives of migration. They are figures that warn against misusing, mistranslating and misinterpreting nature's potential in the contemporary period of global exchange.

Conclusion

Amitav Ghosh centres *Gun Island* on migratory movements within and beyond the Indian subcontinent. He addresses the movements of people that shape postcolonial lives, urban spaces of resettlement, and the transformation of geo-political landscapes. However, female characters remain absent from such rapidly changing geo-political spaces as the interactions between nation and the world that lies beyond it become stronger, yet more loosely connected. In Ghosh's *Gun Island*, women remain deified as custodians of belief systems, doubly marginalised due to their economic and political backgrounds and culturally ostracized due to rigorous societal norms. Therefore, their

voices are considerably depleting in the grander politics of climate migrants – one of the most challenging issues at present – and the changing dynamics of urban spaces. In conversation with Chitra Sankaran, Ghosh asserts that his writing and research interests lie in, “That which is obscure, that which is hidden, that which is occluded, that which is marginal [...] I’m drawn to marginal people in India, I’m drawn to marginal people around the world, I’m drawn to Burmese, Cambodians, to obscure figures, defeated figures and people who salvage some sort of life out of wreckage .” (Sankaran, 12, 13) Women characters in Ghosh’s *Gun Island* inhabit the silences, the pauses, and the middle passages of the narrative. Even though women emerge as central figures in the narrative of climate induced migration and movement, they are hardly incorporated in the aspirations, the hopes, the desires and the dreams that force such movements across the globe to come into reality. “The billions of images that now permeate every corner of the globe” (269) and make way for “dreams and desires” (269) which ultimately leads to generations of uprooting is not directly associated with Ghosh’s women characters. They remain associated with nuanced definitions of home while navigating the interiorities, complexities and migrations in the novel.

Chapter 2

Siting in Translation: Locating Subaltern Female Bodies in Indian Diaspora Literature

Tracing Subject, Tracing Other/Women

Postcolonial discourses have been extensively intertwined with colonial perspectives that shape its theoretical¹²⁴, historical, and cultural¹²⁵ framework. Importantly, over the course of its establishment in Western academic institutions, postcolonial studies have consistently challenged them by acutely demystifying intersections of gender, race, culture, and identity. Alluding to the illustrative power of narration and storytelling, Trinh T. Minh-ha, in her book *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*, argues, “Story, history, literature (or religion, philosophy, natural science, ethics) – all in one,” are the necessary, “tool of primitive man, the simplest vehicle of truth.” (Minh-ha, 120) While Minh-ha eloquently engages with the transformative as well as manipulative power of narration, her theoretical interventions pertaining to the ‘Third World woman’ creates a counter-narrative to the predominantly masculine ‘master narrative’. For instance, in the lines, “...what is more important is to (re-)tell the story as she thinks it should be told; in other words, to maintain the difference that allows (her) truth to live on. The difference. He does not hear or see,” (Minh-ha, 150) the binaries of the counter-

¹²⁴ See Alison Blunt’s and Cheryl McEwan’s book, *Postcolonial Geographies* where they argue, “Knowledge has been, and to a large extent still is, controlled and produced in the West; the power to name, represent and theorize is still located here,” (Blunt and McEwan, 9) and situate postcolonial theorists including Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Edward Said whose influential works counter the dominant narratives of colonialism.

¹²⁵ See Douglas Kerr’s book *Eastern Figures: Orient and Empire in British Writing*, where Kerr, referring to the dominant imagination of the East with respect to the ‘West’s’ viewpoint, discusses the historical and cultural linkages between the geographical locations of the ‘East’ and the ‘West.’ Such colonial interpretations have strongly influenced postcolonial thought.

narrator (she) and master- narrator (He) are clear and distinct. Minh-ha's investment in the Third World woman's need to reconfigure the history she is born into and embrace the process of storytelling as, "the oldest form of building historical consciousness in community," (Min-ha, 149) is indispensable to the process of building narratives that write/speak back to the 'master narrator.' Often emphasised in these counternarratives is the term 'other.' In an interview with Pratibha Parmar,¹²⁶ Minh-ha is asked about her engagement with the 'Third World female other' and their role in the feminist movement. Interestingly, the 'other' that Minh-ha refers to, as she establishes in the interview, is exclusively adhered to race. Her theories locate the people of colour in the United States who have political and intellectual agency and contribute to feminist movements,

"Now that more women of colour have access to education, there will be more and more rewriting work to be done on our side. [...] it continues to shift the framework of Euro-American feminism and, depending on how work is carried out, the refocus on women of colour in white feminist discourse lately can be seen as a simultaneous form of appropriation expropriation, or as an acknowledgement of intercultural enrichment and of interdependency in the fighting-learning process." (Parmar, 68)

It is important to note that Minh-ha's 'other' largely consist of women that have attempted to 'fight' their way towards dominant narratives (of feminism.) For Minh-ha, they can take up a subject position and find the agency to articulate themselves. The 'other', however,

¹²⁶ See Trinh T. Min-Ha's interview with Pratibha Parmar, "Woman, Native, Other."

has been associated with far more distant and 'exotic'¹²⁷ references. For instance, Edward W. Said, in his pioneering book, *Orientalism*, locates the 'other' in postcolonial studies by taking an example of Kachuk Hanem – an Egyptian dancer – to navigate the distinctive interplay of the master narrative highlighting,

“...she never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence or history. *He* spoke for and represented her. He was foreign, comparatively wealthy, male, and these were historical facts of domination that allowed him not only to possess Kachuk Hanem physically but to speak for her and tell his readers in what way she was “typically Oriental.” [...] It fairly stands for the pattern of relative strength between East and West, and the discourse about the Orient that it enabled.” (Said, 15)

Said's 'other' is an object in its own narrative. It is denied identity and cultural affiliation and assimilated in the grand narratives of colonialism. Prominent scholars, including,

¹²⁷ See Graham Huggan's book *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*, where Huggan argues, “the exotic is not, as is often supposed, an inherent quality to be found ‘in’ certain people, distinctive objects, or specific places; exoticism describes, rather, a particular mode of aesthetic perception – one which renders people, objects and places strange even as it domesticates them . . . Exoticism, in this context, might be described as a kind of semiotic circuit that oscillates between the opposite poles of strangeness and familiarity” (Huggan, 13)

Foucault¹²⁸, Deleuze¹²⁹, Fanon¹³⁰, Spivak¹³¹ and Boehmer¹³², to name a few, have discussed the formation of the 'other' exploring its position as an element of desire within the Eurocentric episteme. Desire is almost a creative product of power; it is the lens through which the 'other' is figuratively brought into being. Simone Bignall, in her essay "Deleuze and Foucault on Desire and Power" engages with desire as a significantly popular and promising tool for identifying the 'other' in colonial endeavours and narratives. Highlighting Homi Bhabha's critique of Edward Said where he claims that Said, in Bignall's words, "assumes a seamless and unconflicted colonial subjectivity" (Bignall, 7) in suggesting that colonialism has been able to maintain "complete hegemonic control" (Bignall, 7) she asserts,

¹²⁸ See Michelle Foucault's book *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, where he argues that "power is 'always already there', that one is never 'outside' it, that there are no 'margins' for those who break with the system." (Foucault, 153) See "Can the Subaltern Speak" where Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak argues "in the name of desire, (Foucault) reintroduce the undivided subject into the discourse of power," (Spivak, 2) thereby blurring the hierarchies of power.

¹²⁹ See Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak's essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak" (Page- 2-3) and Simone Bignall's and Paul Patton's book *Deleuze and the Postcolonial* (Page- 21) which highlights the representation and position of the 'other' as a subject situated through desire in the ideological production of power.

¹³⁰ See Frantz Fanon's book *Black Skins, White Masks* which explores the position of the colonised subject in dominant epistemologies- language and cultural hierarchies- of the power structures that influence them.

¹³¹ See Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak's 1988 essay "Can the Subaltern Speak" which highlights the position – as subject and object – of the doubly oppressed 'subaltern' woman.

¹³² See Elleke Boehmer's chapter "Postcolonialism" in her book *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* in which she attempts to situate 'Third World women and migrant women' "in the First World, to define their own positions in relation both to nationalist and neo-colonial discrimination, and to Western feminism." (Boehmer, 217)

“The political operation of colonial discourse extends over the entire social field, and thus any space outside the colonial regime is rendered negligible. This perception of colonisation as involving an apparent totalisation of the social field as an operation of discipline which leaves no room for resistance.” (Bignall, 7)

However, colonial perspectives seek to understand the ambiguous position of the ‘other’ against the ‘self.’¹³³ Homi Bhabha, in his essay, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” notes that in its grand civilising mission, colonial enterprises have effectively used mimicry as a tool to disseminate power, “colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite.” (Bhabha, 3) Bhabha’s theory of mimicry alludes to the development of strong colonial associations across the world with a motivation to create a cultural ‘other’ that re-assembles itself to become the spitting image of the West,

“In the ambivalent world of “not quite/not white” on the margins of metropolitan desire, the founding objects of the Western world become the erratic, eccentric, accidental *object trouves* of the colonial discourse – the part-objects of presence. It is then that the body and the book lose their representational authority. Black skin splits under the racist gaze, displaced into signs of bestiality, genitalia, grotesquerie,

¹³³ Self v/s Other is an important part of colonial narrative structures. Here, I have used the word Self to identify the colonialist and Other to identify the lands, cultures, people, and society that is pitted against it and re-presented. The presence of the Other is acknowledged, predominantly referred to and understood in relation to the image of the Self.

which reveal the phobic myth of the undifferentiated whole white body.” (Bhabha, 10)

Thus, various theories surrounding the representation of the ‘other’ have been incorporated in burgeoning academic circles. Whether it is ever completely accommodated as a subject is a debate that intensifies the ambivalent position of postcolonial studies.

Since the establishment of postcolonial studies as an institution, the position of the ‘other’ as an extension of Europe¹³⁴ has been extensively contested. However, the ‘other’ remained as a figure to be contemplated giving rise to issues of modalities and perspectives and challenging the existing viewpoints that Eurocentric narrative structures and academic tools have held on to – that of re-presentation. Neil Lazarus, in his book *The Postcolonial Unconscious*, states that, “Scholars in postcolonial studies, however, have tended to address Eurocentrism less in terms of ideology and more as an episteme” (Lazarus, 14) This focus on Eurocentrism as an episteme is pertinent to defining the process of re-presentation. It is a term widely associated with the ‘other’ which is constructed in the language of those in dominant positions, situating it as an object in their purview. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that the disenfranchised ‘others’ that are subjected to such delineations are represented in a way that “the complicity between

¹³⁴ See Douglas Kerr’s book *Eastern Figures: Orient and Empire in British Writing*. Also see Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (Page- 15, 16) that explore dominant discourses of power and knowledge that have recognised the ‘other’ as an alternative of Europe in form and function.

“speaking for” and “portraying” (Spivak, 108) is often side-lined. She offers a distinction between two different kinds of representation – *Vertretung* and *Darstellung*.¹³⁵ The former she defines as “stepping in someone’s place [...] to tread in someone’s shoes” (Spivak, 108). Representation in this sense is associated with speaking for people’s needs, demands and desires. The latter is re-presentation which is a way of “placing there.” (Spivak, 108) Postcolonial studies have carried this process of creating and locating the ‘other’, marked by a tumultuous history of colonial reappropriations, and attempted to situate the marginalised voices that struggle to be heard. Arguably, in the process of representation, the identified ‘other’ either slips into the cracks of knowledge producing enterprises and lacks proper forms of recognition – for example, Edward Said’s exotic ‘other’, or it develops a network of socio-cultural counter-narratives that enable it to represent itself – for example Trinh T Minh-ha’s Third World woman ‘other.’ Therefore, as Shehla Burney rightly suggests, postcolonialism stands as an important theoretical framework that, “...deconstructs the structure, processes, and means of othering – a term coined by Gayatri Spivak.” (Burney, 3) Interestingly, Neil Lazarus’ essay’s title - “a figure glimpsed in a rear view mirror” – hints at postcolonial studies being self-reflective. It attempts to reconfigure the marginalised identities and voices amidst a disruptive colonial baggage that it constantly confronts. Further, for Benita Parry, “Such intense self-reflection, focused on the critic’s obligation to undermine the text of colonial authority as well as to install a distance from the concepts of anticolonialist theory, marked the beginnings of postcolonial studies in the late 1970s and early 1980s...” (Parry, 5)

¹³⁵ See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s book *The Postcolonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies and Dialogue*, (Page- 108)

Therefore, the relations that are established with the 'other' are that of social, political, and cultural control across colonial and postcolonial discourses. The question, however, is that as postcolonial studies attempt to define the 'other', to what extent does its object-position and the subject-position collide? Does the ambiguity there lead them to develop nuanced cultural identities of their own?

Postcolonial writers have attempted to redefine and replace colonial epistemologies by disseminating varying cultural identities through literature across geographical borders. The lines separating identity, culture and social recognition are, thus, simultaneously blurring. As globalisation leads to a cross-cultural interaction between various parts of the world, these ambiguities intensify and both colonial and postcolonial discourses are reassessed and re-examined under a very different light – that of acceptance. For instance, Trinh T. Minh-ha, in the essay "No Master Territories," significantly blurs the lines intrinsically dissociating the centre and the margin arguing, "The center itself is marginal...[H]ow possible is it to undertake a process of decentralization without being made aware of the margins within the center and the centers within the margin?" (Minh-ha, 216) As the margins overlap the centre, postcolonial writers probe into issues of border crossing.¹³⁶ Contemporary migration involves conditions of coercion, where crossing borders could mean dispossession or misinterpretation. Translation too operates not only in linguistic terms but as the imposition of dominant cultural motifs onto

¹³⁶ See Mary Jacobus's book *On Belonging and Not Belonging: Translation, Migration, Displacement* (Page- 2-4) where Jacobus studies translation in terms of movement across languages as well as places, discussing the complexities of belonging, migration and translocation.

subjugated voices. It is therefore important to understand that processes of translation could manipulate voices, meanings and literary interventions, revealing the fractures and failures of transnational interactions.

Translating Other – Merging the Local and the Global

The process of 'translation'¹³⁷. Homi Bhabha, in *The Location of Culture*, discusses the 'shiftiness' of the prefix 'post' that attempt to situate theories and narratives at the "borderlines of the present." (Bhabha, 3) Thus, locating postcolonial existence in "a moment of transit," (Bhabha, 4) Bhabha creates a fluid space for political and cultural associations/interventions to develop which leads to "the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest or cultural value." (Bhabha, 5) Thus, culture and its steady alterations in the ever-present colonial perspectives, have incorporated new theoretical, spatial, and political references that expand the space for research. Historically, translation and its roots in postcolonial literature trace the colonised subject under imperial rule. Young locates the 'other', tracing theorists like Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak, in the process of writing that accesses its "violent episteme" (Young, 151) which often homogenises the marginalised or subaltern subject. The process of 'writing back' to the colonial enterprise, that Young identifies to be equally homogenising in the coloniser's tongue, however, often stands out as an act of reclaiming the subject within the same colonial mechanisms that locates the other outside of it. This process of reclamation has remained a central issue throughout the process of

¹³⁷ I attempt to diversify the term translation and its association to the 'migration of meanings' further in this section, thus developing it in terms of location, transference and understanding of the 'other.'

decolonisation and the development of postcolonial thought thereafter. The desire to hark back to the homeland and the posterity of loss and disruption, situates the diasporic Indian writer – writing in English – in a fragmented storytelling process. Salman Rushdie is, however, aware that the English language, as a by-product of colonisation, can ‘neither be conquered nor be rejected,’ (Rushdie, 17) by the writers of diasporic origin. His assertion that the English language, “must, in spite of everything, be embraced. (The word ‘translation’ comes, etymologically, from the Latin for ‘bearing across’). Having been borne across the world, we are translated men...” (Rushdie, 17) almost encapsulates the emigrant, expatriate, and diasporic writer in cross-border movement and links the continuities of both the process of translation and migration. In fact, Christine Ivanovic in the essay “‘We are translated men’: Translational Literature and Migration” highlights the literary and territorial trans-location of postcolonial narratives and argues that Rushdie’s plurality, as ‘translated men’ (Rushdie, 17) in “the state of being translated as a new form of existence” (Ivanovic, 106) enhances the position of “literary translation from notions of faithful text transfer and instead perform translation as a mode of writing on its own merits.” (Ivanovic, 106) Therefore, while translation involves the transference of linguistic sign systems from one language to the other, the process focuses on meaning creation and develops individual cultural locations through signs, symbols, traditions, and beliefs; so much so that the translated text becomes a recognisable cultural entity. Further, Susan Bassnet, in *Translation Studies*, agrees,

“Beyond the notion stressed by the narrowly linguistic approach, that translation involves the transfer of ‘meaning’ contained in one set of language signs into another

set of language signs through competent use of dictionary and grammar, the process involves a whole set of extra-linguistic criteria also.” (Bassnet, 14)

Culture is an important criterion that affects translation as an activity. Translation, textual or otherwise, responds to the often-problematic settings of “contextual requisites, ideological and pragmatic purposes” (Cortés and Harding, 3) which confronts the borders framing the rapidity of cultural interactions.¹³⁸ In fact, Emily Apter revisits the notions of fluidity and transference associated with translation highlighting, “border-crossing has become such an all-purpose ubiquitous way of talking about translation that its purchase on the politics of actual borders – whether linguistic or territorial – has been attenuated.” (Apter, 65) Therefore, while translation incorporates an interplay of languages and cultures, it is forced to encounter untranslatability as well. However, dispersals from the homeland and the emergence of migrant cultures dislocate their cultural and linguistic affiliations to a point of origin which, consequently, either develop cultures that are ‘othered’¹³⁹ or create hybrid and cross-cultural identities and narratives. Alluding to Bhabha, Douglas Robinson in the book, *Translation and Empire* highlights that “the migrant culture of the ‘in-between’, the minority position, dramatizes the activity of culture’s untranslatability [...] towards an encounter with the ambivalent process of

¹³⁸ See Emily Apter’s book *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (Page – 65) where Apter addresses the concerns of ‘othering’ associated with the process of translation. The willingness to translate and the “politics of offence” associated with translational activities revisit ambiguous spaces of interaction between culture and translation.

¹³⁹ See Emily Apter’s book *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (Page – 66, 67) where Apter examines the bordered and ‘othered’ state of Palestine which is often extracted “into existence” through language, art and photography.

splitting and hybridity that marks the identification with culture's difference" (Robinson, 27). He asserts,

"Translation in the traditional sense requires stable differences between two cultures and their languages, which the translator then bridges; the mixing of cultures and languages in migrant and border cultures makes translation in the traditional sense impossible." (Robinson, 27)

Postcolonial literature emerged amidst this cultural difference as a part of migration and border-crossing. Globalisation further expands horizons, canons, communities, and cultures. Interestingly, for narratives that have developed in the process of border transgression and across global markets of consumption, translation became an inherent trait. Rebecca Walkowitz, in the book *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature*, establishes that, "translation and circulation of literature today is historically unprecedented once we consider how quickly books enter various national markets, small and large, across several continents." (Walkowitz, 2) She goes on to use the term "born translated" (Walkowitz, 3) for literature that,

"...approaches translation as medium and origin rather than an afterthought. Translation is not secondary or incidental to these works. It is a condition of their production. Globalisation bears on all writers working in English today. However, it bears on them differently. [...] even those novelists who don't plan on translation

participate in a literary system attuned to multiple formats, media and languages.”
(Walkowitz, 4)

For Walkowitz, ‘born- translated’ literature, filling the gaps of the literary production and the global marketplace, situates itself in a process of ‘un-forgetting,’ (Walkowitz, 7) While literature from all over the world is being translated into English, there is a tendency to forget contribution of other languages to the production of literature in the global marketplace as the narrative space becomes narrower with fewer languages circulating. Therefore, with literature that is simultaneously created and interpellated into the process of translation – especially by the English language – aspects such as identities, cultures, nations, and societies are significantly intermingled. Postcolonial literatures have been written and re-written in the English language amidst a linguistic and cultural change fostered by the process of colonisation.

Translation has remained a consistent part of the English language and its motive of bringing together a distinct array of cultures. It incorporates the power dynamic of the coloniser’s language that went on to relocate multilingualistic and multicultural narratives into a single form or nature of origin. For instance, Tejaswini Niranjana, in *Siting Translation: History, Poststructuralism and the Colonial Context* locates translation in “asymmetrical relations of power that operate under colonialism” (Niranjana, 2) and argues that “[It] produces strategies of containment. By employing certain modes of representing the other – which it thereby also brings into being – translation reinforces hegemonic versions of the colonised...” (Niranjana, 3) The ‘strategies of containment’ that Niranjana associates with the colonial rule is crucial to the close-knit literary and cultural

structures that the imperial centre and the periphery are built within. For instance, Douglas Robinson, in *Translation and Empire*, identifies translation as “an indispensable channel of imperial conquest and occupation,” (Robinson, 10) as, “One of the earliest areas of concern in the history of translation as empire was the selection and training of interpreters to mediate between the colonizer and the colonized.” (Robinson, 10) Language, therefore, has remained a tool for assimilation into the colonial discourse. It has transpired the motives of the colonial enterprise and carried its dominant and exploitative systems forward. However, a significant role of the process of translation has been to traverse the interstices of the large and distinctly demarcated colonial structures of power and language by re-tracing the colonial discourse. Quoting Tejaswini Niranjana, Robinson distinguishes the process of translation as, in Niranjana’s words, “speculative, provisional and interventionist.” (Robinson, 89) He goes on to say that Niranjana advocates a “transformative practice of ‘re-translation’” (Robinson, 88) that asserts on the purity or unadulterated cultural location of the “precolonial essence of Indianness” (Robinson, 89) that should contribute to the larger context of nationhood. Robinson attempts to highlight the ways in which postcolonial theorists like Niranjana preserve the heterogeneity of cultures that are often unified or homogenised under colonial practices. Postcolonial theorists focus on the metamorphic impact that the process of reimagining translation brings to postcolonial literature and culture. For instance, Tejaswini Niranjana, in *Siting in Translation*, argues,

“The post-colonial desire to *re-translate* is linked to the desire to *re-write history*. Re-writing is based on an act of reading, for translation in the postcolonial context

involves what Benjamin would call 'citation' and not an "absolute forgetting." Hence there is no simple rupture with the past but a radical rewriting of it. [...] This act of *remembering*, as Bhabha has pointed out, "is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection." Rather, it is "a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present." (Niranjana, 172-173)

Thus, postcolonial literature, in its cross-cultural translated existence, reappropriates the inherited language of the coloniser, transgresses its territorial and linguistic boundaries and adduces cultural identity. However, translation, as a creative endeavour, has continued to be understood as a second attempt at the original which locates postcolonial literature much lower in the hierarchies of literary creations. 'Literatures in English,' as a separate category emerging from the colonies of the West are often considered a duplication of the European 'origin.' However, they are still not facsimiles. While literary translations grapple with the 'language of loss' (Bassnet and Trivedi, 17), postcolonial translations create and narrate 'difference.' Postcolonial literatures, as nuanced translations, began to be written for non-European considerations, cross-cultural dialogues, and wider consumption. Interestingly, Susan Bassnet, in *Translation Studies*, alluding to Brazilian translators, investigates the idea of the translator as a cannibal. She argues, "The metaphor of translation as cannibal is based on a revised notion of what cannibalism signifies [...] from the perspective of those people whose cannibalistic practices derive from an alternative vision of society." (Bassnet, XV) Bassnet's comparison of translation with the cannibalistic view of devouring the source text not only

questions the relation between the source text and the target language or culture¹⁴⁰, but also contends Derrida's argument "that the translation process creates an 'original' text." (Bassnet, XV) Further, Susan Bassnet and Harish Trivedi in the introduction to *Postcolonial Translation: Theory and Practice* argue,

"...translation is a highly manipulative activity that involves all kinds of stages in that process of transfer across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Translation is not an innocent, transparent activity but is highly charged with significance at every stage; it rarely, if ever, involves a relationship of equality between texts, authors or systems." (Bassnet and Trivedi, 15)

As established by theorists investigating the spatial and cultural orientations of translation, it has been increasingly located in the unequal systems of power and language. Among them, postcolonial narratives translated into or written in the English language have struggled to escape the continuity of colonial power structures. Paradoxically, even if they are being written from the 'margins,' they continue to be written towards the 'centre.' Interestingly, vernacular languages are an insertion of the peripheral 'other' into the speech habits of the centre which has significantly deployed linguistic and cultural space in postcolonial literature. It can therefore be argued that translation as a part of

¹⁴⁰ See Susan Bassnet's *Translation Studies*, where she outlines the notions of translation stating, "The traditional nineteenth-century notion of translation [...] was based on the idea of a master-servant relationship paralleled in the translation process—either the translator takes over the source text and 'improves' and 'civilizes' it (cf Fitzgerald discussing Persian texts) or the translator approaches it with humility and seeks to do it homage." (Bassnet, XV)

postcolonial literature developed equally from journeys away from the centre – migration, movement, and displacement.

Translation: Migration of Meanings, Cultures, and Identities

Historically, the postcolonial usage of the English language has thrived in a continuous process of dismantling vernacular language(s) and alternative culture barriers. This is where postcolonial literatures have identified a discontinuity¹⁴¹ from the inherited coloniser's language, thus, enabling a reclamation of identity along various routes of cross-cultural transference. The movement of narratives towards the West through the English language, however, has remained a prevailing idea where the 'other' develops into a monolith that is selectively assimilated by audiences across borders. For instance, Anuradha Dingwaney in the introduction to her book *Between Languages and Cultures*, studies 'translation of culture(s)' (Dingwaney, 3) of the Third World¹⁴² across borders,

¹⁴¹ See Bell Hooks' essay "this is the oppressor's language/ yet I need to talk to you": Language, a place of struggle," where she explores the position of language as a place of subject reclamation. She says, "Language like desire disrupts- refuses to be contained within boundaries," (Hooks, 295) which is then "possessed, taken, claimed as a space of resistance." (Hooks, 297) hence a discontinuity from the colonial domination that uses the same language premise to subjugate.

¹⁴² The category of the 'Third World' is important to consider in the context of translation. It is widely associated with colonial exploitations and post-colonial literary and cultural efflorescence in formerly colonised areas like Asia, Africa and Latin America. Deepika Bahri, in "Feminism and Postcolonialism in a Global and Local Frame" quotes Kum Kum Sangari's exploration of Third World as a term "that both signifies and blurs the functioning of an economic, political, and imaginary geography able to unite vast and vastly differentiated areas of the world into a single 'underdeveloped' terrain" (Bahri, 200)

“This has to do with the selection of certain voices, certain views, certain texts – by the publishing industry (presumably in response to what it believes readers will read) and by reviewers and critics – that are then constituted as a putative “canon” of “Third World” texts and/or authors. [...] these writers straddle two cultures; attached to specific locales in the “Third World” they address their work primarily to readers in the West, whose tastes they both share and/or appeal to. This dual orientation (and perhaps, allegiance) of their work makes them the privileged mediators and translators of “Third World” cultures and peoples for Western readers.” (Dingwaney, 6)

While postcolonial theorists and writers contribute to a longstanding history of reclamation and cultural revolution, the postcolonial identity of the translator is tied to a simultaneous system of assimilation that their imminent cultural dislocation entails. For instance, Mahasweta Sengupta’s essay “Translation as Manipulation: The Power of Images and Images of Power,” elucidates the translator’s contribution to further commodifying the Third World. She argues that the pervasiveness of the colonial imagination of the Third World seeps into the translator’s creative identity and S/he “selects and rewrites only those texts that conforms to the target culture’s “image” of the source culture...” (Dingwaney, 160) She asserts,

“Translation [...] became a process of manipulation, a submission to the hegemonic power of “images” created and nurtured by the target culture as the authentic representation of the Other. This trend exists even today; a cursory review of what

sells in the West [...] we remain trapped in the cultural stereotypes created and nurtured through translated texts.” (Dingwaney, 172)

The need to represent the marginalised ‘other’ in South Asian colonial history gave birth to *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society* – published in six volumes edited by Ranajit Guha with eight other collaborators. Borrowing the term “subaltern” from Antonio Gramsci, the Italian political thinker and writer who first used the term to depict landless peasants, Ranajit Guha discusses the historiography of the peasant rebellion and consciousness in colonial India. In *Reading Subaltern Studies: Critical History, Contested Meaning and the Globalization of South Asia*, David Ludden argues,

“*Subaltern Studies* reinvented subalternity. In 1982, the term ‘subaltern’ had little meaning in South Asian studies. Its conceptual emptiness at the time was underlined when Ranajit Guha quoted the Concise *Oxford dictionary* on the first page of *Subaltern Studies I* and then remained silent on Gramsci’s use of the term. [...] the project made itself original by divorcing itself from Gramsci to invent a distinctively Indian *subalternity*.” (Ludden, 15)

While Ludden highlights that the ‘Subaltern Studies’ project attempted to reinstate the marginalised communities in Indian history, he points out that Ranajit Guha identified the subaltern group as “an assortment of marginalised academics” (Ludden, 1) and “a distinctive school of research whose adherents came to be called ‘subalternists’ or simply

‘subalterns.’” (Ludden, 2) Interestingly, while as pioneering figures, the subaltern studies group has critically challenged the dominant narratives of colonial history, identity and politics and paved way for the marginalised classes to be in history, the position of the term ‘subaltern’ remained tied to academic circles. Further, with its extension to postcolonial studies¹⁴³, the subaltern and its historical position was notably dislocated. Developing as an impact-driven volume challenging the dominant colonial and nationalistic sentiments and their ‘elitist’ origins that prevail in Indian historiography, Subaltern Studies evolved in institutional departments essentially distanced from the identified ‘subaltern’ that is discriminated on the basis of caste and class in South Asia. The translatability of subaltern identities, therefore, has remained a necessary intervention in postcolonial discourse. In fact, Tareeq Jazeel and Stephen Legg¹⁴⁴ argue that there are two major questions that Guha brought out in the Subaltern Studies Collective and in present subaltern thought - “How should we question and critique the limits of Western thought and representation? And what can we know about the experiences of those non-(colonial, nationalist, or academic) elites who are placed beyond and escape representation, namely, the subaltern?” (Jazeel and Legg, 2) The second question that Jazeel and Legg highlight enhances the concerns of political and intellectual space that the subaltern has access to. Importantly, relocated in postcolonial discourses, the figure of the marginalised Indian woman along with her disappearing history in colonial and postcolonial India needs to be questioned. In the postcolonial

¹⁴³ See Vinayak Chaturvedi’s “Introduction” to the book *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial* (Page- vii – xiii)

¹⁴⁴ See Tariq Jazeel and Stephen Legg’s book *Subaltern Geographies* (Page- 1,2)

context, subaltern women become tirelessly entangled in the nation's aspirations and, often, postcolonial writer's agencies, so much so, that the 'exotic', 'marginal' and 'distant' 'other' engulfs it in its larger narrative.

Subaltern Women in Translation

The spatial and cultural location of subaltern identities has been theoretically explored in relation to marginalised female bodies and voices, often considered waiting to be 'discovered' and 'understood.' In fact, the gendered position of the subaltern influences various criticisms about the place in society and national history. For instance, Ranajit Guha, in his essay, "Chandra's Death," attempts to situate a subaltern woman's body within hierarchies of gender and caste by taking an example of the Bagdi tribe. He highlights, "it was the dominance of the upper caste landed elite over this community that made Bagdi women a prey to male lust; yet they figured in patriarchal lore as creatures of easy virtue." (Guha, 41) Locating Chandra Chashini – a Bagdi tribeswoman's – body in the larger narrative of history itself, Guha outlines the subjugation of marginalised communities.¹⁴⁵ In fact, as he interrogates, "How is one to reclaim this document for history?" (Guha, 36) Guha notices the lack of continuity and relevance in the fragmented testimonies of the community as he identifies it as an "anecdote with no known context, it has come down to us simply as the residuum of a dismembered past." (Guha, 37) Therefore, the anecdotal yet descriptive nature of the event, argues Guha, "was meant to speak of an event without a subject." (Guha, 37) Evidently, Chandra's body, which was

¹⁴⁵ See Ranajit Guha's "Chandra's Death" where he compiles the testimonial documents that present historical evidence of the discrimination and marginalisation that the women of the Bagdi tribe are subjected to. (Guha, 36)

to be the subject of the testimonies and subaltern historiography at large, is devoid of a voice or a context in the surrounding socio-political narratives¹⁴⁶ overshadowing her existence. Chandra and the women in her family are doubly marginalised by the dominant presence of the patriarchal setup and their socio-political caste location. Guha's reading of Chandra's death understands this exclusion as important example in his attempt to unearth the 'subaltern' narrative. The exclusion, in fact ejection, of the (subaltern) female body from mainstream discourses of history and memory after Chandra dies was coupled with "the supreme violence of a man's rejection of a woman impregnated by him." (Guha, 56) For Guha, this exclusionary measure acts as a space for solidarity within the domain of the woman's body where a tragedy of this degree was "a measure, for its time, of the strength of women's solidarity and its limitation." (Guha, 60) Critiquing Ranajit Guha's Reading of "Chandra's Death," Nivedita Majumdar notes that in his attempt "to recover an instance of women's gendered solidarity," (Majumdar) Guha is unable to provide the women in question either communal solidarity or individual agency owing to the liminality of the choices presented to them. Majumdar argues that not only were the choices of ostracization and abortion readily marginalising the women and the Bagdi tribe but the scope of the biological sphere that Guha identifies as a 'language not fully comprehensible to men' (Majumdar) were also further marginalising them as "an idea of the feminine mystique." (Majumdar) Above all, the notion of subaltern resistance is failing

¹⁴⁶ See Ranajit Guha's essay, "Chandra's Death" where he locates two separate political intersections of Chandra's narrative that ultimately try and appropriate it as a moment in history "on behalf of the state in one case and on behalf of the community in the other. [...] the law as the state's emissary, had already arrived at the site before the historian and claimed it as its own by designating the event as a "case," the death as a "crime"..." (Guha, 35)

to administer itself in Chandra's body; Its apparent transcendence towards establishing biological and social female agency is ultimately rendered 'hidden' in history. Thus, despite locating the finer details of Chandra's body "racked by fever and pain, of a plucked fetus, of hemorrhage and death," (Guha, 59) it remained silent, later silenced in death, amidst the overarching postcolonial discourses of rightful reclamation.

Additionally, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's 1988 essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak," including its later edition,¹⁴⁷ is an important addition to the plethora of critically analysing texts that attempt to locate the subaltern woman. For Spivak, the two 'spaces' from which subaltern women narratives have been etched into India's national history are the act of self-immolation in the 'sati' tradition and the act of committing suicide. She elucidates, "Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject constitution and object formation, the figure of the woman disappears, into a [...] displaced figuration of the 'third world woman' caught between tradition and modernization." (Spivak, 102) While the 'sati' tradition opens a space where the imperial regime intervened and continued to challenge the core values associated with tradition and patriarchal associations, in Spivak's words, "saving brown women from brown men," (Spivak, 93) subaltern women were seen as object the entire reconstruction aimed to 'protect' and 'save.' Spivak confirms that the narrative of the 'mythic Sati' was "a transaction between great male Gods fulfils the destruction of the female body and thus inscribes the earth as sacred geography" (Spivak, 103) arguing,

¹⁴⁷ See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's book *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present* (Page- 293-299)

“It was imperialist to erase the image of the luminous fighting mother Durga and invest the proper noun Sati with no significance other than the ritual burning of the helpless widow as sacrificial offering who can then be saved. There is no space from which the sexed subaltern subject can speak.” (Spivak, 103)

What the act the self-immolation and its terrifyingly subservient space leaves no space for is the freedom to make a choice – even if it is between two rather unreasonable choices one could make. In contrast, Spivak brings in Bhubaneswari Bhaduri’s suicide and questions the kind of agency she had in doing so. The act of hanging herself “in her father’s modest apartment” (Spivak 103) in North Calcutta when she was menstruating was well orchestrated so it could not have been misconstrued. Bhubaneswari had mapped out the patriarchal space well enough to present the act in the public eye as ‘a choice.’ The conclusion that Spivak draws from both the ‘sati’ tradition and Bhubaneswari Bhaduri’s suicide is the sense of denial with which dissenting acts by subaltern women are received. There is, of course, criticism about Spivak’s idea of the ‘subaltern’ and its socio-political position. For instance, Nivedita Majumdar question Bhubaneswari Bhaduri’s position as a subaltern arguing that Spivak assigns “the very unitary subjectivity which she describes as an intellectual fantasy. So we seem to have a non-subaltern who does in fact speak and with a coherent subjectivity that cannot in fact exist,” (Majumdar) a criticism that Spivak responds to in her later interviews and essays.¹⁴⁸ Additionally,

¹⁴⁸ See Gayatri Spivak’s book *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* (Page- 189-191) Also see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s chapter “In Response” (Page- 228) as a part of Rosalind C Morris’s book *Can the Subaltern Speak: Reflections on the History of an Idea*.

Rosalind C Morris, in her book *Can the Subaltern Speak? : Reflections on the History of an idea*, re-examines the question proposed in Spivak's 1988 essay regarding the representation of subaltern women in Western discourse and situates emerging trends in postcolonial studies around authenticity, hybridity and multiculturalism that have governed the process. Spivak's examples of subaltern women are interrogated in terms of its position in the larger context of the world. Postcolonial studies departments in Western academic institutions often navigate globalisation and the possibility of cultural exchange as an opportunity to escape the liminalities of tradition, identity and location. However, subaltern women, readily accessed by such institutions and departments, through intellectual readings, re-writings, and primarily English translations, remain to be acknowledged for their intricate conflicts, histories and lives. Therefore, the narratives of 'difference'¹⁴⁹ that assimilates the subaltern in mainstream discourses with postcolonial, diasporic and cross-cultural translations should be revisited to understand its inherent untranslatability.¹⁵⁰ Responding to her 1988 essay "Can The Subaltern Speak," Gayatri

¹⁴⁹ See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's book *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present* (Page- 293-299) where Spivak revisits the act of widow self-immolation that she explored in her 1988 essay "Can the Subaltern Speak" highlighting broader considerations of patriarchy, development and other forms of Western readership that define subaltern women's agency (or lack thereof). These variations in reading subaltern identity, agency and voice and their translations in different contexts further marginalise the voices of subaltern women diminishing "the possibility of recovering a (sexually) subaltern subject" (Spivak, 299)

¹⁵⁰ See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's chapter "In Response" in Rosalind C Morris's book *Can the Subaltern Speak: Reflections on the History of an Idea* (Page- 235) where Spivak explores "death as text" (Morris, 235) which responds to the ways in the subaltern, ironically speaking, ultimately remains devoid of a voice. Also See Rosalind C Hanlon's essay, "Recovering the Subject: Subaltern Studies and History of Resistance in Colonial South Asia" as a part of Vinayak Chaturvedi's book, *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial* (Page- 75-77) where Hanlon traces the ways in which subaltern studies theorists are often faced with the ultimate untranslatability of subaltern histories or acquiring them in their own voices.

Chakravorty Spivak asserts on “the possibility of creating an infrastructure [...] which would make the subaltern not accept subalternity as normality,” (Morris 235) by ‘hearing’ subaltern resistance. Interestingly, Spivak takes the example of Bhubaneswari Bhaduri, her foremother, and assigns an exclusive forbearance and significance to her decision to ‘choose’ the time of her death. The “gendering of the second decision, to postpone her death,” (Morris, 235) was, for Spivak, the kind of silence that could eventually be read. However, she barely engages with the interpretation, translation and rewriting of Bhubaneswari’s silence. Further, the infrastructure that Spivak set out to create for subaltern women’s voices (or silences) that experienced colonial and patriarchal coercions seems to be incomplete without her intervention – be it Rup Kanwar’s mother’s smile in after her daughter had committed sati that “said yes to the Scripture” (Morris, 235) or Bhubaneswari’s act of speaking “inscribed in her body” (Landry and MacLean, 289). In fact, in an interview with Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean, even though Spivak asserts, “the subaltern makes an effort to the death to speak, she is not able to be heard, and speaking and hearing complete the speech act,” (Landry and MacLean, 292) she also argues that speech acts by Bhubaneswari or ‘women on the pyres’ would ultimately be reconstructed and interpreted. Therefore, interpretation of subaltern acts forms an important the process of acknowledging their narratives, making translation across languages, cultures and borders an interactive process that responds to the anxieties of representation in postcolonial discourses.

The position of subaltern women – including those subjected to sati tradition, Bhubaneswari and women disadvantaged due to their caste location, like Chandra – is

essentially located in the need to recover and preserve their alternative history. It is interesting to note that the potential need to 'recover' and 'discover,' an idea Edward Said associated with the Eurocentric 'other', is prevalent in the discussed subaltern female narratives which stands at odds with the discourse of reclamation that has continued to develop postcolonial literature. Both colonial influence and postcolonial counter-narratives have explored the ways in which colonised subjects re-assert their subject position as an inserted dialogue in the English language and Western academic institutions. Where, then, is the subaltern, essentially, 'spoken for' from?

As movements and migrations relocate concepts of identities and nationalities, homes have been associated with a space for refuge, historical, cultural, and political assertion, and warmth. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, in her book *Feminism without borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* problematizes the idea of home as it remains connected to the inevitability of displacement,

“Home is always so crucial to immigrants and migrants—I even write about it in scholarly texts (perhaps to avoid addressing it, as an issue that is also very personal?). What interests me is the meaning of home for immigrants and migrants. I am convinced that this question—how one understands and defines home—is a profoundly political one.” (Mohanty, 126)

Mohanty's statement, exploring the political consciousness of 'home,' inadvertently brings in disenfranchised subaltern women in India. Globally, subaltern women are constructed

through the history, territory, culture, and language of postcolonial women writers and their position in Western academic institutions. Interestingly, in all its ironic glory, it has played a significant role in the process of representing itself as a part of an inherent legacy and heritage of resistance as the bodies and voices of subaltern women are transcribed in postcolonial literary endeavours. However, the available socio-political spaces are limited to the institutions or spaces that seek to hear them – a recognition that postcolonialism and feminism still need to come to terms with. There is, certainly, a privileged subject position that postcolonial women’s narratives re-asserts in academic spaces that is often used to understand the (speaking and hearing) voice of the subaltern woman, consequently, accommodating it in postcolonial discourses and challenging the distinct power relations of the centre and the periphery. Gayatri Spivak argues, “In seeking to learn to speak to (rather than listen to or speak for) the historically muted subject of the subaltern woman, the postcolonial intellectual systematically ‘unlearns’ female privilege.” (Spivak, 91) Whether it is possible to escape the power structures in representing subaltern women across institutions that are both fascinated and repulsed by their exotic appeal¹⁵¹ is debatable. In fact, Nirmala Puwar argues, “Academics are not outside the power relations that they document. In bearing witness to the ills and joys of the world we also need to be alert to the *subjects* (as in people) to which we give life in the course of our pronouncements.” (Puwar, 23) Additionally, subaltern women are placed in postcolonial and feminist discourse alongside the trauma and turmoil that their bodies, the only rightfully owned and preserved form of ‘homeliness,’ have encountered.

¹⁵¹ See Nirmala Puwar’s essay, “Melodramatic Postures and Constructions” that investigates the representation of South Asian subaltern women in academic settings.

The larger political space is an extension of their 'silenced' self that continues to speak, act, protest, and dissent from the margins. Thus, homes or domestic spaces, as a part of the double repressed identities of subaltern women, have a consistent historical relation to the larger political space of the nation. An equally important location of subaltern women is in the constant intermingling of languages and cultures in postcolonial discourses and globalised national terrains. Situating gendered and cultural identities in the mobility, contestation, and mediation of 'translation,' Sherry Simon, in *Gender in Translation: Cultural Identity and the Politics of Transmission*, argues,

“... translation is most often used by cultural studies theorists as a metaphor, a rhetorical figure describing on the one hand the increasing internationalization of cultural production and on the other the fate of those who struggle between two worlds and two languages. [...] For those who feel they are marginal to the authoritative codes of Western culture, translation stands as “a metaphor for their ambiguous experience in the dominant culture” (Castelli, 1990:25).” (Simon, 135)

Further, Sara Suleri, in her autobiography *Meatless Days*, revisits the marginal or subaltern women in non-western developing countries as they are exposed to global spaces where literatures and cultures widely circulate. Living in New Haven and teaching 'topics in third world literature,' Suleri often encounters students questioning the less space given to women writers in her course to which her response would be “there are no women in the third world.” (Suleri, 20) What Suleri denies is the existence of countless authentic lives of women – some of them traced through the women in her memoir – that

have been irrevocably lost to colonial, linguistic, cultural and patriarchal conventions of the West. Subaltern women, therefore, are significantly displaced;¹⁵² They are deeply unsettled in the power dynamics of representation and in the “discourse of convenience” (Suleri, 20) that otherwise circulates numerous images of them across geo-political terrains, intensifying the contentions of home/land, nation and belonging.

This chapter would engage with Mahāśvetā Debī’s original Bengali texts – *দৌলতি* (Douloti) and *দ্রৌপদী* (Draupadi) – and their English translations by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak titled *Draupadi* and *Douloti the Bountiful*, enabling a discussion on the representation of subaltern women in translation. Subaltern female bodies and the critically dissenting positions they take lead to expanding liminal spaces and creating individual positions for subaltern women amidst national and communal disparities. Above all else, it forms a site emblematic of cultural identity and critical contentions in the ways in which they were presented and represented, beginning to allow an efflorescence of an aesthetic imagination of home. Spivak’s translations reframe subaltern women’s positions within postcolonial and diasporic associations, portraying the ways in which their bodies and their acts of speech-making emerge as a unifying trajectory that reimagines the postcolonial Indian nation simmering in turmoil

¹⁵² See Deepike Bahri’s essay “Feminism and Postcolonialism in a Global and Local Frame” (Page- 199, 120)

Chapter 2.1

Subaltern Female Bodies Reworking National History in Gayatri Spivak's Translated

Work – Douloti the Bountiful

The Politics of Translation and Re-location of Mahāśvetā Debī's दौलति (Douloti)

Subaltern Studies, addressing the schisms of nation, region, culture and class in India, locates histories of marginalisation at the junctures of colonial¹⁵³, postcolonial,¹⁵⁴ and cross-border¹⁵⁵ theorisations. While the initial theoretical contributions to Subaltern Studies aimed to situate the marginalised subaltern in Indian colonial history,¹⁵⁶ subaltern narratives have considerably become a part of postcolonial reimaginings of the nation through channels of translation and interpretation. Consequently, the process of representing subaltern identities and narratives within critical explorations in postcolonial discourses were influenced by various theoretical interventions across national territories, languages, and cultures. Amidst well-known theorists¹⁵⁷ of subaltern studies – Ranajit

¹⁵³ See David Ludden's book *Reading Subaltern Studies: Critical History, Contested Meaning and the Globalization of South Asia* (Page- 9-11) where Ludden traces Subaltern Studies' need to develop inclusivity in mainstream colonial history, nationalist movements and constructions of the nation.

¹⁵⁴ See Vinayak Chaturvedi's *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial* where Chaturvedi highlights the trajectory of Subaltern Studies and situates its theoretical interventions in the postcolonial context.

¹⁵⁵ See David Ludden's book *Reading Subaltern Studies: Critical History, Contested Meaning and the Globalization of South Asia* where Ludden examines Subaltern Studies beyond the colonial and nationalist ideas arguing, "Dispersion and convergence, migration and assimilation have made subalternity a moveable feast with jumbled tracks leading in many directions." (Ludden, 26)

¹⁵⁶ See Donna Landry, Gayatri Spivak and Gerard MacLean ed. *The Spivak Reader* (Page- 170,171) where Spivak's engagement with colonial histories and the Third World woman is explored.

¹⁵⁷ See David Ludden's, *Reading Subaltern Studies: Critical History, Contested Meaning and the Globalization of South Asia*, where subaltern studies theorists and their distinctive studies are placed in the context of emerging postcolonial discourses.

Guha, Dipesh Chakraborty, and Gyan Prakash to name a few – Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak establishes subaltern women in the larger rubric of postcolonial studies¹⁵⁸ through her seminal essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak,” first published in 1988. Critically commenting on the first publication of “Can the Subaltern Speak,” in the book *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea*, Rosalind C. Morris examines the reading and interpretation of gendered subalterns in a historical context. Locating the (mis)readings of Spivak’s theoretical analysis of the silent (or silenced) histories of subaltern women,¹⁵⁹ Morris analyses the aspect of double marginalisation,

“Perhaps the quoted and misquoted passage from the text, a sentence conceived as such, as a grammatical form, is that in which Spivak writes, “White men are saving brown women from brown men.” [...] Spivak writes and we note the plural: “When confronted with the questions Can the subaltern speak? And can the subaltern (as woman) speak? We will be doubly open to [...] reaction-formation of an initial and continuing desire to give the hysteric a voice.” (Morris, 3)

¹⁵⁸ See Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge’s essay, “What is post(-)colonialism” where the term “foregrounds a politics of opposition and struggle and problematizes the key relationship between centre and periphery.” (Mishra and Hodhe, 399) Also see Neil Lazarus’s book *The Postcolonial Unconscious*, (Page- 2 -11) where Lazarus outlines postcolonialism as a term which engages with broad contestations around hierarchies and socio-political developments of formerly colonised nations and the ongoing processes of decolonisation. Also see Elleke Boehmer and Rosinka Chaudhari’s book *The Indian Postcolonial* (Page- 3-5) exploring the oxymoronic nature of the term ‘Indian Postcolonial’ where instead of “nationally reframing” or “indigenising” postcolonial criticism in the Indian subcontinent the local, national, and global reception of postcolonial discourses are discussed.

¹⁵⁹ See Rosalind C Morris’s *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea* (Page- 2,3) where she demonstrates the (mis)readings and interpretations of Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak’s essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak.”

For Morris, Spivak articulates and equates the desire to give a voice to the hysteric¹⁶⁰ and the desire to speak for the subaltern. In doing so, Morris focuses on an immediate displacement between the actual speech acts and narratives of subaltern women and their inaudibility and illegibility in patriarchal, imperialist and, eventually, transnational spaces. Morris also forces an examination on the political, cultural and linguistic issues that leaves subaltern women devoid of a voice throughout history wherein “the hundreds of shelves of well-intentioned books claiming to speak for or give voice to the subaltern cannot ultimately escape the problem of translation in its full sense.” (Morris, 8) Further, the problem of translating subaltern (female) identities in the English language intensifies the question of placing subaltern women in the already existing narratives of representation¹⁶¹ in Western academic institutions. Mahāśvetā Debī’s (an Indian writer writing in Bengali) Bengali original text, *দৌলতি* (Douloti), and its English translation, *Douloti the Bountiful*, by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak are central to such interrogations. It is important to note that while Debī’s story navigates communal and cultural experiences of the tribal Nagesia community in postcolonial India, its translation contributes to the ambiguity of speaking and hearing across languages. In her essay “Translation as Culture,” Spivak alludes to her translation of Mahāśvetā Debī’s *দৌলতি* (Douloti)

¹⁶⁰ See Rosalind C Morris’s, *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea*, (Page- 3) where she compares Freud’s analysis of the “silence or muteness of the pathological women” (Morris, 3) with the muteness of the subaltern woman.

¹⁶¹ See Deepika Bahri’s, “Feminism and Postcolonialism in a Global and Local Frame” (Page- 193-212) where she argues, “Feminist and postcolonial literary perspectives are occupied with similar questions of representation, voice, marginalization, and the relation between politics and literature,” (Bahri, 193) and explores their theoretical interconnections.

contemplating both the necessity and perpetuity of translation and the subtle hierarchy between native tongues and the English language,

“Sometimes I read and hear that the subaltern can speak in their native languages. I wish I could be as self-assured as the intellectual, literary critic and historian, who assert this in English. No speech is speech if it is not heard. It is this act of hearing-to-respond that may be called the imperative to translate.” (Spivak, 22)

The distance between native languages, tribal cultures and the English language is, however, not entirely bridged by Spivak’s translations as, alongside the dichotomy of speech and hearing, is the resistance that she confronts within languages. For instance, referring to Mahāśvetā Debī’s use of ‘Bangle tribal Creole’ in her fiction, Spivak situates the deeper intricacies of translation where tribal people “constantly translate [...] between their speech” navigating Creole and Bangla which she then attempts to reconfigure into English,¹⁶² retaining its “powerful mark[s]” and “idiom[s].” (Spivak, 23) Therefore, Spivak’s English translation of a language and dialect, that is already crossing regional and cultural borders, stresses on constant transference of location and identity associated with the process of speech-making. Additionally, while Spivak’s position as a postcolonial and diasporic voice that reconstitutes subaltern identities has been severely critiqued over time,¹⁶³ her transnational appropriation of Douloti’s body delves into the complexities of nation and home which has remained understudied. I would argue that Spivak’s

¹⁶² See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s essay, “Translation as Culture” (Page- 22,23)

¹⁶³ See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s book, *Imaginary Maps: Three Stories by Mahasweta Devi*.

translations of Debī's female character, Douloti, both (dis)places her in the postcolonial context and locates her doubly marginalised¹⁶⁴ body in the intricacies of translation where regional languages and national concerns merge with the constancy of migration. Therefore, in the process of translation, Spivak attempts to bridge the disjunct between subaltern women and her own transnational/diasporic position¹⁶⁵ in Western academic circles, significantly reappropriating characters like Douloti within global apertures of the nation.

Crossing Over: Translating Douloti's Subaltern Body

One of most important character traits of Douloti is that her body is used as a medium to reimagine the nation by both Debī and Spivak. For instance, concluding her novella, Debī pits Douloti's body against the socio-political scenario, caste and gender hierarchy as well as the map of India. Spivak's translation, in the collection *Imaginary Maps: Three Stories by Mahasweta Devi*, retains such visceral imagery, thereby linking the regional and national context of Debī's narrative to its cross-border readership. The process of translating Douloti, therefore, has less to do with the interpretation of her voice; It involves a physical and cultural engagement with displacement as her body crosses over nations in an exchange between languages. Nivedita Sen and Nikhil Yadav, commenting on the reading of Debī's stories across national borders and its exposure to Western readership,

¹⁶⁴ See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's 1988 essay "Can the Subaltern Speak" where she discusses the double marginalisation of subaltern women due to socio-political as well as patriarchal dominance. Douloti was marginalised due to her Nagesia caste as well as her position as a woman.

¹⁶⁵ See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's book, *Imaginary Maps: Three Stories by Mahasweta Devi*.

argue, “Postcolonial misgivings on the transcription of a Third World language/ethnicity/culture for a Western, predominantly academic readership underline our need to be wary of a ‘rewritten’ version of the text.” (Sen and Yadav, 14) While Sen and Yadav warn against a mere rewriting of national/regional/ethnic narratives in the name of translation, it is important to note that translating Debī’s narratives into the English language is not devoid of the power dynamics of cultural appropriation. Minoli Salgado, in the essay “Tribal Stories Scribal Worlds: Mahasweta Devi and the Unreliable Translator,” locates cross-cultural transactions through the process of translation arguing,

“Translations, as Rachel May has pointed out, emerge from a perceived need to change the readership and surrounding culture of a text and, as has been shown, can reflect a struggle over the ownership of a text. Such a struggle is heightened when there is an imbalance of power between the donor culture or country and the target audience as is the case with majority world texts translated for global consumption.” (Sen et al, 155)

If Mahāśvetā Debī’s story, *दौलति* (Douloti), enumerates the narratives of marginalised tribal cultures, translating them into English, Spivak notably locates subaltern women in postcolonial discourses of power.¹⁶⁶ For instance, commenting on Mahāśvetā Debī’s

¹⁶⁶ See Harish Trivedi’s “Colonial Influence Postcolonial Intertextuality: Western Literature and Indian Literature,” where Trivedi studies the transference of literature and culture across borders and the developing position of postcolonialism as a site for cross-cultural discourse and criticism in the West where, “the great majority of the “postcolonial” writers seem to have migrated to the West and to be now writing (back?) from that cosy proximity to the centre in the one global language, English. (Trivedi, 10)

stories in the section “Translator’s Note,” she ascertains, “Mahasweta’s stories are postcolonial. They must operate with the resources of a history shaped by colonization against the legacy of colonialism. This “deconstructive embrace” is not only her message, but also her medium.” (Spivak, xxxi) Apart from incorporating the dominant presence of colonialism, which disrupted socio-political anchors of various communities in India, Spivak disintegrates the very boundaries localising postcolonialism in Western academic institutions – essentially university departments of literature and culture – in her postcolonial reading of Debī’s stories. For instance, in the preface to her translation, Spivak’s conversation with Debī familiarises readers with the historical and cultural locations of subaltern women in her narratives. Debī highlights that the tribes had a name for ‘Hindu’ which was ‘Diku’- meaning ‘outsider’ and, in doing so, locates interesting parallels between the two sections of the society,

“As long as the forests were there, the hunting tribes did not suffer so much, because the forests used to provide them food, shelter, timber, hunting. But now that the forests are gone, the tribals are in dire distress. [...] They do not understand mainstream machination, so although there are safeguarding laws against land-grabbing, tribal land is being sold illegally every day, and usurped by mainstream society all over India, especially in West Bengal.” (Spivak, x)

Spivak re-adjusts the transnational focus of her translation of Debī’s narratives by drawing attention to the subtle lines that marginalise communities in the process of postcolonial nation-building. In doing so, she strongly advocates for the re-configuration of tribal

communities in national history as well as their reconstitution in transnational literary spaces, arguing that Debī is not “commodified as “national cultural artefact,” only accessible to “Indians.” (Spivak, xxiii) In fact, commenting on the title ‘imaginary maps,’ Radha Chakraborty, in the essay, “Visionary Cartography: *Imaginary Maps* by Mahasweta Devi,” questions the placement and accessibility of subaltern characters in postcolonial literature,

“As the title indicates, cartography supplies the controlling metaphor, but the qualifying term ‘imaginary’ adds a curious twist to the familiar figure for cultural space. What does the word ‘imaginary’ imply? Something false as opposed to the ‘real’ or ‘historical’, or a creative, utopian or visionary space, or the realm of the unconscious [...] applied to the activity of mapping, does it carry overtones of the idea of ‘imagined communities’ in theorizing nationhood.” (Sen and Yadav, 191)

One of Chakraborty’s inferences links the word ‘imaginary’ to mapping or charting out territories which could be interpreted as the imperceptible boundaries that separate tribal cultures from the postcolonial nation. However, the stories set out to portray the limitations of tribal cultures in India, which include communities settling as ‘outsiders’ on the land that is itself exploring freedom and autonomy. The title ‘imaginary maps’ could also relate to the longstanding divisive politics that have continued to oppress tribal cultures. Therefore, notwithstanding marginalised groups and their histories alongside developing ideas of nation, modernity and progress in India, Radha Chakraborty, argues that Debī’s literature, “...casts a suspicious eye on the economic idea of ‘development.’” (Sen., et al,

191) For Debī, “it exemplifies the exploitation of tribal knowledge and resources in the name of ‘progress’ without any real concern for the welfare of the tribals themselves.” (Sen., et al, 191) Although, tribal women have not been addressed in her 1985 essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak,” or its later version, that provides a critical insight to subaltern positions and women tethered to them, her translation of Debī’s subaltern female character, Douloti, navigates the widening chasm between subaltern women’s history and narrative and emerging issues around cross-border migration of languages, cultures, identities and their meanings. In doing so, Spivak investigates Douloti as the image of an independent struggle that forms a connection beyond national borders, reimagining diasporic discourses, concerns and literatures in the process.

The plot of *Douloti the Bountiful* excavates the subaltern body from the depths of caste and class hierarchies and displays its helplessly marginalised position in the nation-building process. The narrative outlines its characters, Ganori Nagesia, Bono Nagesia, Douloti, and bonded labourers, who are segregated in a society where caste-based oppression has significantly altered the lives of people. Situating these voices within the mainstream discourses of the Indian subcontinent, Debī establishes an undeniably harsh portrayal of the bonded labour system that perpetrates violence and asserts control over the marginalised. Additionally, Debī’s narrative strikingly challenges the ideas of development, change and progress associated with the long-awaited Indian independence and is determined to embed the disappearing narratives of marginalized narratives. In fact, alluding to the systemically oppressive bonded labour tradition in the

section “The Author in Conversation,” in *Imaginary Maps: Three Stories by Mahasweta Devi*, Debī asserts,

“In such backward, feudally oppressed districts, the bonded labor system survives. [...] from Kashmir to the Indian Ocean, and from East to West, in every state, there are districts marked as bonded labor districts because there are more than forty thousand bonded laborers in each of them. The Palamu I have depicted in my stories – only a few have been translated – is a mirror of tribal India.” (Spivak, xii)

Locating Palamu as “a mirror of Tribal India,” (Spivak, xii) Debī extends the territorial limits of the fictionalised Palamu district to incorporate the larger context of postcolonial India. This section would examine Mahāśvetā Debī’s original Bengali text *দৌলতি* (Douloti) and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s translation, *Douloti the Bountiful*, navigating the ways in which Debī’s story and subaltern female character – Douloti – is re-written read and received in a transnational context. Spivak, as a diaspora writer who reimagines Douloti beyond her regional/national frame, brings in questions of identity, representation and belonging that add valuable insights to diasporic and transnational literary perspectives. This section would examine the ways in which Spivak’s translated text – *Douloti the Bountiful* – becomes an important addition to the late twentieth Indian diasporic/transnational literary corpus, engaging with wider notions of displacement and the imagination of home.

Reading Mahāśvetā Debī’s *দৌলতি* (Douloti): A Comment on the Writer’s Craft

In her novella titled *दौलति* (Douloti), Mahāśvetā Debī examines the life of a tribal girl who succumbs to the perils of bond-slavery, a common practice in the fictional town of Palamu. In writing Douloti's character, Debī lucidly traces the day-to-day lives and the close-knit society of Palamu through its women. She writes,

“on a winter's night old 'kamiya' bonded labour women sit warming their hands and feet by the fire and say” [...] “our left thumb is covered in ink, prints were taken on white paper, the paper was kept in a treasure chest, they have thousands of papers like this, [...] and we have become 'kamiya' bonded labour women, there is no escape now.” (Debī, 324, my translation)

Debī's language not only evokes a beautiful poetic image of Palamu, adding a gentle rhythm to its everyday practices, through this group of old women but also introduces its poignant reality. The simplicity of her language coupled with the directness with which she addresses Palamu's harsh circumstances is crucial to the narrative process. It is interesting to note that Douloti, the protagonist of her story, is introduced much later in the narrative. Debī's narration extends far beyond Douloti; She traces characters like Crook Nagesia, Bono Nagesia and Ram Piyari through her who remain equally important to the story. In fact, Jaidev, in the essay, “Douloti as a National Allegory,” rightly points out, “Mahasweta does not deny her various characters their individual slants, although, of course, these exist within the severe constraints of their location within the structure.” (Sen and Yadav, 90) For Debī issues of imposition and segregation form the deeper recesses of the formidable idea of nation-building. She does not pursue these by

focussing on one particular character in her narrative. She traces individual narratives of struggle, hope and determination across generations, all of which intermingle with each other yet are bound to Palamu's inescapable history of bond-slavery. For instance, Debī introduces her readers to bond-slavery through Crook Nagesia. He conjoins the two worlds – one that her readers inhabit and one that is infested by oppression and caste discrimination– through a conversation that he pretends to have with a reporter from the city, “I am everything, I am the slave he bought. Write, write, write everything down. Then sit in your car and drive to the city, leave me alone in this jungle. Let us live where we truly belong. You and I are after all from two different worlds.” (Debī, 324, my translation)

While other characters portray the dismal reality of Palamu, Douloti remains the heart of her narrative developing as an allegory of postcolonial India where subaltern women were still silently suffering. In Debī's lucid writing, Douloti emerges as the connecting links between subaltern narratives; a metaphor for those countless transactions, translations and border-crossings into bond-slavery that Nagesia women have faced. For instance, when Ram Piyari, the woman who takes care of all the kamiya women, talks to Douloti she reveals the names and identities of other women who would have otherwise been lost to the narrative. Additionally, in a powerful scene, Douloti sees herself as a mirror image as she tries to fathom her first day as a bond-slave. Douloti looking back at herself is a powerful image of that brief moment when she is seeking her own narrative, trying to hear herself. Debī asks, “are spectator Douloti and oppressed Douloti becoming the same?” (Debī, 352, my translation) as if to underscore the lack of narrative agency. As her thoughts and perspectives are mediated by the author/narrator, Debī deliberately shows the erasure of tribal women's voices. In narrating Douloti's suffering, however, she

does not give her an artificially empowered voice. Instead, by making Douloti stare at an image of herself lips bleeding, as spectator, she makes her readers confront the violence of a society that consumes women like her entirely. Counteractively, in Debī's narrative voice is used in various other ways to portray how systems of power erase, use and silence subaltern women. Songs are an important site through which resistance is expressed. In the narrative the women don't sing in creole Bengali making the songs easily accessible to her readers. The songs are not just women re-telling their stories as bonded labourers; they are a sarcastic attempt and understanding the separations between Debī's fictional town of Palama where caste discrimination and bond-slavery where a rampant reality and postcolonial India, where it seemed to be a distant one. Additionally, what Debī invokes in the town of Palamu is the idea of a community. In a conversation between Bono Nagesia and Douloti, she locates a strange sense of connectivity though bond slavery,

“Do other cities also have kamiyas?

Yes, of course. Different names in different parts.

Bono said, this makes us feel less lonely. The Kamiya community is so huge, quite huge.

If we call it a 'community,' there are so many people in it that we have lost count.”

(Debī, 366, my translation)

It is ultimately through Douloti that Debī merges Palamu's unheard communities and the postcolonial nation together. When Douloti's sickness and invested gut literally spills onto

the map of India, Debī traces both the synchronicity of the moment with Indian Independence Day and the fact that Douloti was at odds with the nation – a narrative that ultimately fails to be translated.

Reading Mahāśvetā Debī's दौलति (Douloti) as Translation

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's translation of Mahāśvetā Debī's story, titled *Douloti the Bountiful* traces the oppressive measures of bond-slavery, effectively commenting on the idea of the nation,

“The Nagesias know well that when a Nagesia child is six days old, the day our lord Fate will lower from the sky a yellow turmeric-dyed string. Lord Fate would come down to earth on that string. He will look like a head-shaved brahman.

He will never enter the room with the Nagesia mother and child. He stands outside the shanty and writes with a thick pen in high-Hindi in the clothbound ledger. You will spend your life as you are born. You will never build a home better than a shanty.” (Spivak, 23)

While the interference of 'fate' identifies and, hence, segregates the Nagesia clan, what pushes them further into the margins, defining their subaltern identity, is the duty to “never build a home better than a shanty.” (Spivak, 23) Homes, recognised as personalised spaces, have remained definitive spatial configurations that effectively construct one's identity and subjectivity. In fact, the freedom to conceptualise, construct and even deconstruct the orientation of a home encloses the cultural, ideological as well as

individualistic assertions that develop and maintain one's identity and subjectivity. Therefore, the Nagesia clan being denied the accessibility to build a home, their inability to conceive a home, is directly linked to their subaltern subjectivity in the novella. The issues intensify further when establishing the character of Bono Nagesia (presented in the story as completely opposite to the passivity of the subaltern, Bono's subaltern identity has been democratised and has access to the benefits of globalisation) who has travelled and gathered experience beyond the laws of the society that bind him and explored the potential for growth, "Bono Nagesia built his house. The walls were whitewashed. The roof was thatched. His aunt mixed colors and painted monkeys, elephants, horses, birds, flowers on the white walls. Everyone came to see. Everyone said it was wonderful." (Spivak, 28) It is through Bono Nagesia building a home that the narrative locates the caste-based inequalities of the society and creates a violent display of power as his aspirations are circumvented by the traditions of bonded labour highlighted in the lines,

"Munabar Singh Chandela got some men to surround the place and burn Bono's house. They trussed up Bono like a pig and carried him hanging to Munabar's office. [...] Munabar kept him locked up in a room all night. In the morning he undid the ropes and made him put his thumbprint on a sheet of white paper.

- Take these twenty-five rupees. You are borrowing this because your house burnt down. From now on you are my bond-slave. You will repay by the body's labor." (Spivak, 28)

Similarly, the narrative traces Ganori or crook Nagesia's life experience and bodily identity to showcase generations of prejudice against the Nagesia clan in the lines,

“When Crook Nagesia's name was Ganori, then he gave his thumbprint to Munabar and took three hundred rupees. [...] He did a million things for the master, watched the plow-cattle. His work was over at evening when he put expensive oxen and water-buffaloes back into the pen. Then he returned to his shanty.” (Spivak, 22)

Bono Nagesia's burnt brick house and Ganori Nagesia's submission to his life in a shanty as he, in Jaidev's words¹⁶⁷, “cannot even question or think of changing what he assumes to be God's law,” (Sen and Yadav, 90) are symbolic of the realities of bonded labour. Therefore, while the narrative navigates the conflicts and disparities of the Nagesia community, the insight to the individual stories of the male bonded labourers situates the subaltern narratives in the historicity of a nation intrinsically divisive. As the Nagesia men struggle to build concrete ideas of community and home, the women, existing as symbols of honor and subjected to bodily enslavement and rape, further intensify the lack of agency. For instance, tracing the perils of bonded labour, the narrative locates Bono Nagesia's poignant reiteration, “The boss can grab our women's honor twice a day, virgin or wife or mother, [...] And here they have brought kamiya women and made them whores.” (Spivak, 74) Further, situating the tribal culture in the section “The Author in Conversation,” of *Imaginary Maps Three Stories by Mahasweta Devi* Devi argues,

¹⁶⁷ See Jaidev's essay, “Douloti as a National Allegory,” as a part of *Mahasweta Devi: An Anthology of Recent Criticism* (Page- 90-91) where the male bonded labourers and their relations to feudal and systemic impositions are explored.

“Among the tribals insulting or raping a woman is the greatest crime. [...] Women have a place of honor in tribal society.” (Spivak, xviii) While the tribal society that the narrative re-creates fundamentally associates subaltern female bodies with cultural and traditional roots, an ‘outsider’s’ invasion through rape, counteractively, establishes control over it. Subaltern female bodies, therefore, remain implanted in varying patriarchal codes that result in their oppression. However, in addition to the larger landscape of male narratives to which female figures are connected as masculine interpretations of honour, Douloti’s position as a suffering and sacrificing body independently exists as an image of the deeply entrenched roots of generational oppression. Jill Arnot, in the essay, “Body, text, materiality: Reading the gendered subaltern,” rightly points out,

“Spivak’s commentary makes explicit the ways in which Devi uses the figure of Douloti to call into question the idea of collectivity, whether at the level of family, community or nation-state. [...] the figure of Douloti fractures this collectivity and undermines the whole notion of a chain or hierarchy of collectivities beginning with the family and progressing unproblematically from family, through community to nation.” (Arnot, 169)

In addition to distinctive struggles of the Nagesia men subjected to bonded labour, Spivak’s translation attempt to relocate subaltern experiences into the socio-political location of the nation and the narrative of national consciousness is illustrated by the women of Palamu district.

Douloti the Bountiful is inherently confrontational; It encroaches the mainstream discourses of decolonisation and attempts to incorporate marginalised cultures. In fact, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's conversation with Debī discusses the overarching developments of the postcolonial nations and the continuing processes of decolonisation that have subjugated tribal and other dispossessed communities,

“The tribals, then, paid the price for decolonization? They have not been part of decolonization of India?

They have not been a part. Yet they have paid the price. I am wary of the West. In America I found such lack of information about the Native Americans. [...] Only in the names of places the Native American legacy survives. Otherwise entire tribes have been butchered. Their land has been taken away, there is movement, there are protest camps. But I say to my American readers, see what has been done to them, you will understand what has been done to Indian tribals. Everywhere it is the same story.” (Spivak, xi)

While Debī situates the oppression of tribal communities as a concurrent phenomenon across national borders, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's translation delves into such forms of dismemberment. For instance, while the Nagesia community exemplifies the tribal and indigenous sections¹⁶⁸ of society, it becomes the palimpsest on which the systemic

¹⁶⁸ See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's book *Imaginary Maps: Three Stories by Mahasweta Devi* where, Mahasweta Devi traces the gradual process of banishment of indigenous tribes in the colonial and postcolonial India stating, “The British had isolated the small tribes. [...] They branded the small tribes as criminal tribes because they lived in the forest and did not take to cultivation. [...] In the 1950's, the government of India

debilitation of bonded labour is inscribed. The narrative sustains the sense of disenfranchisement that the historical and cultural system of bonded labour promotes and locates the oppressed across the Indian subcontinent,

“In Andhra the people of Matangi, Jaggali, Malajangam, Mahar and other castes become Gothi. In Bihar Chamar, Nagesia, Parhaiya, Dusad become Kamiya or Seokiya. In Gujarat the Chalwaris, Naliyas, Thoris and others become Halpati. In Karnataka the lower birth become Jeetho, in Madhya Pradesh Haroyaha. In Orissa Gothi and in Rajasthan Sagri [...]

Different names in different regions.

The system is slavery.

The marginal, the harijan, the tribal¹⁶⁹ is its sacrifice.” (Spivak, 61)

Large-scale exploitation that envelope the marginalised communities across India’s regional borders lay out on the landscape of masculine transactions; male moneylenders and landowners lend money to male ‘kamiyas’ who work to repay the loan. In fact, when Ganori Nagesia recounts his position at the mercy of Munabar Chandela in the lines, “- Hey, what are you? Kamiya, seokia or beth-begar? -I am everything. I am his chattel slave,” (Spivak, 20) it is apparent that his body is consignable and entrusted with the moneylender until all the money is repaid. The marginalised women become the carriers

“denotified” these tribes. The society immediately adjacent to where they now live- the police and the administration- still see them as thieves, robbers, criminals.” (Spivak, xiii)
¹⁶⁹ Spivak’s translation locates the marginalised communities segregated by caste and class hierarchies by individually highlighting them.

and upholders of this intrinsically patriarchal correspondence and are entwined in the cycle of loan repayment by virtue of their bodies. For instance, caught in the penitentialia of the bond-slavery system, detached from home, community and selfhood, Douloti is taken to Madhapur at the cost of Ganori Nagesia's 'freedom.' As Douloti is gradually accustomed to her identity as a bonded labour, Spivak's commentary unfolds her position on the terrains of home and nation. For instance, when Douloti introduces herself as "Not kamiya, kamiya-whore," (Spivak, 84) she develops outside the cultural and traditional ideas of home and its patriarchal assertions that bind female sexuality. Quoting Spivak, Jill Arnott¹⁷⁰ affirms,

"Spivak has remarked elsewhere that "[w]omen carry internalized the lesson of exchangeability of home, the base of identity" (1993:252) This is nowhere more starkly evident than in the case of Douloti who is literally exchanged for her father's debt." (Arnott, 170)

Additionally, the songs throughout Spivak's translation of Debī's narrative questions national and international affairs and raises significant issues regarding the position of the marginalised 'kamiyas' in independent India's interaction with the world at large. For instance, in the song that demonstrates Latiaji's involvement as a government official, also locates Douloti's ignorance and oversight of her national identity,

"Calls out, "Give whatever you have into his shawl."

¹⁷⁰ See Jill Arnott's essay, "Body, Text, Materiality: Reading the Gendered Subaltern."

-Why sir?

-Isn't there a war on?

-Where, I don't know

-You will never know [...] China has come to contaminate India's truth

-Yes, yes? But where is China? Where again is India? Myelay or MLA says, "This country is India"

-No, no, Madhapur." (Spivak, 66)

Madhapur, apparently 'outside' the Indian national identity, is the geographical locale where Douloti's gendered body is regulated by pending debts, filial relations and her ultimate forfeiture. The issues of submission and responsibility raised by Spivak in Douloti's narrative, highlighted in the lines, "...Douloti has taken the yoke of Crook's bondslavery on her shoulders," (Spivak, 73) opposes the state of the male bonded labourers. In fact, examining "the need to rethink responsibility so that it becomes something other than feminine self-abnegation understood as choice," (Arnott, 171) Jill Arnott¹⁷¹ argues,

"It is this gender- specific sense of responsibility for her family – a responsibility not in itself ethically negative – that allows for her exploitation and marks her distance from the male victims of the bonded labour system." (Arnott, 170)

¹⁷¹ See Jill Arnott's essay, "Body, Text, Materiality: Reading the Gendered Subaltern."

Douloti's body, repressing its own desires and exiling itself from the affiliations of home and nation to navigate the territorial limits of bond-slavery, is splayed out on the masculinist notions of control. While the masculine identity and agency of the Nagesia community remains tethered to bond slavery, the women are embroiled in the exploitative regime as stoic and sexualised beings.

Bond-slavery's patriarchal and oppressive cycle of commodification, that entangles the subaltern women, is situated in extensive debates of exclusion and displacement. Enunciating the bonded slavery system through the female subaltern's perspective, Spivak's translation, situates the sexual politics that are integral to the subaltern woman's existence and the feudal and patriarchal systems of exploitation amidst burgeoning capitalism in post-independent India. For instance, as Rampiyari introduces the female victims of bond-slavery, she locates them in a system of exploitation,

“-These are all Parmananda's kamiya's.

Douloti, Reoti and Somni

Field work, digging soil, cutting wells is work

This one doesn't do it, that one doesn't do it, the other one doesn't do it-

The boss has turned them into land

The boss plows and plows their land and raise the crop

They are all Parmananda's kamiya.” (Spivak, 59)

The parallels drawn between the enslaved women and land through the physical act of 'plowing' situates the subaltern female body in the vicious cycle of capitalist control from which desired results are reaped and marketed ahead. Female bodies, exposed to the trials and tribulations of an inherently exploitative system, is subject to male lust, ownership and sexual commodification. In fact, alluding to such consumerist and capitalist disenfranchisements succumbing Douloti into a process of exchange, Spivak rightly argues, "Woman's body is [...] the last instance in a system whose general regulator is still the loan: usurer's capital, imbricate level by level, in national industrial and transnational global capitalism." (Spivak, 112) Further, the systemic violation of Douloti's body carried out by Crook Nagesia, Parmananda, traders, labour contractors and government officials navigate the internal displacement of the subaltern female within patriarchal, feudal and capitalist¹⁷² relations. For instance, the figure of the 'Delhi holy man' that obfuscates the divisive politics of caste in the Palamu district by claiming, "You are not untouchable. You, me, Munabar Chandela are offspring of the same mother," (Spivak, 41) effectively locates the idea of the nation in an all-embracing maternal connectivity. Devi's narrative is, however, quick to question such a bond through washerwoman Rajbi's interjection in the lines,

¹⁷² See "The Secret of Primitive Accumulation" where Karl Marx's theory on capitalism is based on "The expropriation of the agricultural producer, of the peasant, from the soil, [...] The history of this expropriation, in different countries, assumes different aspects..." (Marx)

“– But Munabar doesn’t know that. Munabar’s children in my room, Munabar’s children in Mukami Dusadin’s place as well, and all these boys are bonded labor. Tell me how this can be.

-Sister, not that kind of mother, Mother India.

-Who is that?

-Our country, India.

-This is our country?

-Of course.

-Oh Sadhuji, my place is Seora village. What do you call a country? I know tahsil [a pre-independence revenue-collecting unit], I know station, I don’t know country. India is not the country.” (Spivak, 41)

The narrative portrays the grandeur of nationalism and the extensive hopes of freedom as distant and almost insignificant ideas that have failed to reach India’s marginalised population, and in extension, the subaltern identity and consciousness. The independent political entity of the ‘country’ is, therefore, expunged from the dichotomies of cultural, communal, and caste-based identities that take over the subaltern narrative. Devi further destabilises the international politics of the ‘country’ alongside the individual narrative of Somni the ‘kamiya’ woman in the lines,

“- What’s this fight?

-Who knows? They are fighting some China.

-Whose fight?

-Someone called India, his, I didn't understand anything." (Spivak, 65)

It is interesting to note that the oppressed female subaltern constantly questions the idea of the nation as men preach, promote, and develop its imaginative portrayal. However, as subaltern women consistently attempt to perforate the larger expanse of the nation, their position in the body politic of the nation are increasingly subjugated. These interjections further connect India to the global economy. Placing Douloti, enforced into sexual labour against post-independent India's growing economic and inter-cultural relations, the narrative depicts the universality of displacement often developed as a privileging postcolonial condition associated with migrating writers and theorists. Douloti is effectively translated beyond colonial, national and cultural borders in Spivak's translation in the lines,

"Filling the entire Indian peninsula from the oceans to the Himalayas, here lies bonded labor spread-eagled, kamiya-whore Douloti Nagesia's tormented corpse, putrefied with venereal disease, having vomited up all the blood in its desiccated lungs. Today, on the fifteenth of August, Douloti has left no room at all in the India of people like Mohan for planting the standard of the Independence flag. What will Mohan do now? Douloti is all over India." (Spivak, 93)

These profound lines converge Douloti's body with the territory of the nation, countering the idea of 'mapping' or 'inventing.' Spread on the expanse of the subcontinent, Douloti erases existing national frontiers and emerging transnational developments; her body

becomes the cartographic reality unearthed from the annals of national history. In fact, Jill Arnott rightly argues, “the figure of Douloti fractures [...] collectivity and undermines the whole notion of a chain or hierarchy of collectivities [...] progressing unproblematically from family through community to nation.” (Arnott, 169) Additionally, Douloti’s body, riddled with diseases, envelopes the map of India as a “graphic comment,” (Spivak, xviii) on the violence perpetrated on the gendered body. As Douloti lay “all over India,” (Spivak, 93) The chalked outline of the map appeared universally complicit with the degeneration of subaltern female bodies like that of Douloti. In fact, Mary Cappeli, in “Tortured Bodies, rape and disposability in Mahasweta Devi’s “Giribala,” “Dhowli” and “Douloti the Bountiful,”” traces the dismantling of the female body to incorporate the piety that epitomizes the nation arguing, “wombs, hymens, breasts, and other reproductive organs occupy marginalized emblematic territories where individual women become subsumed as allegorical byproducts of its creation.” (Cappeli, 9) Therefore, with Douloti on the map of India, charted territories and imagined national spaces were subsumed by their culpability in the deterioration of the female body to an object of exploitation. While, in Spivak’s reading, “sweet, innocent, responsible Douloti is not a subject of resistance,” (Spivak, xxviii) Douloti’s invaded womb and tortured body consumes the “entire Indian peninsula” (Spivak, 93) from the periphery, developing as a refuge for the narratives of the bonded prostitutes. Covering the expanse of the nation, Douloti’s body is an invented homeland sustaining the subaltern resistance; home to the generations of gendered violence categorically displaced from the evolving postcolonial nation.

Conclusion

The distinctive portrayal of subaltern women in the Gayatri Chakravorth Spivak's English translation of Mahāśvetā Debī's *Douloti* plays a vital role in reimagining the story beyond its regional context. Through Spivak's translation subaltern narratives and the exposition of bond-slavery, as an act of choiceless submission, effectively interject mainstream political conversations nationally and transnationally. Spivak acknowledges this wider readership of postcolonial literature in Western academic institutions as an important facet of the process of translation. In fact, in the "Translator's Preface" to her book, *Imaginary Maps*, she argues,

"The book is going to be published in both India and the United States. As such it faces two directions, encounters two readerships with a strong exchange in various enclaves. [...] I am convinced that the multiculturalist US reader can at least be made to see the difference at work, and it is the expatriate critic who can make the effort. (Spivak, xxiii)

Drawing from the interrelations between subaltern female bodies and the nation, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's reading of *Douloti* and her determination to locate her is twofold – on the one hand, Debī's character, Douloti, placed against the backdrop of postcolonial India comments on its internal conflicts and on the other hand her narrative, as an English translation, notably diversifies postcolonial contexts of displacement making it a possibility through linguistic border-crossings as well. Interestingly, the title of her compilation, *Imaginary Maps*, alludes to the idea of 'mapping' – integral to the nation-building process – which essentially invents the national and transnational spaces upon which subaltern

history is emplaced. This 'mapping' is primarily achieved through the English language as a medium which both explores and erases local/traditional symbols of tribal societies and their songs, cultural aspects that Debī makes enough space for in her narrative. Salman Rushdie, in *Imaginary Homelands*, positions the English language in the context of Indian writing arguing that the English language,

“...needs remaking for our own purposes. [...] Those of us who do use English do so [...] perhaps because we can find in that linguistic struggle a reflection of other struggles taking place in the real world, struggles between the cultures within ourselves and the influence at work upon our societies. To conquer English may be to complete the process of making ourselves free.” (Rushdie, 17)

This idea of 'conquering' English can be seen in Spivak's translations. In her reply to Sujit Mukherjee's comment about the accessibility of the English language in Spivak's translations, she interrogates the position of the language with respect to the nation, "should Indian texts be translated into the English of the subcontinent?" (Spivak, xxviii) Spivak's retention of tribal names in her translation of *Douloti the Bountiful* is an effective way of 'possessing' the English language and locating subaltern identities in the postcolonial context. The translated songs expose the exploitative conditions in which the Nagesia community lives and challenges the developing idea of the nation which continues to deny their existence. However, while Spivak 'conquers' the English language, she also locates subaltern female figures like Douloti, who are devoid of a voice, under the rubric of transnational and diasporic literatures. In doing so, Douloti is

even more displaced as her passive submission to bond-slavery and dismal death thereafter does not accompany a voice of her own or add to the transnational discourse. Douloti's story is, therefore, 'remade' in the English language; her lack of vocal resistance a mere embodiment of narratives of generations of bond-slavery victims that span the nation. Quoting Jaidev, in her essay, "The Nation and Its Outcasts: A Reading of Mahasweta Devi's *Douloti the Bountiful*," Nivedita Majumdar traces Douloti as an allegorised representation of the nation,

"Douloti is certainly important in her own right, important as a tragically wasted, blighted life, but she is even more important as the site on which a whole variety of the 'the Great Indian meaning' – mythological, historical, socio-cultural, class, casteist and gender -- converges to get illuminated as a set of operative, oppressive forces even as they establish a real, material relationship with her." (Menon, 163)

In translating Douloti, Spivak faces one of the crucial issues of representation that she herself addressed – the "persistent critique" where she warns against "constructing the Other simply as an object of knowledge, leaving out the real Others because the ones who are getting access into public places due to these waves of benevolence and so on." (Spivak, 63) Douloti, is transnationally translated as an allegory of the Indian nation in Spivak's narrative. In doing so she is reinterpreted in the diasporic/transnational contexts of home, roots and migration which leaves behind all the other narratives that the original had given equal emphasis on. To Spivak's 'western audience,' Douloti develops as an 'object of knowledge' and other characters have gradually slipped away behind her. The

translation, therefore, does not approach Palamu and the Indian subcontinent as a juxtaposition, but enables the almost literally juxtaposed figure of Douloti onto the map of India to be transnationally migrated. All subaltern narratives, therefore, remain silent in the process of translation.

Chapter 2.2

Weaving Subaltern Women into Nation: Resistance and Refuge in Gayatri Chakravorty

Spivak's Translated work – *Draupadi*

Subaltern Women's Bodies: Speaking, Hearing, Migrating

South Asian women have been increasingly represented as 'subalterns' in Western academic institution, a portrayal that promotes a sweeping homogenisation of the term. For instance, Nirmla Puwar, in the book *South Asian Women in Diaspora*, discusses the image of the subaltern female body as it is vigorously propagated in social and transnational media circles,

“The body of the subaltern female – in the image of the hybrid metropolitan youth who dons saris and trainers, the sati on the funeral pyre of her husband, the sweatshop worker in the East End of London, the domestic cleaners in the homes, offices and airports of global cities and the 'dextrous' fingers on electronic circuits in free trade zones – is the text upon which a whole array of academic fantasies and anxieties are written.” (Puwar and Raghuram, 22)

Bodies of subaltern women have been reimagined in terms of struggles around the lack of agency and voicelessness in postcolonial societies, making a dialogic understanding

of representation and essentialism central to the context of globalisation.¹⁷³ While Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak asserts on the idea of a (non)place¹⁷⁴ – “a violent aporia between subject and object status” (Spivak, 102) – from where the subaltern is not able to speak, academic circles have attempted to answer Spivak’s question – Can the subaltern speak? For instance, regional projects such as the Subaltern Studies Group attempted to recover the narratives of the ‘other’ that has been suppressed throughout history under class distinctions and the elitism in the narrative process. In fact, for Vinayak Chaturvedi¹⁷⁵, “by the end of the 1980s, Subaltern Studies was the most dynamic sector within the emerging disciplines of postcolonial theory and cultural studies in the Anglo-American academy.” (Chaturvedi, vii) Upon this expanding terrain of Subaltern Studies, the discourse of translation remains one of the most important intersections. Interestingly, translation, widely understood and read as an act of mediation between languages, cultures and identities, has been widely investigated in terms of gender, culture and subaltern identity. For instance, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in the essay “Translation as Culture,” understands translation as “*anu-vada* –speaking after, *translatio* as *imitatio*. This relating to the other as the source of one’s utterance is the ethical as being-for.” (Spivak, 21) However, in the process of translating subaltern women characters in Mahāśvetā Debī’s

¹⁷³ See Deepika Bahri’s essay, “Feminism and Postcolonialism in a Global and Local Frame,” (Page- 200-201) raises central questions on gender, identity and narrative in a global space.

¹⁷⁴ See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s 1988 essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak,” where Spivak argues the ‘placement’ of the subaltern woman between patriarchal and imperial coercions by taking the example of ‘suttee’ and argues, “The case of suttee [...] challenge and reconstruct this opposition between subject (law) and object-of-knowledge (repression)” (Spivak, 102)

¹⁷⁵ See Vinayak Chaturvedi’s book *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial*, where Chaturvedi traces the interconnections of Subaltern Studies with wide ranging disciplines.

narratives, Spivak, as a translator, does not necessarily 'speak after'; In many ways, she voices them and places them in the global contexts of the English language. Additionally, the mediation between languages – both regional and (trans)national – is a severely affected by the power dynamics that govern the transactions across linguistic as well as national borders. Subaltern women, however, have their individual speech acts that can only be accessed if translation is identified as an interactive process. Commenting on the idea of communicating or, precisely, speaking in terms of the subaltern, J. Maggio, in the essay “Can the Subaltern be Heard?": Political Theory, Translation, Representation and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak,” introduces the aspect of “being heard” as a part of the communicative process of translation. Maggio quotes Devadas and Nicholls as they deduce the title of Spivak’s essay stating,

“In other words the “cannot speak” in “the subaltern cannot speak” is gesturing to the impossibility of speech to an audience that refuses to hear and respond to the crying out. It is this incomplete transaction that suppresses the subaltern”
(Maggio, 430)

To provide viable answers to Spivak’s question, Maggio asserts that the socio-political and cultural position of subalterns need to be duly translated by the Western intellectual. This interaction, however, is complex as translation stands on the hierarchies of cultural interaction. The relationship between the Western intellectual or critic and the subaltern that Maggio professes is a vantage point where “The Western critic is constituted by the other, or the subaltern and the subaltern is also constructed vis-à-vis its relation to the

dominant groups.” (Maggio, 436) Subaltern identities, however, has consistently remained associated with the idea of excavation and discovery and the Subaltern Studies initiative has remained integral to this process. Contradictorily, Rosalind O’Hanlon, in the essay, “Recovering the Subject: *Subaltern Studies* and Histories of Resistance in Colonial South Asia, argues that “the history of the people is an unknown quantity, an area of darkness which the dominant modes of historical discourse have failed to penetrate, and which mocks their claims to complete or even partial knowledge.” (Chaturvedi, 78) For Hanlon, subalterns are disenfranchised only in relation to the elitist historiographers that attempt to seek their voices. In the light of such developments, subaltern female bodies and their theoretical intersections are imperative to develop a comprehensive understanding of the postcolonial nation. Additionally, the process of translating subaltern identities rests on a gradual socio-political, linguistic and cultural intermediation that is eventually able to situate them in the postcolonial context.

Translating female bodies and their portrayal in Mahāśvetā Debī narratives in her collection, *Breast Stories*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak examines Debī’s female characters, essentially across boundaries of language, culture, and space. It explores questions of subject position, linguistic and political exclusion, cultural interaction and its placement on the expanse of postcolonial discourse. Additionally, it engages with the migration of meanings within the larger context of translation, spatial existence and identity creation with Mahāśvetā Debī Bengali women characters being developed as an extension of their identity in the English language in academic circles. The politics and poetics of the ‘breast’ is an important and interconnecting aspect of the collection of Debī’s

stories that Spivak compiles. While Spivak examines the position and significance of the breast in the individual stories, as a symbol of nurture and sanctuary, the breast can be understood as an extension of the idea of home and nation as it encompasses the narratives of bearing and belonging. In fact, explaining the setting of *Draupadi*, Spivak enters the elitist versus masses conversation that both O’Hanlon and Maggio allude to in their respective critical interventions,

“The story is a moment caught between two deconstructive formulas: on the one hand, a law that is fabricated with a view to its own transgression, on the other hand, the undoing of the binary opposition between the intellectual and the rural struggles.”
(Spivak, 8)

Draupadi’s body is both read and translated keeping in mind that it acts as an interlocutor between regressive power structures and the terrifying possibilities unleashed by her breasts. Therefore, the potential of the breast as a subaltern discourse emerges into a feminist stance that attempts to contribute to the process of postcolonial nation-building.

This section attempts to read Mahāśvetā Debī’s subaltern female character, *द्रौपदी* (Draupadi), and her narrative in global and transnational contexts by examining Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s translation. Draupadi’s body, as a victim, survivor and counteractive discourse, is the focal point of both the narratives. Using Draupadi’s body as a central force, this section would explore the ways in which subaltern bodies and speech acts are carried across transnationally by Spivak’s diasporic affiliation with Western academic

circles. Additionally, language and nation form interesting correlations with Draupadi's body and these interactions, already existing Mahāśvetā Debī's Bengali short story, are further involved in a process of translocation across linguistic and national borders. This section would examine the extent to which Draupadi's body and narrative ultimately (un)settles in the diasporic and transnational contentions of home and belonging.

Locating Postcolonial Plotlines: Setting the Narrative of Mahāśvetā Debī's *Draupadi*

Mahāśvetā Debī's Bengali short story, *Draupadi*, translated into English by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, locates the narratives of Dopdi Mejhen and Dulna Majhi – two revolutionaries contributing to an ongoing peasant uprising which attempts to subjugate an oppressive system. The plot engages with tribal cultures and their retaliation against various forms of injustices as an attempt to reconstruct existing ideas of nationalism. In fact, in her preface to the translation, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak draws from the 1967 Naxalbari peasant revolution, a resistance that successfully challenged the historically sustained class and cultural divide in post-independent India and aimed to re-assert the socially, politically, and economically suppressed subaltern identities in the struggle for freedom. She argues that the revolution targeted “long-established oppression of the landless peasantry and itinerant farm worker,” (Spivak, 6) and was “sustained through an unofficial government-landlord collusion that too easily circumvented the law,” (Spivak, 6) which not only exemplifies the hierarchies of power and the dichotomies of nation-building in the country but also locates the subaltern – the peasants – as a group essentially segregated from it. Incorporating the protagonists, Dopdi and Dulna's fierce and dedicated retribution by “Murdering Surja Sahu and his son, occupying upper-caste wells

and tubewells during the drought,” (Spivak, 17) and “cause of Captain Arjan Singh’s diabetes,” (Spivak, 17) as subaltern resistance in transnational contexts, Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak universalizes the seemingly personal stories of resistance. Retaliation, retribution and resistance emerge as tools that propel subaltern figures towards the political and ideological centre of recognition and the unified national identity. Forms of political resistance have considerably redefined Indian nationalism by expanding the contours of the nation¹⁷⁶ and, in doing so, Dopdi and Dulna encapsulate a force which aims to include peripheral subaltern identities in the discourse of national progress – significantly encouraged by anti-colonial and nationalist movements that sought to demand freedom from colonial rule in India.

In Indian history, revolutions and uprisings have consistently given rise to a nationalist cry for freedom against colonial rule.¹⁷⁷ Amidst diversified origins of India and its cultural,

¹⁷⁶ See Partha Chatterjee’s *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* where he discusses the relationship between nationalist movements and the peasant revolution that contributed to nationalism in India, “on the one hand was the domain of the formally organized political parties and associations, moving within the institutional processes of the bourgeois state forms introduced by colonial rule and seeking to use their representative power over the mass of the people to replace the colonial state by a bourgeois nation-state. On the other hand was the domain of peasant politics where beliefs and actions did not fit into the grid of “interests” and “aggregation of interests” that constituted the world of bourgeois representative politics.” (Chatterjee, 159)

¹⁷⁷ See Gyanendra Pandey’s essay “The Indian Nation in 1942,” in Sekhar Bandopadhyay’s book, *Nationalist Movement in India: A Reader* which outlines various nationalist movements in India that, with the emergence of Mahatma Gandhi as a leader, promoted the idea of a unified national identity. Further, Salil Misra, in his article “Indian National movement: One or Many?” defines nationalism as “a process of transformation of multiple communities into national community (or a nation)...” (Misra, 1) and argues that the various anti-imperialist struggles individually mentioned by Sekhar Bandopadhyay and other theorists were fought “against a common enemy, the British government,” and were therefore a collective form of nationalism.

political, and linguistic differences, the anti-colonial movements sparked a quest for unity and aimed to create the primary facet of nation-building – inclusion. However, in his article, “Indian National movement: One or Many?” reviewing Sekhar Bandhopadhyay’s *Nationalist Movement in India: A Reader*,” Salil Misra identifies the distinctive forms of nationalisms in India stating,

“It is important to recognise that the national movement was internally quite diverse, more like a spectrum. The diversity of nationalism in India can be discussed at two levels - the diversity of the ways in which the Indian nation was imagined; and the ideological diversity within the national movement.” (Misra, 4)

He asserts that Bandhapadhyay and other historians and theorists fall short of addressing the second level of diversity in national movements and goes on to say,

“No nations in history have been planned and designed and then implemented with completeness. A nation is above all an abstraction, a platform that has to be created before people begin to join it. Workers, peasants, women, students, tribals did not suddenly, one day and through one event, become part of the Indian nation. They joined in stages and in the process imparted their own meanings to it. It was precisely in this sense that S N Banerjea referred to India as "A Nation in Making". It could be argued that the Indian nation is still in the making. Its incompleteness is of its very essence.” (Misra, 4)

While Salil Misra does understand Indian nationalist movements as critical interjections into the very fabric of nation-building, his argument recognises the non-uniform ways in which nationalist movements have progressed; the nation's 'others' have contributed to the nationalism's 'unifying' narrative through ongoing resistance. Subaltern historiographers and theorists have, interestingly, contrasted nationalist and anti-colonial movements with the peasant-led uprisings and attempted to locate the subaltern identity in the ambiguities of their relationship. For instance, B.B Chaudhari in "Subaltern Autonomy and the National Movement," in *Reading Subaltern Studies: Critical History, Contested Meaning and Globalisation of South Asia*, traces subaltern led movements and uprisings and situates them in the wider nationalistic projects in India. Reading his understanding of David Hardiman's essay, "From custom to crime: The politics of drinking in colonial South Gujarat," where he situates Hardiman's study of the protests led by the tribals of Gujarat against the "intervention by the colonial government in the production and distribution of 'drinks'" (Ludden, 129) that forced them to "shift to cheaper but impure stuff (made not of the traditional ingredients such as the juice of certain trees or certain flowers,)" (Ludden, 129) as a part of subaltern historiography that led to rapid changes in the social and cultural attributes of thus segregated subaltern identities. Quoting from Hardiman's essay, Chaudhari argues,

"Drinking for the tribals was not just a way of finding an escape from the stress produced by a hard day's work. It 'occupied a central place in their culture' (p.173). 'In all spheres of their life, drink had positive associations. It was food of the gods which possessed an element of divine power; it set a seal on negotiations and

legitimized family ceremonies; it enhanced the pleasures of social gatherings and public festivities; it provided succour during times of scarcity. Drink... lubricated the whole cycle of life of the peasants' (p.177)." (Ludden, 129)

This distinct cultural significance of drinking in the tribal community highlights the position of the subaltern identity in unified idea of the nation. Renunciation of drinking and its association to upward mobility in society led to a restructuring of their social and cultural attributes in society. Chaudhari highlights the Devi movement led by the tribe during the time Mahatma Gandhi called for the Non-Cooperation Movement (Ludden, 130) and identifies it as a necessary intersection of two different kinds of nationalist perspectives in the country which helps locate the agency of the subaltern. By highlighting the collective force of the Devi movement led by the tribes, Chaudhari, recognising the strength and determination that forces the subaltern identity to cross distinctive boundaries upheld by dominant cultures within the nation, argues,

"In an essay on the Devi movement (included in volume III of *Subaltern Studies*) Hardiman identified as one of the primary impulses behind the movement, a collective will to appropriate the symbols of a ritual status of the dominant groups in order to undermine their cultural domination." (Ludden, 130)

Further, B B Chaudhari's reading of Tanika Sarkar's essay "Jitu Santal's movement in Malda,1924-32," attempts to understand the "recurrence of religious revitalization movements among tribals in different parts of British India" (Ludden, 127) and its

ambiguous relationship with the influence of dominant Hindu ideologies. Nationalist resistances as well as cultural assertions have, therefore, remained an imperative part of the nation-building process. In her reading of Debī's *Draupadi*, Spivak reinstates such struggles and movements when Draupadi and Dulna are identified as 'fighters' who "kill by means of hatchet and scythe, bow and arrow etc." (Spivak, 19) Spivak registers a strong disdain for power – an essentially hierarchical and homogenous aspect of postcolonial and subaltern narratives – that remains associated with 'gentlemen with guns.' Interestingly, the longstanding discourse of power is destabilised in two distinct ways in the Devi's narrative – linguistically and physically – thus, inserting the subaltern identity in postcolonial theoretical structures.

Reading Mahāśvetā Debī's द्रौपदी (Draupadi): A Comment on the Writer's Craft

In her short story titled द्रौपदी (Draupadi), Debī introduces her female protagonist, Dopdi Mejhen, through a series of movements and migrations. Languages cross over, motives overlap, and the pace of the story is heightened as borders between authorities and resistive forces slowly merge. Even though Dopdi is marked as a target by the state and as a mere name on a wanted list that needs to be apprehended, interrogated and neutralized, Mahāśvetā Debī's narrative quickly disrupts this view. Dopdi knows the landscape, understands danger and navigates resistance networks. Debī's storytelling, emerging from fieldwork activism and an ethical commitment to making suppressed voices heard, is often fragmented and colloquial, highlighting that Dopdi's character is tied to the collective roots of land, memory and insurgency that her community shares.

Thus, Debī adds a slow exploration of Dopdi's surroundings as she evades danger; She attempts to show that Dopdi's is a shared struggle,

“Dopdi was slowly walking with rice tied in a cloth attached to her waist. Mushai Tudu's wife had cooked the rice for her. She offers to do so sometimes. Once the rice is cooked, Dopdi ties it in a cloth and walks slowly. While walking she was running her fingers through her hair, taking out lice and killing them. Rubbing a little bit of kerosene oil on the head can kill lice. After that soda can be rubbed on the head to clean it. But they are in every corner of this waterfall. If they smell the kerosene in water they will find her.” (Debī, 65, my translation)

Dopdi's slow movements through forested terrains, aware of the manhunt underway, is tense and urgent. It is emblematic of the fact that she is not a passive character, she is skilled, strategic and deeply embedded in her cause. Additionally, Debī centres Dopdi, a subaltern woman, as the bearer of political agency after her husband's demise. In fact, the lines “At six fifty-seven in the evening Dopdi Mejhen was apprehended. [...] At eight fifty-seven in the evening was Senanyak's dinner time and he goes inside saying “make her, do the needful” ” (Debī, 69, my translation) are a reminder of the moment she becomes a political agent. She confronts military apparatuses and is suppressed not just by the language of the law but also by patriarchal assertions. For instance, as authorities are ordered to make her, the act of rape is described in the language of the state as well as through phallic symbols. Dopdi is made by “flesh pistons going up and coming down, going up and coming down.” (Debī, 70) Debī's language here is raw, highlighting that

Dopdi's existence as a political agent cannot be censored; Her heroism is unglamorous and traumatic which is what makes it powerful. Further, Dopdi's story is political not only in content but also in the form of the narrative. Debī's use of fragmented dialogue and abrupt shifts in tone destabilises the dichotomy between authority and resistance. For instance, official orders on the microphone urging Dopdi and Dulna to surrender are followed by jeep sirens and marching officers and in the middle of all this Dopdi and Dulna wriggle out. This makes the narrative a medium to articulate resistance instead of silencing it. Such interjections in the narrative, ironically, explore the ways in which Dopdi's character becomes an interruption in the state's narrative of control and hence more visible throughout the story. Additionally, Dopdi's body is also a site of rebellion in the narrative. She is seen using her body to reject control. For instance, as she navigates the dense forests revisiting her plans to escape, Dopdi's mind wanders thinking about the other rebellions that were fought by people like her. She particularly remembers a fellow insurgent who had cut off his tongue in order to protect the rebellion and decides to do the same if and when her physical and mental strength give up on her, "Dopdi knows, she has learnt by hearing about how to fight oppression" (Debī, 66, my translation) Interestingly, through the act of cutting off one's tongue Debī juxtaposes the immediacy of physical and epistemic violence that she establishes in the story suggesting that people like Dopdi are often silenced. She uses violence as a storytelling motif to engage her readers. It is both inflicted upon oneself as a sign of protest and used as a mechanism to induce fear and exert control over subaltern bodies. Therefore, Dulna's death and Dopdi's thought of cutting of her tongue depict the different variations and agents of violence in the narrative. Further, English words like 'neanderthal' and 'counter' intersperse the

narrative in a figurative violence. It forces a sense of fear in the narrative and, in the process, inverts the idea of the other. Therefore, in Debī's narrative, subaltern men and women associate law enforcing figures, like that of Senanyak, with the periphery where there is a sheer lack of voice and agency. The consistent reference to different kinds of violence – political, as well as linguistic - is also deeply ironic because Dopdi does not speak for the most part in the story. It is only at the end of the story, staring at Senanyak, that she finally speaks thereby embodying an unflinching form of resistance. Mahāśvetā Debī's craft as a writer, however, emerges beautifully when she describes Dopdi in motion, transcending landscapes, discourses and, ultimately, her body. Debī captures Dopdi in the gaps between her thought process – her narrative is inserted with pauses as she listens for footsteps behind her, and sentences that loop around and go back and forth as she thinks about taking the risk of heading for the camp where her fellow comrades are. Counteractively, in Dopdi, Debī also traces a continuity in the darkness of her blood which remains integral to her identity as a subaltern, "Dopdi's blood was like the pure black earth, unadulterated." (Debi, 68, my translation) The forest that she navigates, in this sense, becomes as an allegory of the unity and comradeship that Dopdi shares with her community. It is with regards to this deep and compassionate bond the Dopdi re-routes, not letting the footsteps following her know the location of the camp and is captured by Senanyak and his men. What follows is a poignant series of images that cumulatively depict the violence inflicted on Dopdi's body. For instance, in a very powerful image, Debī shows Dopdi counting the men that come and 'make her' before she falls asleep under the moonlight, "how many, 4-5-6-7- after that Dopdi was unconscious." (Debī, 70, my translation) The image projects a recuperative potential onto the figure of

Dopdi carried forward later as she refuses to wear clothes in front of Senanyak. She, ironically, deviates from the mythological association of her name to Draupadi from the *Mahabharata* and single-handedly weaves the narrative of resistance and emancipation. The finality of the grotesque image of a naked Dopdi walking up to Senanyak asking him why he couldn't clothe her is a powerful conclusion to her story. Dopdi emerges as a symbol of rebellion because she turns her silence and her body into a site of political resistance. She refuses to be erased, and her rebellion lies in survival, in standing up and staring back. For Debī, the peasant revolution and other subaltern resistances are mirrored in Dopdi's uncovered body – their presence is incomprehensible to people like Senanyak and fail to garner the kind of attention and respect they rightfully deserve.

Reading Between the Lines: An Analysis of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's Translation

The short story, *Draupadi*, introduces its character with two names, each from a different time in history. While Dopdi, for Spivak, could be 'the tribalized form' of the name of the Indian mythological character – Draupadi, or there could be genuine parallels drawn connecting the two stories. For instance, Spivak locates the mythological character of Draupadi in a polyandrous relationship with her five husbands “‘singular’ in the sense of odd, unpaired, uncoupled.” (Spivak, 9) as “No acknowledgement of paternity can secure the Name of the Father for the child of such a mother,” (Spivak, 9) and argues, “Mahasweta's story questions this 'singularity' by placing Dopdi first in a comradely, activist, monogamous marriage and then in a situation of multiple rape.” (Spivak, 9)

Further, commenting on the momentous episode in the Mahabharata¹⁷⁸ when Draupadi is prevented from being unclothed in public, Spivak traces parallels with Dopdi's narrative,

“Mahasweta's story rewrites this episode. The men easily succeed in stripping Dopdi [...] rather than save her modesty through the implicit intervention of a benign and divine [...] comrade, the story insists that this is the place male leadership stops.”
(10)

Interestingly, using a 'tribalized' version of the name of a well-known female character from the popular epics of the Indian literary tradition – a necessary cultural translation – Devi successfully positions Dopdi, a Santhal woman, an identified subaltern female body, in postcolonial discourses. Drawing from Maggio's deduction of an 'actively speaking' subaltern that needs to be heard, Dopdi seems to be left unclothed and 'unprotected' from scrutiny. Dopdi's body, therefore, becomes the point of analysis as well as a scribe on which postcolonial narrations and reinterpretations are written. Precariously perched on the intricacies of translation, Dopdi's body houses the scars inflicted upon her by Senanyak's men. It is through these scars, “her breasts bitten raw, the nipples torn [...] ravaged lips...” (31, 33) that Draupadi is 'heard' in the postcolonial context. In fact, the visual impact of Dopdi being 'apprehended' is a far superior translation than language in the narrative as the tribal language is left untranslated for the readers or for Senanyak.

¹⁷⁸ The Indian epic from which Draupadi's story is extracted. See “Translator's Preface” to Draupadi in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's *Breast Stories*.

For instance, in a pivotal scene where Dulna's last words were 'Ma-ho' a series of interpretations follow,

“What does Ma-ho mean? Is this a violent *slogan* in the tribal language? Even after much thought, the Department of Defence could not be sure. Two tribal specialist types are flown in from Calcutta, and they sweat over the dictionaries put together by worthies such as Hoffman-Jeffer and Golden-Palmer.” (20)

However, when Dopdi faces Senanyak with rage, his “terribly afraid” (33) self is encroached by Dopdi's physical grotesqueness and newfound translatability. For instance, Dopdi's “mangled breasts” (33) push him and relocate her formerly disrobed identity to a position of power, the use of the term 'kounter' pierced the barriers of speech and performance developing a nuanced postcolonial identity. Spivak argues,

“In the matter of 'translation' between Bengali and English, it is [...] Dopdi who occupies a curious middle space. She is the only one who uses the word 'kounter' (the 'n' is no more than a nasalization of the diphthong 'ou'). As Mahasweta explains, it is an abbreviation for 'killed by police in an encounter', the code description for death by police torture. Dopdi does not understand English but she understands this formula and the word. In her use of it at the end, it comes mysteriously close to the 'proper' English usage. [...] What is it to 'use' a language 'correctly' without 'knowing' it?” (Spivak,15)

It is evident from Spivak's interpretation that Dopdi as a subaltern woman is capable of speech and, using 'correct' terms, seem to depict the need to be translated even less. By the end of Devi's narrative Dopdi emerges as epitome of an ongoing resistance – as a stronghold to preserve the heterogeneity of the nation where peasant revolutions have contributed to the nation-building process, a penetrative force that breaks normative barriers of linguistic and cultural translation, and, finally, a body that cuts across binaries of gender that are defined by the act of 'making her'. However, criticism of Spivak's reading of Draupadi usually fall on these lines of interpretation and add to the discourse of the subaltern female identity. For instance, Spivak expands on Debī's interpretation of Draupadi's "infinitely clothed" scene from the Mahabharata and argues, " It is when she crosses the sexual differential into the field of what could *only happen to a woman* that she emerges as the most powerful 'subject'" (Spivak, 11) Nivedita Majumdar, in "Silencing the Subaltern: Resistance and Gender in Postcolonial Theory" critiques Spivak's perspective where "Draupadi the subaltern revolutionary comes into her own for Spivak only *after* her gendered brutalization." (Majumdar) Majumdar is quick to dismiss Dopdi's gendered association to the political resistance and argues that Dopdi inhabits "a steely courage, a sense of obligation to the sacrifices of others, and an unshakable commitment not to endanger the lives of other comrades..." (Majumdar) While both Spivak and Majumdar situate Dopdi's gendered body in their criticism, it can be argued that the very act of sexual violence ultimately transcends beyond the fixities of her female identity and body. Nivedita Sen and Nikhil Yadav in "Colloquium on "Draupadi" quote Rajeshwari Sundar Rajan stating,

“It is simultaneously a deliberate refusal of a shared sign-system [pertaining to nakedness and rape] and an ironic deployment of the same semiotics to create the disconcerting counter effect of shame, confusion and terror in the enemy.” (Sen and Yadav, 244)

If Dopdi’s naked body demystifies female figures and instills fear, her uncovered breasts recuperate the narratives of subaltern women with the potential to develop a response against discriminatory and authoritative power structures. She emerges symbol of refuge where generations of peripheral uprisings and movements culminate and are given a fierce potential for recognition.

In addition to translating Dopdi’s gendered body as a purveyor of political resistance, Spivak situates Dopdi in postcolonial contexts by developing her as a counteractive force against Senanyak. In her preface to *Breast Stories*, Spivak states that Senanyak’s character required as much of a critical analysis as that of Dopdi. If in Devi’s narrative, Senanayak advocates ‘theoretically’ becoming the enemy to destroy it, in Spivak’s reading he is quite closely linked to the First World Scholars who, wandering out of their ‘First-World enclosure,’ seek the Third World. This act of not only reappropriating but also replacing the subaltern subject in Western academic discourses is widely debated.¹⁷⁹ In fact, addressing the critique of her English translations of Debī’s narratives in *Imaginary Maps*, Spivak highlights being called the ‘dwarpalika’ or female doorkeeper “of Mahasweta in the West” (Spivak, xxvi) by Sujit Mukherjee who also questioned the

¹⁷⁹ See David Ludden’s book *Reading Subaltern Studies: Critical History, Contested Meaning and the Globalization of South Asia*.

appropriateness and accessibility of her English language for the Indian audience. Spivak knowingly situates the subaltern female characters in Debī's stories as postcolonial subjects accessed by a wider readership and, therefore, acknowledges Mukherjee's critiques. However, the English language and its 'relevance' for the Indian audience calls for a larger debate of linguistic translation. Adding to that debate to some extent, Spivak's English translation acquires Dopdi, as an "Indian theme,"¹⁸⁰ and reconstitutes her in postcolonial and global contexts where the English language seldom requires appropriation. Dopdi is, therefore, 'remade' into a subaltern female identity that can be read and analysed as a postcolonial subject through translation. However, if, for Spivak, "the subaltern cannot speak,"¹⁸¹ the only way Dopdi is interpreted as a postcolonial subject is through Spivak's use of the English language which raises important issues regarding the extent to which the subaltern identity is reappropriated as a postcolonial one, 'made' into an 'accessible other.'¹⁸² Further, the need to make/unmake Dopdi is what develops Senanyak's character who has to impose authoritative and patriarchal means to suppress and 'own' the enemy in accordance to his theory vs practice considerations. However, when Dopdi's body is infiltrated by "active pistons of flesh" (Spivak, 195), a culmination of military and patriarchal coercion, it is not Senanyak that becomes the enemy, but Dopdi who is 'made' into a brutal reminder of the peasant revolution.

¹⁸⁰ See Salman Rushdie's book *Imaginary Homelands* (Page- 17, 18)

¹⁸¹ See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak" (Page- 102-104)

¹⁸² See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's book *Imaginary Maps: Three Stories by Mahasweta Devi*, where she traces Sara Suleri's critique of her translation of pterodactyl stating, "Reading my commentaries on the guardians of the horizon-such as the pterodactyl in the final novella-my friend Sara Suleri has unaccountably diagnosed a case of exoticization. And there is also a feeling that perhaps this is a denial of voice to "the subaltern," so that she can only be spoken for." (Spivak, xxvi)

Interestingly Dopdi is a speaking subject who actively participates in a rebuttal to such appropriations in the lines,

“Draupadi stands up. She pours the water down on the ground. Tears her piece of cloth with her teeth. Seeing such strange behaviour, the guard says, She’s gone crazy, and runs for orders. He can lead the prisoner out but doesn’t know what to do if the prisoner behaves incomprehensibly. [...] Draupadi stands before him, naked. Thigh and pubic hair matted with dry blood. Two breasts, two wounds. [...] The object of your search, Dopdi Mejhen. You asked them to make me up, don’t you want to see how they made me?” (Spivak, 196)

Ironically, it is Dopdi’s emergence as a speaking, interrogating and ‘countering’ subject that is incomprehensible to Senanyak. Therefore, when Dopdi ‘speaks,’ she challenges translatability by refusing to rely on language, the medium through which she is adapted by Senanyak’s institutionalisation and Western intellectuals’ postcolonial discourse. In fact, Neluka Silva, in the essay, “Narratives of Resistance: Mahasweta Devi’s “Draupadi,” rightly argues,

“[...] see how they made me” has more than one meaning. The command “make her” is like the term “counter”, a way of making her talk, an irony in the light of Spivak’s famous question “can the subaltern speak?”. But Dopdi does “speak,” not in a conventional way, but by tearing her cloth. This form of speaking is not heard

because, as far as the guards are concerned, her behaviour is incomprehensible.”
(Silva, 60)

It is by transcending dominant epistemologies of patriarchal, militarised, sexual and postcolonial discourses that Dopdi emerges as a salient figure of the postcolonial nation. Her bruised body moving towards Senanyak embodies political agency that is often overlooked in India’s nationalist struggle for freedom. Additionally, Dopdi’s revelation as a fierce revolutionary demands further scrutiny of the phallogocentric images of Draupadi – the mythologised female figure that Devi herself reimagines – and of Mother India that have upheld the traditional, cultural and religious sentiments of the nation. By pushing Senanyak backwards with her violated body, Dopdi reclaims the mainstream imagination of the nation and reconstitutes a (home)land for all the displaced and dislocated tribal histories and ‘peripheral’ nationalist movements that contributed to its freedom and development. She also develops as an emancipatory narrative within herself where her body provides solace and refuge to the displaced and unheard subaltern women who fail to speak in a language discernible by mainstream officials, critics and theorists. Dopdi, therefore, needs to be contextualised in postcolonial institutions and Western academic circles through her body’s active engagement with the politics of narration, comprehension and adaptation across linguistic and cultural borders.

Conclusion

Translating *Draupadi* as a diaspora writer, Spivak often deals with the issue of representing Dopdi Meijhen’s subaltern body transnationally. She deals with placing

(Spivak, 106) Draupadi in a Western academic intellectual setting where she is not only read and understood but also reinterpreted. In many ways, Spivak herself falls prey to the “complicity between ‘speaking for’ and ‘portraying’” (Spivak, 63) that she warns against. For instance, Spivak locates Draupadi in association with homeland, body, peripheral subaltern narratives of the nation and within the contours of the question “Can the subaltern (transnationally) speak?” – all of which are related to longstanding postcolonial and diasporic engagements across national, linguistic and cultural borders. Further, as the terrains on which this regional Bengali text is placed significantly expands, Draupadi, a speaking subaltern with agency, voice and courage is (mis)heard. She is reinvented across national borders and woven into the narrative of the nation through a discursive backdrop of cultural texts, mythologised women and gender identity. For instance, as a note to her translation of *Draupadi*, Spivak speaks at length about Draupadi from the Mahabharata and the breast as a symbol of fierce femininity to develop a background that familiarises Dopdi Mejhen as a character. It is, however, important to note that Draupadi, as Debī’s regional Bengali short story, appears to be a different text – one that delves into the intricacies of the violence that subaltern identities are consistently subjected to and the deep-seated hierarchy within the nation that enables it. However, Spivak’s Draupadi remains a translation, carried across national borders and circulated on the larger expanse of globality and migration. In fact, Jhumpa Lahiri’s definition of translation rightfully supports this observation. Lahiri comments on the position of the translator who cannot merely repeat the text back without listening to it,¹⁸³ and upon listening, adds nuances to the text making it a venture quite like crossing borders,

¹⁸³ See Jhumpa Lahiri’s book *Translating Myself and Others* (Page- 46, 47)

“The translator “repeats” and thus “doubles” a text, but this repetition must not be taken literally. Far from a restrictive act of copying, a translator restores the meaning of a text by means of an elaborate, alchemical process that requires imagination, ingenuity, and freedom.” (Lahiri, 47)

Gayatri Spivak’s translation of Draupadi creates a separate text, one that is complete in itself and influenced by her position as a Western academic intellectual. Her diasporic and transnational affiliations and postcolonial contexts around home, identity and gender have a strong impact on the ways in which Draupadi is read across borders of language and nation. Draupadi, read, heard and reinterpreted as a subaltern woman in transnational contexts, thus, quickly becomes an allegory of the (home)land. She withholds, within her terrifying glory and countless subaltern resistances that remain unread.

Chapter 3

Rooted Figures: Returning the Indian Diaspora Woman 'Home'

Transient Homes and Travelling Women in Indian Transnational Literatures

Diasporas have an unsettling relationship with the idea of home. Investing in literary and cultural developments, they attempt to reconcile with the unassailable rift between the homeland left behind and its transnational reimaginings. Diaspora literatures have, therefore, widely engaged with migrations, re-settlement and homelessness.¹⁸⁴ Ato Quayson, in *A Companion to Diaspora and Transnationalism*, traces writers such as Toni Morrison, J.M. Coetzee and Salman Rushdie identifying the genealogical condition of “stories of the where-we-came-from variety” (Quayson and Daswani, 154) as an important aspect of postcolonial writing. Examining postcolonial literatures that portray the complex and layered experiences of displacement, Quayson responds to the idealised desire to seek an origin emotionally and psychologically associated with diasporas asserting that it is often fraught with ambiguity.¹⁸⁵ Further, Rogers Brubaker, in his essay “‘diaspora’ diaspora” traces the legacies and journeys of diasporic community(s) as he goes on to “de-substantialize it by treating it as a category of practice, project, claim and stance,

¹⁸⁴ See Dohra Ahmad’s book *Penguin Book of Migration Literature* which explores the complexities of migration, ambivalence of relocation and the precarity of home through diaspora narratives.

¹⁸⁵ See Ato Quayson’s book *A Companion to Diaspora and Transnationalism* (Page-16,17) where Quayson associates nostalgia with the experience of loss of home, an impossible idea of return and diasporic identity politics arguing, “While diasporas evoke a future time that foregrounds ritual practice and performance which is in tension with, yet also participates in, the creation of a distant homeland in the present, transnationalism points to an irony and tension between the personal and group ambitions to transcend geographical, social, and economic boundaries and the political and cultural barriers and boundary-making processes that accompany such movement and mobility.” (Quayson and Daswani, 17)

rather than as a bounded group.” (Brubaker, 13) Brubaker’s hypothesis dissociates it from the fixities of homeland which, “Most early discussions of diaspora were firmly rooted in.” (Brubaker, 2) Therefore, while dispersals from the homeland have largely defined diasporas, increased migrations and border crossings in twentieth and twenty-first centuries have led them to be theorised as a motif of travel and mobility. However, diasporic journeys inspire a sentimental relationship with home which percolates in postcolonial literary productions¹⁸⁶ For instance, establishing the ‘diasporic imaginary’ and its association with a sense of place, Ato Quayson develops home as an imagined, historically displaced yet concomitantly existing part of the diasporic identity which resides in one’s consciousness and imagination. He introduces the term “unheimlich” as a discursive space that further propounds the relationship between diasporas, national borders and the contemporary concerns of home,

“Apart from the fact that for the diasporic, this place is always in some form of dialectical relation to that place and to an elsewhere, the dialectical relation may in certain instances produce breaches in the commonplace, an unheimlich of place, as it were. The unheimlich or “unhomeliness” of place is undergirded by the fraught dynamic of the links between ideas of homeland and host nation that take as their theater the mind of the beholder (i.e., the diasporic individual or community) in negotiating the present.” (Quayson, 149)

¹⁸⁶ See Ato Quayson’s book, *A Companion to Diaspora and Transnationalism*, (Page-152, 153) where Quayson explores a wide range of narratives that reiterate the issues of location in terms of home, nation, and their nostalgic associations.

If Quayson locates 'unhomeliness' temporally, Homi Bhabha, in his essay, "The World and the Home," identifies the 'unhomely' as a terrain arguing, "To be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the "unhomely" be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public spheres." (Bhabha, 141) As the intermingling of cultures brings the world into a close-knit network, the idea of one's origins is left in the realm of the imagination. Andreas Huyssen rightly argues, "Diasporic memory in its traditional sense is by definition cut off, hybrid, displaced, split,' (Baronian et al., 85) and "Home, Heimat, is no longer what it used to be, either for the nation or for the diaspora." (Baronian et al., 84) Further, Anindya Raychaudhuri, in *Homemaking: Radical Nostalgia and Construction of a South Asian Diaspora*, examines the reconfiguration of home in the context of diasporas and the relations they form beyond national borders highlighting,

"The home that is being created does not have to be static, unchanging, essentialist version of the home that was left behind, but an imaginary, imaginative, discordant and vibrant entity that is able to transcend past, present, and future, that is able to rewrite space and time, in order to produce a new sense of belonging..." (Raychaudhuri, 15)

As writers and theorists navigate diasporic reimaginings and rewritings of home, its multiplicity and multi-placed-ness comes to the fore. For instance, Jean Amato and Kyunghye Pyun, in *Home and Homeland in Asian Diaspora: Transnational Reflections in Art, Literature, and Film*, tracing the sporadic history of Asian diasporas, argue that the diasporic association with homeland is not linear, they form "entangled allegiances to

nation, sovereignty, domicile, region, ancestry, family, heritage, politics, class, and ethnic identity.” (Amato and Pyun, 11) The notion of home remains intrinsic to diasporas and their collective identity with its residue buried in culture, religion, and tradition, and, often, women.¹⁸⁷ In fact, for Alison Blunt and Jayani Bonnerjee, women play a pivotal role in the process of navigating home along routes of diasporic connections and relations. Taking examples of Moroccan women living in Italy who assert their Moroccan and Muslim identity through commodities “that constitute and represent their “other home” in Italy” (Blunt and Bonnerjee, 271) and migrant women domestic workers who are vulnerable in their employers’ homes, they question the (dis)placement of home and the challenges of home-making in a globalised world. In postcolonial societies, home develops across physical, social, cultural and imaginary locations amidst ongoing issues of transnational representation and belonging. Primarily associated with such cross-border interaction, home has remained central to both the intimate spaces and the grander perspectives of the diasporic and migrant tendencies of nurturing home beyond borders.

Postcolonial literary productions have opened the field of postcolonial studies to emerging discussions around women and the effects of ongoing contemporary migrations on their everyday life. Female figures in developing postcolonial societies are explored well

¹⁸⁷ See Marie Aude Baronian, Stephan Bessar and Yolanda Johnson’s book, *Diaspora and Memory: Figures of Displacement in Contemporary Literature, Arts and Politics*, (Page- 138-142) where writers and theorists “call for an expanded approach to testimony in diasporic recollection – one in which a consideration of gender can play an important interpretive role.” (Baronian et al., 138) They critically examine how “gender figures in acts of memory and transmission.” (Baronian et al., 138)

beyond the theories of feminism¹⁸⁸ as dilemmas of diasporic existence¹⁸⁹ and their historical, cultural and fictional depictions become prominent categories in postcolonial discourses. For instance, Sushila Nasta, in *Motherlands: Black Women's Writing from Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia*, encouraging a breakthrough in the larger scope of writing women through the existing foundations of language and literature, examines dominant perspectives and colonial implications of home that remain invested in female figures,

“The seductive power of ‘home’, both as a force for authority over and as a continuing domestic metaphor for maintaining a means of authority within, figures most forcefully perhaps in the widely held image of England as colonial ‘motherland’, [...] an illusory haven which both beckoned and betrayed many of Britain’s imperial subjects before and after Independence.” (Nasta, 1)

¹⁸⁸ Feminist postcolonial theory engages with and deconstructs patriarchy and the colonial past of certain previously colonised nations in relation to the female subject. Sara Mills and Reina Lewis, in the introduction to *Feminist Postcolonial Theory*, attempt to resituate the female colonised and oppressed subject within colonial discourses. Theoretical engagements of postcolonial theory with feminism have been a conscious effort to bring the gender question into a demonstratively masculine intervention. Theorists like Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak, in “Three Women’s Text: A Critique of Imperialism” and Ania Loomba in *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* discuss the position of the Third World and the colonised subject in association with gender.

¹⁸⁹ See Amba Pande’s book *Women in the Indian Diaspora* (Page – 4-6) where Pande situates issues of alienation and belonging that diaspora women face as “with complex realities of unequal power dynamics of the homeland and stereotypical spaces of the hostland, women tend to experience conflicting subjectivities of freedom and subjugation.” (Pande, 2)

Reading contemporary postcolonial literatures that are influenced by similar colonial typecasting in her later works,¹⁹⁰ Nasta argues that they are often ‘pigeon-holed,’ refusing to “move beyond the perpetuation of the narrow stereotypes by which most modern nations have attempted to protect their borders.” (Nasta, 3) Women have remained archetypes of tradition, national identity, border construction and home in the aftermath of colonisation and have sought a space to come to terms with individual experiences of migration, identity crisis and cultural interactions across national borders. Women writers, on their journey to undercut the conditions where their work is “sexualised, exoticised and stereotyped,” (Bhalla, 81) against male authored “serious, literary, intellectual and historical” (Bhalla, 81) narratives, encounter blatant homogenisation of their transnational experiences.¹⁹¹ Over time, their struggles for representation across transnational borders has developed into a major counteractive discourse. For instance, Jaspal Kaur Singh, in *Representation and Resistance: South Asian and African Women’s Writing at Home and in the Diaspora*, develops on the conflicts of postcolonial nation-building bequeathed upon woman writers. Singh explores the ways in which they utilise the dichotomy, ambivalence, contentions and complexities of globalisation to promote “nebulous re-inscriptions and

¹⁹⁰ See Susheila Nasta’s books *Writing Across Worlds: Contemporary Writers Talk* and *Reading the ‘New Literatures in a Postcolonial Era* which examine postcolonial writers and their relationship with colonial stereotypes and national borders.

¹⁹¹ See Nandi Bhatia’s essay, “Women, Homelands and the Indian Diaspora,” (Page- 514-516) where Bhatia confronts the notion of the ‘imaginary homeland’ prevalent in transnational contexts and experiences which often erases the experiences of diasporic women. Also see Sandra Ponzanesi’s book *Paradoxes of Postcolonial Culture: Contemporary Women Writers of the Indian and Afro-Italian Diaspora* (Page- 20,21) where Ponzanesi argues that postcolonial diasporic women writers tackling the hegemony of language, culture and national identity, “link their diverse local and personal experiences through a universal anxiety that transcends individual differences.” (Ponzanesi, 20)

empowerment.” (Singh, 58) Additionally, Elisabetta Marino, in *Transnational, National and Personal Voices: New Perspectives on Asian American and Asian Diasporic Women Writers*, examines women writers who often navigate the conflicts of diasporic existence and the quest for identity through their bodies, “the ultimate frontier in an attempt to “belong” somewhere.” (Marino, 16) However, negotiating aspects of gender, race, culture and social-political location, one of the most urgent challenges that postcolonial women writers face is to tackle the all-encompassing cultural identity¹⁹² which considerably impacts individual diasporic experiences. Women writers and feminist critics assemble their narratives amidst boisterous voices that claim to anchor communities, cultures and traditions of ‘others’ in the West. The multiplicity of narratives tends to engulf their subjective understanding of life across borders and they either become the ‘mirror for Western self-reflection’¹⁹³ or are commodified and consumed.¹⁹⁴ Women writers from the Indian subcontinent have grappled with issues of identity and spatiality in their respective diasporic settings where the sedentariness of home is set against their journeys across borders. For instance, alluding to Meera Syal’s female protagonist in the book *Life Isn’t All Ha Ha Hee Hee*, Balli Kaur Jaswal traces the “permanent state of existing between worlds,” (Kaldas, 153) and reiterates her own experience, as a woman writer, of sketching British Indian female characters in her novel, *The Unlikely Adventures of the Shergill*

¹⁹² See Namrata Poddar’s essay, “Whiny Assholes or Creative Hustlers? : On Brownness, Diaspora Fiction and Western Publication,” where Poddar questions the need for a fixed, authentic and homogenising voice in diaspora fiction.

¹⁹³ See Uma Narayan’s book *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions and Third World Feminism* (Page – 136- 139)

¹⁹⁴ See Nancy N. Chen’s interview with Trinh T. Minh-Ha “Speaking Nearby: A Conversation with Trinh T. Minh-ha” where Minh-ha elucidates on her position as a Vietnamese-American woman filmmaker.

Sisters. Writers like Meera Syal and Balli Kaur Jaswal are among other Indian diasporic women writers who have intricately woven narratives around Indian women and the socio-political transgressions that have defined their lives. Interestingly, such transgressions have strongly engaged with the idea of home and its complex relationship with transnational and transcultural lives of women. Further, Lisa Lau, laying the foundation of her research in her article “Making the Difference: The Differing Presentations and Representations of South Asia in the Contemporary Fiction of Home and Diasporic South Asian Women Writers” discusses two different kinds of women writers in South Asia – home and diasporic. Lau is, however, conscious of the limitations of such demarcations due to the increase in movements across borders,

“...travel and mobility, which was scarcely possible only several decades ago and far more uncommon, now slightly blurs the boundary between the home and diasporic writers. This suggests that these very boundary markers are negotiable, and certainly questionable, and it is important to keep in mind that the distinctions are not set in stone.” (Lau, 244)

Lau’s study encourages an interaction with contemporary terms of globalisation that increasingly develops as a postcolonial paradigm. Unrelented migrations in the colonial period that propelled narratives of discord gave way to new prerogatives where diasporas confronted the (un)ease of new opportunities, cultural interaction and positions of exiles, expatriates and refugees. As national and cultural emblems that continued to define home in colonial, anti-colonial, and postcolonial discourses, women saw the intimacies of home

merging with global developments and aspirations. Amba Pande argues that women's agency in diasporic conditions is in fact understudied, "...women encounter and negotiate with multiple conflicting situations from the public and the private spheres of both the homeland and the hostlands, in the process, shifting their perspectives from traditional to contemporary (see Thadani 1984; Pessar and Mahler 2003)." (Pande, 10) Therefore, migration has adverse effects on the individual regardless of established gender norms, and the idea of home crumbles under the pressures¹⁹⁵ of global departures, cross-border connectivity and transnational interactions. Migrations disrupt the idea of home; the opacity of the private and domestic space against the world is particularly challenged by emerging fluidity in family and cultural dynamics. Further, border-crossings in the late twentieth century have almost engulfed geopolitical demarcations and subsumed national territories. They have deployed attributes of multi-directionality in processes of migration and encountered a "continuum of involuntary to voluntary" (Ahmad, xvi) as forced migrations like trafficking and slave trade formed linkages with contemporary situations of expatriation and exile, contributing to the globality of movement. However, what initiated the imagination of diaspora as a "part of global networks,"¹⁹⁶ also gave rise to nuances in the idea of homemaking. With gender-relations deeply embedded in the

¹⁹⁵ See Mastoureh Fathi and Caitríona Ní Laoire's book *Migration and Home* (Page- 21-40) that examines gender relations and the changing idea of home in the context of migration. Also see Deborah Chambers's book, *Changing Media, Homes and Households* where varying experiences of "home" in a media globalised world are extensively studied along the lines of changing gender relations and family dynamics.

¹⁹⁶ See Sneja Gunew's book *Haunted Nations: The colonial Dimensions of Multiculturalism* where the term 'diaspora' is theorised in terms of globalisation and transnationalism which leaves such communities "at once disparate and all too connected." (Gunew, 108)

broader structures¹⁹⁷ of home and the body politic of the nation, migration disrupts the experience, memory and aspirations attached to the idea of home. For instance, Annabelle Wilkins, in the essay “Gendering home and migration,” examines her research with migrants and refugee women activists at the Myanmar-Thailand border and their experience of leaving their homes in Myanmar. Wilkins argues that the process of moving away from their homes “led them to question gendered expectations that associate women with domesticity, sacrifice and preservation of the nation.” (Bocagni, 403) Further, Sneja Gunew, in the book *Post-multicultural writers as neo-cosmopolitan mediators*, explores women writers like Anita Rau Badami and Yasmine Gooneratne whose writings and female characters “indicate the instabilities of hybridity, métissage, creolization and “contamination,” elements that have also defined the condition of (post)modernity more generally.” (Gunew, 54) Gunew questions the idea of home and nation through female characters that navigate borders. The complexity of the question ‘where is home?’ (Bocagni, 103) lies at the heart of the processes of globalisation and adds to the conflicts of women often attempting to understand their diasporic conditions. However, women remain pertinent to movements across borders that form the late twentieth century global world system and contribute to a nuanced sense of home and belonging beyond national borders.

¹⁹⁷ See Nira Yuval Davis’s essay, ‘Women, Globalization and Contemporary Politics of Belonging’ where Yuval-Davis studies the ways in which globalisation and transnational migrations often assert the biological and cultural differences between men and women and develop political associations and attempt to maintain the ‘authenticity’ of nation, home and cultural belonging. “...hegemonic political projects of belonging [...] construct women’s roles as wives and mothers as part of women’s biological destiny and equate between hearth, home and women’s domestic roles in their constructions of safe belonging.” (Yuval-Davis, 8)

This section explores Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* and Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* in the contexts of contemporary migration. As women writers narrating the diasporic experience, both Lahiri and Desai attempt to situate and shape their female characters amidst the trends and tensions that continue to erupt in a changing world. As national borders become permeable, migrating women personalise and redefine the debates around 'local', 'national', 'global' and 'transnational'. Their movements (or lack thereof) reconfigure the placement and potential of home against the intensity of cultural exchange, socio-political transitions and professional aspirations propelled by transnational interactions. Writers like Lahiri and Desai navigate the interiors of home as well as the internal conflicts of their women characters, both of which contribute to the nuances of globalisation.

Chapter 3.1

Finding 'Home,' Finding 'Women': Reading Ashima Ganguly in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The*

Namesake

Location and Movement: A Take on Globalisation

Colonial and postcolonial cross-border migrations have significantly defined coeval diasporic existence and transnational routes that contribute to processes of globalisation. In fact, movements of commodities as well as labour, propelled by colonisation and the need for territorial and cultural expansion, eventually led to the contemporary conditions of globality. Arjun Appadurai, in the book *Globalization*, typifies the consistent trends of global and transnational interaction with the presence of 'objects in motion'¹⁹⁸ highlighting, "the nation-state, [...] is today frequently characterized by floating populations, transnational politics within national borders, and mobile configurations of technology and expertise." (Appadurai, 5) Further, in a conversation with Pnina Werbner¹⁹⁹, Stuart Hall comments on the newfound avenues of globalisation and the 'interconnectedness' it proffers cautioning that "globalisation is a contradictory system, the product of what used to be called 'combined and uneven development.'" (Werbner, 345) In fact, Stuart Hall

¹⁹⁸ See Arjun Appadurai's book, *Globalization* (Page- 5), where the 'objects in motion' are identified as "...ideas and ideologies, people and goods, images and messages, technologies and techniques." (Appadurai, 5) Additionally, in his book *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, (Page- 27, 28), Appadurai engages with persistent inter-national, territorial and cross-cultural 'transactions' that have contributed to the present terms of globalisation.

¹⁹⁹ See Pnina Werbner and Stuart Hall's conversation in "Cosmopolitanism, Globalisation and Diaspora: Stuart Hall in Conversation with Pnina Werbner, March 2006."

elaborates on the complexities of the 'diasporic dilemma' questioning the inevitability of displacement in world that is constantly in motion,

“How do you make sense of your self, and your life, if this movement between places, cultures, religions, languages, civilisations, histories, times, becomes your lived reality? How can you say, 'This is who I am', and what on earth do you mean by it?” (Werbner, 347)

The concern that Stuart Hall raises in relation to diasporas focuses on the development of the idea of home beyond the emotions, bereavements and hopes fostered by the 'lost' homeland.²⁰⁰ This anxiety around location and movement can be navigated in the context of diasporic associations formed with the Indian subcontinent – specifically its histories, cultural affiliations and late twentieth century literary engagements.

Harking Back to the Homeland in Literatures Across the Indian Subcontinent

Cross-border migrations uprooted and dislocated communities across India's national border; Such violent disenfranchisement urged people crossing the Indian subcontinent to trace their roots back to the envisaged homeland. While the actuality of return was often an impossible notion,²⁰¹ the desire to establish a relationship with the homeland

²⁰⁰ See Michael McMillan's book *The Front Room: Migrant Aesthetics in the Home* (Page- 9) where McMillan navigates interiors of homes in the post-war British period examining the remembered homeland through objects related to migrant cultural memories.

²⁰¹ See Vijay Mishra's book *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorizing the Diasporic Imaginary* (Page- 1, 2) where Mishra explores the idea of return in the context of Indian diasporas.

remains central to diasporas. Rita Christian and Judith Misrahi-Barak, in *India and the Diasporic Imagination*, argue,

“The India ‘remembered’ is necessarily one of myth and fantasy. It is not that one does not remember, it is simply that one chooses not to remember the past one has left behind, or, if one chooses to recall at all, the memories are all fragmented. With this fragment of memory, comes a kind of ‘cognitive dissonance’ which can accompany feelings of displacement.” (Christian and Misrahi-Barak)

The memory of India, the homeland, that stems from traumatic dislocations, is reconstituted in an amnesiac recollection of the relationship migrants shared with it.²⁰² Emerging diasporic literary narratives engage with migration and its evolving relationship with the homeland. For instance, Salman Rushdie, in *Imaginary Homelands*, navigates his position as an Indian diasporic, displaced and migrant writer who “had a city and a history to reclaim” (Rushdie, 10) stating,

“It may be argued that the past is a country from which we have all emigrated, that its loss is a part of our common humanity. Which seems to me self-evidently true;

²⁰² The relationship between history and memory is further examined by Urvashi Butalia in the book *The Other Side of Silence*, from the vantage point of the partition of India. Butalia argues, “It seemed to me that, at least where Partition history was concerned, there was a contradiction in the history that we knew, that we had learnt, and the history that people remembered. Many historians have spoken of how selective amnesia and memory are at the root of the relationship between human beings and their history, that historiography as a technique attempts to ‘dissipate amnesia and collective memory.’” (Butalia, 277-278)

but I suggest that the writer who is out-of-country and even out-of-language may experience this loss in an intensified form. It is made more concrete for him by the physical fact of discontinuity, of his present being in a different place from his past, of his being 'elsewhere'." (Rushdie, 12)

Postcolonial writers and critics have often explored the idea of the return to the homeland through the lens of their 'rootless' position as they reckon the impregnable distance that separates them. Amit Sarwal, in *South Asian Diaspora Narratives: Roots and Routes*, situates memory and nostalgia as interwoven aspects that are utilised by South Asian diasporic writers to reimagine the homeland. Sarwal quotes Bangladeshi- Australian writer Adib Khan's novel *Homecoming* to develop the narrative of the homeland,

"... 'fragmentation, detachment and melancholy are inevitable conditions for the migrants', as they 'live with parallel worlds': One is a world in the memory, of what was and you cling to that because that sort of represents a pristine idea of life which is gone now. Everything changes and yet you cling to and retain a part of the past and you sanitise it. You remember the best bits and somehow or the other you hope that is still there when you get back and it is an impossible expectation. (p. 318)" (Sarwal, 110)

Further, quoting Amitava Kumar, Sarwal asserts "nostalgia, the longing for the return to homeland, is a deep and enduring aspect of the refugee (and migrant) experience." (Sarwal, 110) However, while the homeland and its physical and metaphysical presence

is cultivated in the diasporic consciousness, home remains a contested space amidst notions of migrancy, rootlessness and alienation. In fact, Rosemary Marangoly George, in the book *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth Century Fiction*, rightly argues, “Home in the immigrant genre is a fiction that one can move beyond or recreate at will. The association between an adequate self and a place to call home is held up to scrutiny and then let go.” (George, 200) Home, therefore, is a mutable and variable idea prominent in the postcolonial and diasporic literary and cultural dimensions.

Indian diaspora writings, universalised for their triumphant portrayal of the diasporic identity’s detachment from the homeland, and “a celebration of rootlessness and “hybridity” (Jani, 19) in the post-1981 period, engaged with global and cosmopolitan relations and harboured a “cynicism toward nation-oriented politics and identities.” (Jani, 19) In fact, Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, projected on the global literary platforms as a repository of diasporic attitudes, issues and contexts, effectively positioned migrancy as an important trope associated with Indian diasporic identities. The literatures in English that commenced after its 1981 Booker Prize were made aware of the contours of diasporic and migrant identity. Graham Huggan, in *The Postcolonial Exotic*, rightly points out that Rushdie’s cosmopolitanism, his ability to “hold a conversation with the world,” (Huggan, 64) positions him as a “familiar defence of the literary migrant.” (Huggan, 65) As *Midnight’s Children* globally appealed to its readers, it severely disrupted the diasporic journeys and routes of migration that postcolonial societies like “The African diaspora in the Caribbean through slavery and colonialism, with later migrations of South and South East Asian populations to the Caribbean through indentured labour,” (Florian

Stadtler, 195) to name a few, have experienced. Mass migrations and the tempestuous dismantling of national identities were juxtaposed by Rushdie's individual migrant characters and their personal journey towards a fragmented and slippery idea of home as well as homecoming to a disoriented nation.²⁰³ Jenni Ramone, in the chapter "Salman Rushdie and Diasporic Identities," engages with Salman Rushdie's interpretation to his reading of *The Wizard of Oz* asserting,

"...the lesson taken from this negotiation between home and away is that 'the real secret of the ruby slippers is not that "there's no place like home" but, rather, that there is no longer any such place as home – except, of course, for the homes we make, or the homes that are made for us'." (Stadtler, 203)

Further commenting on migration and the narratives of loss and despair that migratory movements and diasporic existence typically expound, Ramone understands Rushdie's fiction, in Elleke Boehmer's words, "as a 'liberating polyphony' aimed at 'dismantling authority'." (Stadtler, 203) The potential for liberation associated with Salman Rushdie's protagonists is further explored by Nilufer E. Bharucha,²⁰⁴ in the chapter "Salman

²⁰³ See Florian Stadler's book *Salman Rushdie in Context*, in which Stadler "charts Rushdie's position as a commentator and chronicler of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries as he maps his own journey from Bombay to London and New York and engages with the political evolutions and circumstances of the localities he inhabits. [...] different forms of artistic expression and attracted much attention in literary circles, literary critical scholarship, and critical theory, considering his work through the prisms of late modernism, cosmopolitanism, postmodernism, and postcolonialism." (Stadler, 1) Rushdie's characters in *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, *Shalimar the Clown* have been studied in terms of their migrant positions, diasporic dislocations and the contestations of home. (See Chapters 14, 15 and 18)

Rushdie's Upwardly Mobile, Globally Migrating Middle Class," where the position of Rushdie's migrant characters is outlined,

"Rushdie's protagonists are part of these immediate first and then second generations of postcolonial Indians whose families managed to move out to the more prosperous western world. Rushdie's protagonists are thus not part of the mixed economy and later deregulated economy of India from the 1970s and the 1990s, when India was integrated into a wider global economy." (Stradtler, 230)

Voluntary and liberating forms of migrations highlighted in Salman Rushdie's novels in the post-1980 period was widely responded to and developed in twentieth century literary interventions. Writers like Arundhati Roy, Amitav Ghosh, Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri developed narratives that explored the caste, class, race and gender contestations of the Indian diaspora. Therefore, while migration, displacement as well as the perpetuity of the human condition of 'migrancy' remain central to the Indian diasporic experience, the literary traditions emerging from the Indian subcontinent were ingrained with the complexities of immigrant lives. In fact, Jhumpa Lahiri's fiction extensively engages with the Indian American diasporic identity, thereby intensifying the debates around contemporary migrations.

Locating Jhumpa Lahiri: Blurring Home and Abroad

As an Indian diaspora writer growing up in the United States of America, Jhumpa Lahiri's own diasporic identity, much like Salman Rushdie's, is exemplified in her fictional

narratives. Her short stories and novels delve into the intricacies of cross-cultural mobility and transnational experience attempting to provide an insight to the apparently detached migrant. For instance, Ruvani Ranasinha, in *Contemporary Diasporic Women's Fiction: Gender, Narration and Globalisation*, rightly argues "Lahiri's insights into and emphasis on the emotional character of Asian Americans mark a shift to interiority that stands in contrast to most contemporary South Asian anglophone fiction that tends to be framed by a more socio-political perspective." (Ranasinha, 176) In fact, the most prominent critiques of Jhumpa Lahiri's narratives are on the feminist and postcolonial perspectives associated with her literary productions. For instance, contradicting Ranjana Sidhanta Ash's critique of Lahiri's 'focus' as "an intimate world of family tensions and domestic occasions laced with emotional awareness and memory's alterations..." (Ranasinha, 176) and Anuradha Marwah's inference of Lahiri's narratives as "quietist and apolitical," (Ranasinha, 176) Ranasinha argues,

"Lahiri's emphasis on interiority [...] develops a feminist aesthetic that challenges expectations within the field of postcolonial and feminist studies. Furthermore, [...] she invites us to reassess the way we think about the intersection between the political and the personal and the contemporary global novel." (Ranasinha, 176)

Lahiri's experiments with the inner and outer worlds have been articulated in *The Namesake*, intricately exploring the Indian immigrant's relationship with home. The space and politics of home, though a driving force in Lahiri's narrative, have been explored in the context of the women and their diasporic relations. For instance, Lekha Roy and

Rajyashree Khushu-Lahiri, in the essay “Forging Transnational Identities: A Postethnic Diasporic Re-imagining of “Home” in Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake*,” point out, “*The Namesake* challenges the premise that home is central to the identity of an Indian woman and that the cultural sanctity of home is inviolable.” (Roy and Khushu-Lahiri, 112)

Further, the idea of the home is debated in terms of its ethnic and cultural dimensions in the narrative as Roy and Khush-Lahiri argue, “the concept of the nation or *desh* must be understood as limited in Lahiri’s novel to Bengal, and hence the homogenising of the Bengali ethnic community in America.” (Roy and Khushu-Lahiri, 112) While idea of home, therefore, develops in relation to existing cultures and ethnicities, Lahiri’s narrative intertwines the process of homemaking around multiple diasporic experiences – that of a husband, a father, a wife, a mother, a son and a daughter – so much so, that individual cross-border journeys transgress gender binaries, generational boundaries and locational barriers. Home, however, is continuously sought in the fixities, dependencies and anchorages of longing and belonging. Exploring Ashima Ganguly’s character in *The Namesake*, I would argue that female figures develop as a central carrier of the diasporic ‘home’ – the inevitability of its loss, the unremitting mourning²⁰⁵ of its distant presence and the tangible reality of its existence – which is deeply invested in twentieth century diaspora relations with the nation and its global and transnational connections.

Textual Analysis

²⁰⁵ See Vijay Mishra’s book *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorizing the Diasporic*.

Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* dwells in the constancy of diasporic journeys and improbabilities of 'return,' exploring the dilemmas of one's diasporic existence. In the narrative Lahiri introduces two parallel journeys – Ashoke, a doctoral student at MIT, and Ashima, his wife, who have a different understanding of their diasporic positions. The hopes, anxieties and aspirations of a migrant is effectively portrayed through Ashoke who navigates family ties and interpersonal desires while seeking better opportunities abroad. The aspect of migration and mobility is intricately woven into Lahiri's narrative through the motif of a train which opens the window of possibilities that people in the late twentieth century were often exposed to. For instance, an engaging conversation between Ashoke and Ghosh examines the idea of travel,

“Ghosh shook his head. “You are still young. Free,” he said, spreading his hands apart for emphasis. “Do yourself a favour. Before its too late, without thinking too much about it first, pack a pillow and a blanket and see as much of the world as you can. You will not regret it. One day it will be too late.”

“My grandfather always says that's what books are for,” [...] To travel without moving an inch.” (Lahiri, 4)

Lahiri locates the two distinctive ideas of travel in a conversation between two men alluding, perhaps, to the fact that the 'home' and the 'world' have been laid out by dichotomies of gender. Sandhya Rao Mehta in *Exploring Gender in the literature of the Indian Diaspora*, discusses the position of women as diasporas arguing,

“South Asian women migrating to Europe and North America sometimes bring with them – or are expected to bring with them – traditional gender ideologies where family and procreativity are valued over the individual self. Indeed, diasporic situations can sometimes intensify the idea of men as negotiators with the external world and women as custodians of traditional culture within the home.” (Mehta, 104-105)

Cross-border migrations have the societal biases of gender embedded within. The narrative of *The Namesake* is woven around these familiar patterns and gender distinctions as Ashoke and Ashima come to terms with their displacement. Interestingly, while Ashoke has a choice in his migrant position, Ashima slips into his narrative as easily as she “stepped into the shoes at her feet.” (8) feeling his presence. Married to Ashoke and simultaneously engulfed by his immigrant position, Ashima’s idea of home is wound around the delicate notions of belonging attached to her husband,

“Eight thousand miles away in Cambridge, she has come to know him. In the evenings she cooks for him, hoping to please, with the unrationed, remarkably unblemished sugar, flour, rice, and salt [...] By now she has learned that her husband likes his food on the salty side, that his favourite thing about lamb curry is the potatoes, and that he likes to finish his dinner with a small final helping of rice and dal.” (10)

For Ashoke, who associates the metaphor of birth to the trauma of a train accident, Ashima grows into the familiarities of a maternal figure reconnecting his formerly severed roots with his homeland. For instance, upon naming their son 'Gogol,' Ashima's relation to her husband's life and identity is further explored,

“...the name stands not only for her son's life, but her husband's. She knows the story of the accident, a story she first heard with polite newlywed sympathy, but the thought of which now, now especially, makes her blood go cold. There are nights when she has been woken up by her husband's muffled screams, times they have ridden the subway together and the rhythm of the wheels on the tracks makes him suddenly pensive, aloof.” (29)

Ashima's embracing female figure and maternal instincts develop as the reinvigorating thread between Ashoke's past and his present, a position contemplated and theorised extensively by postcolonial writers and theorists. For instance, Rita Christian and Judith Misrahi-Barak, in *India and the Diasporic Imagination*, explore the multiplicity of diasporas and argue, while “the notion of many Indias and many diasporas is clearly evident,” diasporas often excavate the connections to the homeland, “for most, to a large degree there is still, as Stuart Hall has argued, some kind of ‘umbilical connection to the homeland and home culture.’ (Hall, 1995:5)” (Christian et al.) They further locate the idea of belonging in transnational experiences arguing,

“Does the Indian in the diaspora feel any real sense of belonging? Salman Rushdie affirms that ‘having been borne across the world, we are translated men’ (Rushdie 1992: 17). ‘Translated’ yes, but one would argue still Indian in orientation and in essence, and this is evident through various aspects of culture such as food, dance, the cinema and music.” (Christian et al.,)

Christian and Misrahi-Barak examine domestic and biological connections to the homeland which continue to be associated with female figures. Much like the domestic space that sustain the idea of the homeland, Ashima is a purveyor of home amidst intransigent diasporic journeys that contribute to her displacement. Her presence at the kitchen table writing Christmas cards, replying to the letters to her parents offering “careful descriptions of her son, reporting the circumstances of his first smile, the day he first rolls over, his first squeal of delight.” (36) Or making ‘mincemeat croquettes’ for guests, is a dedicated re-creation of home that Lahiri interjects her narrative with. Ashima becomes a metaphor for the hybrid space of home – neither fully Indian nor fully American but carrying both the cultures. The Ganguly household, largely shaped by her rituals, food, and language, is a site of cultural negotiation. Her character illustrates that home is not tied to geography alone, but is an evolving space brought to life by love, loss, memory and resilience. In fact, for Sandhya Rao Mehta,

“While the choice of moving from one physical location to another is primarily seen to be a male one, [...] the onus of retaining memories of home, of recreating them within new contexts and ultimately acting as cultural harbingers of homeland culture,

remain vividly feminine. The challenges inherent within this contradictory situation is central to current discourses of the diaspora, reflecting as it does, the problematics of gendered roles within an act which remains outside the agency of women.”
(Mehta, 1)

Claiming her limited agency as a diasporic individual, while Ashoke is primarily absent from the domestic space, and her children Gogol and Sonia have grown into their lives, Ashima is a metaphor for the experiences of transplanted lives. Uprooted from one culture and placed in another, her loneliness, alienation and slow adjustment to life in the United States reflect the broader immigrant experience. Particularly as a first-generation immigrant she struggles with the loss of family and cultural contexts. However, she recreates the journeys back home through the process of writing. Letters hold her interaction with the homeland invoking a subtle idea of return,

“Letters arrive from her parents, from her husband’s parents, from aunts and uncles and cousins and friends, from everyone, it seems, but Ashima’s grandmother. The letters are filled with every possible blessing and good wish, composed in an alphabet they have seen all around them for most of their lives...” (36)

The letters – written, sent, and saved – form the emotional anchors and narrative threads of Ashima’s experience. They underscore her role as a metaphor for cultural continuity and quiet resistance against the erasure of her identity in the process of migration. By going through these letters and later saving them she creates a way to stay connected to

a life she left behind. The letters represent her effort to translate the foreignness of her new life into an intelligible form for both to her loved ones back home as well as to herself as a way to process her isolation. The long and detailed narration of her days is a way to comfort herself and sustain the illusion of closeness. Further, Ashima's personal repository of letters are a critical form of exchange that represents her idea of home – a solitary journey that she takes across borders where home is formed in epistolary fragments of love, loss and longing,

“She has saved her dead parents' letters on the top shelf of her closet, [...] She revisits their affection and concern, conveyed weekly, faithfully, across continents – all the bits of news that had had nothing to do with her life in Cambridge but which had sustained her in those days nevertheless.” (160)

Saving her parents' letters after their demise is a powerful gesture of emotional preservation. As she clings on to the handwriting, the paper and the words as remnants of their presence, these letters become the embodiment of a home that she can carry with her even when the physical home is lost. Lahiri's narrative is invested in Ashima's uneasiness at her dislocation. While her son Gogol's search for identity is outward and dramatic, Ashima's is inward and sustained by small acts like letter writing. For instance, one of the most vocal episodes in Gogol's search for identity occurs when he legally changes his name to Nikhil during his college years. This act is a symbol of rejection of his past and an attempted erasure of his roots. It also marks a conscious attempt to shed his inherited cultural baggage, an act that is constantly re-evaluated by Ashima's quiet

assertions through small gestures like cooking and letter writing. She also stands as a metaphor for the ways in which women in diaspora build their identities across borders through faithful acts of remembering. Always at a counterpoint to her son's visible turmoil, Ashima revisits and fiercely protects the very roots her second-generation children try to evade. Finally, for Lahiri, Ashima is in constant transition within her diasporic identity as she navigates motherhood and the translative possibilities of the English language and her mother tongue, Bengali, eventually building her relationship with the homeland.

The gender binaries that influence Ashoke and Ashima's individual diasporic experiences are abundantly clear in the beginning of *The Namesake* as a pregnant Ashima calls out to her husband "who is studying in the bedroom," (Lahiri, 2) without addressing him with his name. Lahiri's narrative portrays Ashima's transition between the role of a wife to that of a mother. Her proprietary as a wife, who holds the husband's name "intimate and, therefore unspoken. Cleverly patched over," (2) is shrouded by her body's transition with "a solid streak of brownish blood," (2) which beckons her to the changes and adaptations of motherhood. Importantly, Ashima's pregnancy and motherhood, central to her diasporic identity, is intertwined with food which builds connections with the rumination of home. For instance, Lahiri begins *The Namesake* with a glimpse at Ashima quite literally 'mixing' the flavours of home in her kitchen abroad,

"On a sticky August evening two weeks before her due date, Ashima Ganguly stands in the kitchen of a Central Square apartment, combining Rice Krispies and Planters peanuts and chopped red onion in a bowl. She adds salt, lemon juice, thin slices of

green chili pepper, wishing there was mustard oil to pour into the mix. Ashima has been consuming this concoction throughout her pregnancy, a humble approximation of the snack sold for pennies on Calcutta sidewalks and on railway platforms throughout India, spilling from newspaper cones.” (1)

Through Ashima’s desire for food from the Indian streets during her pregnancy, a fact that she culturally associates with her homeland where “women go home to their parents to give birth, away from husbands and in-laws and household cares, retreating briefly to childhood when the baby arrives,” (4) Lahiri introduces food as a metaphor of the memory of return, solace and recuperation. In fact, Anindya Raychaudhuri, in *Homemaking: Radical Nostalgia and the Construction of a South Asian Diaspora*, locates the sites where food is cooked and consumed as areas where memories are generated, almost manufactured, arguing,

“Like museums, grocery shops and restaurants both have this magical ability to conjure up the forgotten, the left behind. The ability to cook, serve, and eat the food of one’s home, the food of one’s memories, can be used to dream up a world where one can be accepted for who one is, in the valuing of one’s way of life as desirable, even though (or rather because) it deviates from hegemonic notions of mainstream and alternative, successful and unsuccessful, desirable and unwanted.” (Raychaudhuri, 78)

While Raychaudhuri situates grocery shops and restaurants as spaces where food conjures up a memory of home, the domestic, personal and creative relations of food are equally retained by diasporas. Jhumpa Lahiri imbibes a hybridity in Ashima's food, arising from the complexities of her immigrant identity. While globalisation and transnational interconnections have the ability to bring one's home-country closer through, film, media and migrating individuals,²⁰⁶ in Lahiri's narrative home remains a cooked up 'concoction,' a culmination of memories which continues to entangle the diasporic individual. Ashima, therefore, ends up translating the two worlds, Rice Krispies and Planters peanuts without mustard oil, where she remains eternally unclaimed. Additionally, Lahiri extends Ashima's ritualistic consumption of Rice Krispies during her pregnancy to an exploration of her diasporic identity,

“Though no longer pregnant, she continues, at times, to mix Rice Krispies and peanuts and onions in a bowl. For being a foreigner, Ashima is beginning to realize, is a sort of lifelong pregnancy – a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts. It is an ongoing responsibility, a parenthesis in what had once been ordinary life, only to discover that the previous life has vanished, replaced by something more complicated and demanding.” (49)

By relating Ashima's relationship with motherhood to her diasporic identity, Lahiri navigates a gendered portrayal of the migration and displacement. Sandhya Rao Mehta,

²⁰⁶ See Arjun Appadurai's book *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Page- 3,4)

in *Exploring Gender in the Literature of the Indian Diaspora*, navigates the contestations of gender in diasporic existence arguing,

“In its literary manifestations, the site within which the diasporic subject is placed has been extensively, but problematically, explored in ways that privilege the heterosexual male experience, silencing those outside its reach. As Sneja Gunew, for example, asks, “While diaspora often evokes a homeland, how do women writers assert, negotiate, and contest multiple, political ideas of home across time, history, and geography?” (8).” (Mehta, 1)

In Jhumpa Lahiri’s narrative motherhood transgresses geographical, cultural and generational borders and reimagines home intensified by the relations within the domestic space. For instance, Ashima’s journey into motherhood in Cambridge displaces her from the ‘normalcy’ of the cultural influences that supplement her idea of childbirth,

“Throughout the experience, in spite of her growing discomfort, she’d been astonished by her body’s ability to make life, exactly as her mother, grandmother and all her great-grandmothers had done. That it was happening so far from home, unmonitored and unobserved by those she loved, had made it more miraculous still.” (6)

Ashima’s idea of home is encapsulated by the women that came before her, wrought in the private yet collective experience of pregnancy. Her present position in the hospital,

removed from the solidarity fostered by this experience, localises her as a symbol of return, centring women as the curators of home and the biological producers of the nation. In fact, for Min Hyoung Song, “Pregnancy, normally, and normatively, inspires thoughts of generational continuation, a stitch of life experience that connects one woman to all the women before who have endured the same pain of making life in their wombs.” (Song, 351) Apparently, women emerge as symbols of continuity owing to the experience they share. It is this continuity that inspires the idea of home in Ashima – traced in the inter-generational relationships that constitute her narrative. For instance, the news of Ashima’s grandmother’s ill health navigates the memories of her leaving home, “Dida, I’m coming,” Ashima had said. For this was the phrase Bengalis always used in place of good-bye.” (37) Migration is central to her interaction with her grandmother who tells her to “Do what I will never do.” (38) Although, with Ashima’s migration, the domestic space, with its food and other cultural dimensions, interacts with the outside world, the aspirations of the women in her family form sequestered narratives of freedom that they have silently woven within the patriarchal constructions of home. Indrani Karmakar, in the essay, “Being a Foreigner...Is a Sort of Lifelong Pregnancy: Interrogating the Maternal and the Diasporic in Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake*,” argues,

“...most of the time Lahiri shows this homing instinct through Ashima’s yearning for her mother. Ashima, while preparing to console her mother for the impending death of Ashima’s ailing grandmother, dreads her own mother’s death: “[S]he can’t help but wonder who will console her the day her own mother dies” (Lahiri 2003, 44). It is the connection of three generations of women—grandmother, mother, daughter—

through which the narrative repeatedly invokes home in the imagination of the immigrant character.” (Karmakar, 52)

Lahiri, therefore, intricately weaves in a gendered idea of the nation as mothers across timelines reinscribe home with traditions, cultures, and shared experiences of their bodies in *The Namesake*. Interestingly, through Ashima, Lahiri destabilises the patriarchal notions of the land as mother that constitute nationalist narratives. In fact, highlighting the mother figure set as a backdrop of nationalist movements, Elleke Boehmer²⁰⁷ argues,

“...set in relation to the figure of her nationalist son, her ample, childbearing, fully representative maternal form typically takes on the status of metaphor. Cast as originator or progenitress, a role authorised by her national sons, she herself, however, is positioned outside the central script of national self emergence.” (Boehmer, 29)

In contrast, Lahiri’s narrative places the ‘childbearing’ and ‘maternal’ figure of the woman as a subject of self-narration. By remembering the traditions of pregnancy and childbirth throughout the narrative, Ashima develops her own routes towards home, holding the domestic space as a sanctified storehouse of her migrancy. Ashima, therefore, embodies the idea of return despite her solitary experience of pregnancy as she revisits the intimate

²⁰⁷ See Elleke Boehmer’s book *Stories of Women : Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation*.

maternal bond that she shares with women across generations. Further, Ashima's idea of home closely relates to the familiarity of her mother tongue. While Ashoke reads the *Boston Globe*, Ashima carries a "tattered copy of *Desh* magazine" (6) written in her mother tongue, Bengali, across continents. As *Desh* magazine provides Ashima with the physicality of a maternal connection on her journey away from the homeland, "The printed pages of Bengali type, slightly rough to the touch, are a perpetual comfort to her," (6) she realises that her immigrant identity is caught in the process of incessant translation. If English is a language Ashima is constantly discovering, Bengali's linguistic nuances and syntactical relations remain tied to her existing national identity. For instance, when asked whether she was expecting a boy or a girl, Ashima replies "As long as there are ten finger and ten toe" (7) because singular and plural verbs are not distinguished in Bengali, "a finger can also mean fingers, a toe toes." (7) Similarly, "motherhood in a foreign land" (6) is a translative experience for Ashima as she attempts to grasp the English terms that support her new venture. For instance, she is introduced to the word 'dilated' which is a term for "the unimaginable thing her body must do in order for the baby to pass." (3) As both motherhood and her immigrant identity are supplemented by new English words that she navigates, Ashima's constant search for cultural fixities is a prominent motif of return in the narrative. Her preparation for Gogol's rice ceremony "meant to introduce him to a lifetime of consumption," (40) and desire to visit home during Durga Pujo, commemorate the innumerable journeys that Ashima takes towards the homeland. As a continuing link between the Bengali ethnic and cultural relations and the Ganguly family's present diasporic existence, Ashima reinstates home through her hybrid and experimental incorporations of Bengali food and ceremonial rituals. She, therefore, develops the

repository of intricate cultural connections beyond national borders, through which the first, and second-generation immigrants in her family navigate the homeland left behind. However, Lahiri interrogates the stability of home in the diasporic consciousness by placing Ashima as a migrant, negotiating borders and their impermanence beyond nations. Therefore, Ashima Ganguly's journey in *The Namesake* ultimately becomes a profound metaphor for the act of translation: of language, self, culture, memory and belonging. In her letters to her parents, she translates an unfamiliar American life; In her home she translates Bengali traditions into a new context for her children; And in her silence she translates grief and longing for her dead parents into care for the family she has left. Ashima's life as a diasporic woman is an archive of translated meanings, shaped by distance yet rooted in national and cultural connections. Ashima, thus, embodies the quiet and powerful work of translation, carrying the memory of one world into another and crafting a home through small yet persistent acts of returning to the homeland by using the domestic space to weave the rhythms of her home in India into her life abroad.

Conclusion

Ashima, with a name that translates to 'boundless' in Bengali, is Lahiri's crucial interjection in the narrative that explores national and cultural mobility and rootlessness. In her journey navigating displacement and loss, Ashima's relentless search for her roots is enveloped by the overbearing acceptance of the multi-locationality of home. Her homes are 'scattered' between the country where she grew up and "the country in which she had grown to know and love her husband," (279) amidst a conundrum of 'own' and 'foreign,' national and transnational, and border and borderless, instigated by her decision,

“...to spend six months of her life in India, six months in the States. It is a solitary, somewhat premature version of the future she and her husband had planned when he was alive. [...] True to the meaning of her name, she will be without borders, without a home of her own, a resident everywhere and nowhere.” (275, 276)

Therefore, although Ashima resettles in the perpetuity of her border-less-ness, she is effectively positioned as a consistent reminder of the internalised sense of home that diasporas carry within them. Lahiri winds the idea of home around Ashima, the apparently boundless yet intrinsically rooted diasporic female identity, for whom home is “the world for which she is responsible, which she has created, which is everywhere around her...” (280) Thus, Ashima’s female body in *The Namesake*, not only becomes the upholder of the cultural ties that recreate home across borders but is also the embodiment of the domestic space which interacts with the larger expanse of the world. Positioning Ashima as a female figure that consistently engages with the conflicting realities of the diasporic home, Lahiri contributes to the existing debates of displacement in the late twentieth century. The idea of home intersects with the lived experiences of women, so much so that its ambiguity in terms of diasporic relations finds a fixed dimension and origin in the women that bear them. For instance, Ashima’s character highlights that women’s experiences of displacement are often shaped by caregiving roles and emotional labour. As she performs the unrecognised work of cultural preservation by raising two children between worlds while negotiating her own loss of language, kinship and identity, her journey underscores that displacement is experienced differently across gender lines.

While women are frequently tasked to sustain cultural continuity, Ashima's story redefines home as a flexible lived experience where she models belonging through memory, habit and relational ties instead of assimilation alone. Through Ashima, Lahiri contributes endurance, cultural translation and the continuities of return to the present-day debates on diasporas. Ashima is symbolic of what it means to be home in a world of movement.

Chapter 3.2

Fragmented Nations, Migrating Bodies: Reading Sai in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of*

Loss

Navigating Globalisation, Negotiating Nation

The final decades of the twentieth century witnessed burgeoning trends of globalisation²⁰⁸ that have expanded the horizons of cultural interactions. For instance, Eric Hobsbawn, in “The Nation and Globalization,” identifies ‘nation’ as a single and complete entity and positions it against the backdrop of global perspectives arguing,

“...a “nation,” however we define it, is by definition exclusive and particular. It is always recognizable by not being another nation. To this extent it is by definition not global. This is both objectively and subjectively so. From the national point of view, the “nation” is primary and qualitatively unique. From the global point of view, it is just one component among many others of the total system.” (Hobsbawn, 1)

As Hobsbawn navigates the contours of globalised world where nations exist as ‘subvarieties’ of a local culture, he is aware of the exchanges between national and global

²⁰⁸ See Douglas Kellner’s essay, “Theorizing Globalization,” where Kellner interrogates the position and trajectories of globalisation highlighting it as “...the continuation of modernization and a force of progress, increased wealth, freedom, democracy, and happiness,” (Kellner, 286) as well as the criticisms navigating, “...an undermining of democracy, a cultural homogenization, and increased destruction of natural species and the environment.” (Kellner, 286) Kellner’s conclusive arguments locate it as “inevitable and beyond human control and intervention, whereas other view it generating new conflicts and new spaces for struggle, distinguishing between globalization from above and globalization from below (Brecher, Costello, and Smith 2000).” (Kellner, 286) Also see Clara A.B Joseph’s, *Global Fissures: Postcolonial Fusions* (Page- 56) where the linkages of globalisation and postcolonialism are discussed.

orientations exemplified by larger corporations²⁰⁹ leaving the ideo of the nation restructuring. Further, Arjun Appadurai, in his book *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, locates deterritorialization in two distinct areas which include – media bringing the associations of home to migrant cultures, and migrants engaging with the essence of the home country. To cite an example for the former Appadurai locates vibrant visual and migratory mobilities of cultures exemplified in his observations on film and sport “which thrive on the need of the deterritorialized population for contact with its homeland,” (Appadurai, 38)

“Mira Nair’s film *Mississippi Masala*, for example, is an epic of diaspora and race redoubled, exploring how Indians transformed and displaced by race relations in Uganda deal with the intricacies of race in the American South, all the time retaining their sense of Indianness-in-motion. The viewing of cricket matches between India and Pakistan by migrants in the Gulf states from these countries (see chap. 5) is about the peculiarities of diasporic nationalism in an emergent Indian Ocean politics.” (Appadurai, 11)

Further, citing an example of the latter, Appadurai discusses the religious, political, or fantastical reimaginings of home by migrant cultures,

²⁰⁹ See Eric Hobsbawn’s essay, “The Nation and Globalization” where corporations like Macdonalds and Coca-Cola are highlighted as important examples for the interactions between the national and the global. While Macdonald’s carries the ‘particularities’ of a local food culture to global markets, Coca Cola’s global popularity “being uniform and adjusts to local differences, such as language, local culture, or, for that matter, local politics.” (Hobsbawn, 2)

“In the Hindu case, for example, it is clear that the overseas movement of Indians has been exploited by a variety of interests both within and outside India to create a complicated network of finances and religious identifications, by which the problem of cultural reproduction for Hindus abroad has become tied to the politics of Hindu fundamentalism at home. [...] The creation of Khalistan, an invented homeland of the deterritorialized Sikh population of England, Canada, and the United States, is one example of the bloody potential in such mediascapes as they inter act with the internal colonialisms of the nation-state.” (Appadurai, 38)

Theories of globalisation and transnational existence see a need to establish identities, cultures and territories past national borders. The emergent idea of ‘postnation,’ consequently, is employed in the context of globalisation, facilitating the movement towards a transnationally discursive platform of identity-creation. For instance, Arjun Appadurai, in the essay, “Patriotism and its Futures,” advocates the need to “think ourselves beyond the nation,” and discusses the developing form of the ‘postnation’ in association with the existing colonial nation-state as he explores the “relationship between the nation-state and its postnational others” in increasingly violent historical, temporal, and territorial productions of identity. Additionally, Partha Chatterjee’s counterargument to Appadurai’s ‘postnational’ thinking, in *Empire and Nation: Selected Essays*, discusses the transnational tendencies that question the imperial constructions of the nation and its reformation at the turn of the century arguing,

“...the nation-state, as a complex modern political form, is on its last legs ...Nation-states, as units in a complex interactive system, are not very likely to be the long-term arbiters of the relationship between globality and modernity’ (p. 19). With the nation-state having entered ‘a terminal crisis’, emergent ‘postnational’ forms of organization have moved into political spaces that were previously jealously guarded under claims of national sovereignty.” (Chatterjee, 166)

The idea of the nation remains cardinal to the reinforcements of globalisation. However, the transition towards a globalised world is not particularly smooth; overlaps of imperial hierarchies, dominant epistemologies and cultural inequalities constantly effect it as the grand narratives of the nation. James Petras and Henry Veltmeyer, in *Globalization Unmasked: Imperialism in the 21st Century*, attempt to establish the connections of imperialism developing in “imperialist centres and the newly colonized countries between the 16th and 19th centuries,” (Petras and Veltmeyer, 39) and the present forms of globalisation. Petras and Veltmeyer go on to argue,

“The significant continuities are found in the point of origin of globalization, in the advanced imperial countries (though the particular countries have changed) and in the unequal effects it has on the classes and nation-states in the imperial relations. Today, as in the past, major trade takes place via the giant European, Asian, and North American firms. Today, as in the past, the greater part of the profit is appropriated by the ruling classes linked through investments, trade, rents and interest payments.” (Petras and Veltmeyer, 39)

Establishing former imperial centres as the propagators of globalisation that often dissuade the equal relations of trade to colonised peripheries, James Petras and Henry Veltmeyer project the continuing colonial domination in the developing processes of globalisation which, Clara B Joseph affirms, “is a euphemistic respelling of imperialism.” (Joseph, 58) Importantly, while the territories are reconfigured in the political space of the nation over conflicts of identity, culture and recognition, the foundation of globalisation goes on to incorporate newer avenues of exploration in literary studies. For instance, Paul Jay, in *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies*, commenting on the effects of globalisation elucidated in “Language, Culture and Society,” as the “reshuffling [of] the cultural map of languages and literatures,” (Jay, 16) quotes Dorris Sommer’s argument,

“To listen to the world now is to wake up from a romantic enchantment whose spell cast human subjects into vessels of one language, made language seem almost identical to nation, and made nation practically indistinguishable from state. . . . But today, home means not a here but a there, somewhere else, a loss for migrant parents and a lack for the children...” (Jay, 16)

Placing globalisation in the growing contentions of home and identity which, Jay reinstates, “has broken the spell of the romantic enchantment one home, one nation, one language and one stable place...” (Jay, 16) he situates literary studies beyond their relation to the nation, arguing, “the national model for literary studies is the product of a

focus on literature produced in countries that have an empirical existence. [...] we make a choice to study literary texts and other cultural forms as national productions,” (Jay, 73) and explores spaces in which literatures and languages form affiliations and,

“...new, more contemporary engagement with transnational spaces, hybrid identities, and subjectivities grounded in differences related to race, class, gender, and sexual orientation, and the study of how culture and its practices are shaped and reshaped in border zones and liminal spaces that transgress the clear lines between states and the more fuzzy ones between nations.” (Jay, 17)

Interestingly, Paul Jay focusses on the spatial relations that have consistently governed the placement of literature. The emerging transnational forms, as Jay points out, have to “map relationships between the local and the global,” (Jay, 74) and, further quoting James Clifford, emphasizes on the need to “conjure with new localizations, like ‘the border’” specific places of hybridity and struggle, policing and transgression” (109)” (Jay, 74) Twentieth century diasporic writers hailing from the Indian subcontinent simultaneously place their narratives in the contemporaneity of global readership, and the growing ambiguities of cosmopolitanism.

India in Globality: Literary Efflorescence of the Twentieth Century

The internationalisation of Indian literary enterprises has been a prominent phenomenon throughout the twentieth century. For instance, Inderpal Grewal, in the essay “Amitav

Ghosh: Cosmopolitanisms, Literature and Transnationalisms,” as a part of Krishnaswamy and Hawley’s *The Postcolonial and The Global* argues,

“The circulation of texts, particularly novels, canonized by institutions such as the Nobel Prize across what came to be understood, within an emerging cosmopolitan discourse, as an “international” arena, enabled the production, in the second half of the twentieth century, of a new discourse of cosmopolitanism as a form of belonging that placed through the articulation of displacement; it understood its place in comparison with others.” (Krishnaswamy and Hawley, 181)

While adulations such as the Nobel Prize for literature and the Booker Prize²¹⁰ have relocated the literary traditions in India beyond its national borders harnessing its interactive potential,²¹¹ literatures produced in the vernacular languages in India have been denied such exposures. In fact, Graham Huggan’s book *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* highlights the various debates surrounding the position of literary productions in India. For instance, while Graham highlights Salman Rushdie’s assertion

²¹⁰ See Graham Huggan’s book, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*, where Huggan investigates Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* in the context of the Booker Prize as a metaphor of consumption in which the Indian English novel is susceptible to issues of accuracy, authenticity and the ‘universal’ access to western readership. Quoting Rushdie’s disdain for the judgement received by his novel “as some sort of inadequate reference book or encyclopaedia,” Huggan argues, “Rushdie cites the Booker Prize as an index of consumption, as a symbolic marker for the potentially deleterious effects of commercial success. For the prize, as prizes will, not only brought a wider audience to *Midnight’s Children*, turning the novel into the site of intensely mediated conflict...” (Rushdie, 71)

²¹¹ See Graham Huggan’s book, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (Page-59, 60)

that “literature, he stresses, ‘has little or nothing to do with a writer’s home address’ (Rushdie and West 1997:xv)” (Huggan, 65), he also places K. Satchidanandan’s argument stating, “Indian literature in English is ‘but a peripheral region of Indian literature’ ...” (Huggan, 64) As indicated by the abovementioned critics, the emergence of the Indian English novel was encapsulated by massive support of the western audience that were widely intrigued by the seemingly far-reaching potential of the English languages across nations. It is imperative to note that, Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, having catapulted Indian writing in English to the ‘West,’ knowingly consumed the disparities in postcolonial migrations and the internal conflicts arising in the wave of cosmopolitanism. Daniela Rogobete, in the essay, “Global versus Glocal Dimensions of the Post-1981 Indian English Novel,” rightly positions the post-1981 production of the Indian English novel as the “the search for a new novelistic idiom that would ‘engulf multitudes,’ redefine national identities and map out cultural, political and linguistic spaces.” (Rogobete, 17) However, at the turn of the twentieth century writers like Amitav Ghosh and Jhumpa Lahiri, and later, Kiran Desai, to name a few have frequently explored the contemporary struggles of space and identity in the context of globalisation. Indian diaspora literature engaged with the global forms of migration, mobility, border-crossing and connectivity that developed at the end of the twentieth century. These writers have effectively engaged with the idea of the nation without overlooking the discrepancies of border construction, nationalism and migration that prefigured and continued to distinctively define the Indian subcontinent. Additionally, they contributed to growing cosmopolitanism and global readership, consistently existing in the hybridity and multiplicity of locations.

Locating Kiran Desai: Nation and Identity in a Transcultural Frame

Kiran Desai, a popular diaspora writer whose literary works engage with the India as a nation replete with cosmopolitan influences, is often reflective of her own diasporic position in literature. As a writer who inherited her mother, Anita Desai's, ambiguities around identity²¹² which were later intensified by her own migrant position,²¹³ Desai explores the blurring lines between 'inside' and 'outside', 'home' and 'abroad' as well as 'national' and 'global'. In fact, in Desai's narratives, spaces are tied to the character arcs developed in her novels. For instance, in *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, the guava tree, initially solace and refuge, ultimately forms a narrative segment that shapes Sampath Chawla, the protagonist's, character. Further, in *Inheritance of Loss*, Desai establishes India's northeastern borders, England and New York producing "a topography that has many centres and binds various small worlds into uneven relationships of exchange" (Baumbach and Birgit, 229) which link all the characters in the novel in an interaction across local and global terrains. Additionally, the larger spaces that diaspora writers confront are the intimacies of home and ongoing transnational migrations. Sonali Das, in *National Identity and Cultural Representation in the Novels of Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai*, asserts that "These writers always have in their mind a double-audience – one at home (in India) and another abroad. This is why India as a nation will continue to fascinate them for assuming an identity in the world." (Das, 61) However, Desai addresses fragmented identities and fissured relationships within the internal and

²¹² See Maggie Gee's conversation with Anita Desai in "Anita and Kiran Desai in Conversation: Writing Across the Generations."

²¹³ See Sonali Das's book *National Identity and Cultural Representation in the Novels of Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai* (Page- 59)

transnational borders of the nation amidst these newfound interactions on a global scale. She traces contemporary migrants by drawing “difficult lines” (Gee, 35) across colonial pasts and postcolonial futures where migrations resituate the dissonances and conflicts that constantly make and remake national borders.

Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss* is perched on the process of globalisation defined by the convulsion of the Indian nation into contestations of mobility and cross-cultural interaction. Defining ‘contemporary globalisation’ by a “*simultaneous* acceleration of globalization and nationalism,” (Jay, 119) Paul Jay situates Desai’s narrative in the “linked relationship between the history of ethnic/nationalist conflicts and the forces of globalisation.” (Jay, 119) The changing trends of globalisation and the increasing movement of people towards Western nations have often side-lined disparities in terms of race, class, gender, culture and ethnicity. It is such differences that Kiran Desai addresses in *The Inheritance of Loss*. In fact, Oana Sabo, in the essay “Disjunctures and diaspora in Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss*,” rightly argues,

“Kiran Desai extends this model of diaspora by exploring the material conditions that have given rise to transnational flows of people as well as the ways in which diasporic identities are lived and experienced in the context of global capitalism. In contrast to studies of diasporic subjects that tend to celebrate their mobility and hybrid cultural identity, Desai attempts to re-politicize the genre of South Asian diasporic narratives through a renewed attention to topical themes and narrative form.” (Sabo, 376)

Further, Desai navigates the internal as well as external borders of postcolonial India by tracing the narrative along New York, Kalimpong and the extensions of its northern borders. The narrative explores fragmented national and transnational interactions as well as fissured landmasses that increasingly contribute to the contestations of diasporic and migrant identities. Interestingly, while Desai's narrative oscillates between the minoritarian cultures on a national and global scale and in the larger discourses of transnational migration, it inculcates a distinctive idea of homecoming and return that is intensified by the physical and metaphysical aspects of the domestic space. Reading Sai in the context of India's postcolonial condition where cross-border migrations and cross-cultural interactions were promulgated, this section of the chapter navigates routes of diasporic imaginary return and the fluidity of the idea of home where migrant identities attempt to be culturally rooted. Further, critically analysing Sai as the metaphorical idea of home that transcends generational, cultural and national borders, it explores the difference between masculine and feminine cosmopolitanisms.

Textual Analysis

In *The Inheritance of Loss*, Kiran Desai traces national and transnational movements and overlapping narratives that effectively contribute to postcolonial nation-building and home-making. Desai's narrative encapsulates the tensions of mobility and migrancy in its three male characters that cross national and transnational borders. For instance, forced to leave his roots in Kalimpong and embark on a journey to the metropolis of The United States of America, Biju navigates the deeper, hidden and often unsolicited recesses of contemporary globalisation and cosmopolitanism. In fact, commenting on cosmopolitan

attitudes, Emily Jackson, in the essay, “Globalization, Diaspora and Cosmopolitanism in Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss*,” quotes Gikandi stating “the growth of elite diasporas has been accompanied by mass migration of the poor into the West, (29)” (Jackson, 33) and attempts to develop an inclusive understanding of cosmopolitanism along the struggles of class and culture. Further, Jackson locates Gikandi’s idea of cosmopolitanism on the lines of privilege and argues,

“Gikandi sees cosmopolitanism as “a state of mind and an aesthetic practice, a cultivated sensibility that underscores one’s detachment from the local and ethnic and a willingness to engage with the Other” (32). However, he argues that “[t]he cosmopolitans’ engagement with the Other is enabled by their own privileged position within global culture.” (Jackson, 34)

While Jackson outlines the aspect of elitism that has remained central to the formation of cosmopolitan attitudes, she argues that “globalization does not necessarily lead to cosmopolitanism” (Jackson, 34) For Jackson the contemporary effects of globalisation have not necessarily led to an increased intermingling of cultures. Instead, she examines globalisation and cosmopolitanism in terms of the expanding global apertures and the growing need for cheaper labour across nations²¹⁴ and argues, “many migrants and

²¹⁴ See Emily Jackson’s essay, “Globalization, Diaspora and Cosmopolitanism in Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss*,” where Jackson quotes from Liam Connell and Nick Marsh stating, “Despite the narratives of globalization that emphasize the opening of international borders, the recent history of labour migration has actually seen a hardening of national borders, the raising of physical boundaries and a growing reliance upon illegalized migrants as sources of cheap labour. (150–51)” (Jackson, 33)

refugees become cosmopolitan without becoming elite, and many people who have never travelled live in a world in which cultural and linguistic diversity is omnipresent.” (Jackson, 34) Desai introduces Biju as a “fugitive on the run – no papers,” (Desai, 3) who is perpetually dislocated and falls through the cracks of the grandeur of inter-national exchange. Working in an array of kitchens like Don Pollo, The Hot Tomato and Ali Baba’s Fried Chicken, (22) that harbour a world of immigrants like him, Biju constantly questions his cultural roots. For instance, despite his accumulation as a ‘new’ Indian immigrant into the cosmopolitan metropolis, he carries with him traces of the ‘old’ “Desis against Pakis” (23) war. Additionally, deepening such racial cultural barriers that seemed to be ingrained in Biju’s identity, he contemplates it in the lines,

“Saeed was kind and he was not Paki. Therefore he was OK?

The cow was not an Indian cow; therefore it was not holy?

Therefore he liked Muslims and hated only Pakis?

Therefore he liked Saeed, but hated the general lot of Muslims?” (76)

Alongside Biju’s cosmopolitanism, Desai traces the roots of globalisation in Jemubhai’s voyage to London and his apparent alienation from his national and cultural identity in the process. Coming to terms with the ostracization of his identity and culture, Jemubhai develop a sense of self-loathing for the ‘otherness’ imposed on him by the English culture in the form of phrases like “Phew, he stinks of curry!” (39) and grows into an Anglophile who detached from his country. Carrying a powder puff to lighten his skin and eating with a fork and knife upon his return, Jemubhai appears to be on a constant journey away

from himself, a perpetual foreigner. In fact, Paul Jay, in *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies*, connects such individual aspects of cultural mobility in the narrative and argues,

“The link between each of these stories is the old literary motif of the journey, but updated to focus on a critical topic for globalization studies— mobility. This focus on mobility is launched with the story of Biju’s journey to the United States, which Desai then connects to the judge’s earlier journey by sea from India to Oxford to study law. In linking these two stories the judge’s Englishness, born of colonialism, is connected to the pressure to westernize under globalization that Biju experiences in New York; the focus on mobility features the kinds of crises related to personal and cultural identity that come with the increasing mobility of populations as globalization accelerates.” (Jay, 124-125)

As Jay examines the trope of mobility connecting Biju and Jemubhai who were both swayed by westernisation, it is evident that the two male characters engage with a strong sense of displacement. Gyan, on the other hand, is entangled in two distinct instances of oppression – colonial and postcolonial India – owing to which his socio-political identity remains fragmented. As Gyan dives into his family history discovering that “In the 1800s his ancestors had left their village in Nepal and arrived in Darjeeling, lured by promises of work on tea plantations.” (141) and his great-grandfather had, eventually, “swore allegiance to the Crown,” (141) his identity was deeply fractured by centuries of investments in the colonial rule. Further, Gyan is succumbed by the ‘climax’ of colonial

history in India and the rampant exclusion of the Nepalis of India from freedom in 1947 and their demands of “Gorkhaland, in blood.” (159) Gyan’s introduction to globalisation is, unlike Jemubhai’s and Biju’s, in the process of navigating the shifting borders of postcolonial India. Amidst stirring nationalist histories of India, Nepal and Bhutan, Kalimpong stands out as the focal point of a ‘messy map’ where “India blurred into Bhutan and Sikkim,” (9) and Gyan ‘floats’ affirming the borders of land, masculinity and national and cultural affiliation. The three male characters, separated by their individual struggles, remain interconnected in terms of their relationship with the shifts of globalisation. However, while Paul Jay argues that the all the characters in Desai’s narrative have a “literal or figurative relationship with Biju,” (Jay,124) I would argue that Sai’s presence develops into a quintessential narrative of home and imaginative return for the three dislocated male characters. Her personal journeys intermingle with Biju’s diasporic existence, Jemubhai’s racial and cultural dislocation and Gyan’s displaced identity, so much so, that she emerges as the metaphor of the home/land they long for in their respective ways.

Biju’s narrative of diasporic dislocation begins in the kitchens under the globalised metropolis of New York where he encounters his identity as a South Asian diaspora. As he meets men from Guyana, Trinidad, Madagascar, Chile, Kenya and Canada to name a few, Desai intersects the domestic space of the kitchen with the larger expanse of the world. However, residing in the global influx of cosmopolitan identities to the West, Biju’s life as an illegal immigrant is engrossed by the desire for home. In fact, Oana Sabo, in “Disjunctures and diaspora in Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss*” rightly points out,

“As a broken journey, immigration [...] requires a mode of narration that vacillates between visions of the wholeness of home and the fragmentation of immigrant subjects and diasporic communities in the hostland.” (Sabo, 381) Sai’s perpetually domestic life between the kitchen and the verandah of her grandfather’s house in Kalimpong repeatedly interjects Biju’s narrative. Thus, emerging as a steady dialogue. Paul Jay rightly argues, “Throughout the novel the reader moves back and forth between Sai’s point of view and Biju’s in a way that sets up a complex dialogue between the two character’s experiences.” (Jay, 124) For instance, while Biju seeks the nostalgic comfort and earthiness of the memories of his village through “Fresh roti, fresh butter, fresh milk still warm from the buffalo...” (103) Sai is exposed to “*Angrezi khana*,” or “English food,” inspired by the cook’s rendition of what he thought Biju cooked in his restaurants, using humble Indian ingredients including “tuna fish souffle and *khari* biscuit pie.” (17) Further, while Biju reminisces his journey away from home through the “sack of basmati rice that had come all the way from Dehra Dun,” (191) Sai’s inherently inquisitive nature instils in her a desire for travel and exploration. In fact, the story of a giant squid engaging with “a solitude so profound they might never encounter another of their tribe,” (2) highlights Sai’s own position in the context of globalisation and cosmopolitanism. Exposed to the perils of globalisation early in her life, Sai grew up in a convent writing her parents in the Soviet Union letters which lacked the “emotional immediacy of their existence.” (28) Thus, her solitude was mirrored in the squid’s loss of a tribe or a family, utterly disengaged from the world beyond borders. Further, Angelia Poon, in the essay, “(In)visible scripts, hidden costs: Narrating the postcolonial globe in Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss*,” discusses the unequal access to the changing trends of globalisation through the figure

of the squid which “captures perfectly the idea of unregarded and invisible lives lived in concert with more public and historic scripts.” (Poon, 548) She goes on to argue that identity in a developing postcolonial and globalised world “is represented as being about finding a script – or, in many cases, being born into a script – coupled with the realization that not all scripts are equivalent in an uneven world.” (Poon, 548) Poon’s argument explores the broader theme of displacement across national borders. As Sai reflects on the squid’s giant form, “the melancholy of this situation washes over her” (4) revealing the depth of her own isolation. Raised in a predominantly westernised household and living in the remote Himalayan foothills, Sai neither fully belongs to the colonial legacy she inherited from Jemubhai nor is accustomed to the local, postcolonial realities around her. The squid’s solitary existence becomes a metaphor for the dualities in her identity. Additionally, it is symbolic of the psychological dimensions of contemporary migration, where individuals often find themselves disconnected from any singular identity or community. Sai’s afterthought to the squid in the National Geographic article, “could fulfilment ever be felt as deeply as loss?” (5) further underscores how deeply solitude, longing and fractured belonging shape migrant, diasporic and transnational conditions in an increasingly globalised world. Thus, the squid is a haunting emblem of the emotional exile that accompanies processes of dislocation. It captures the silent, often invisible loneliness at the heart of modern migration. However, Sai is significantly distanced from the squid; the processes of migration are profoundly gendered, and her narrative is uneasy, unsettled and, often, unread amongst all the narratives of migration in the novel. Sai’s journey and transnational understanding is unfairly and unevenly juxtaposed over the male migrants in the novel, often dissociating her from diaspora discourse.

While both Biju and Sai are subject to the inequalities of a demanding globalised and cosmopolitan world, Biju explores other diasporic and migrant identities in the world, his tribe beneath the affluent city of New York whereas Sai utilises the defining presence of her domestic space to mould her desire for travel. For instance, setting up the “free *National Geographic* Inflatable Globe” with the cook and tracing its “glorious orb” for Biju and New York, Sai measures her distance from the momentous period of globalisation. Further, as she uses the doughballs in the kitchen to make the map of India, her position on the contested national borders of Kalimpong and the turbulent times of postcolonial India is intensified. In fact, Angelia Poon examines Sai’s engagement with the globe²¹⁵ and argues, “It is this realization of her place vis-à-vis the world – that hers is one narrative among many – that the novel mobilizes as its telos and [...] marshals as part of a larger comment on and critique of a postcolonial, globalizing world.” (Poon, 547-548) However, while Sai develops as a critique of globalisation, her position in the domestic space remains a narrative that is solely hers. Devoid of global and cosmopolitan interactions across national borders like that of Biju, Sai is moulded into the narrative of the postcolonial nation through the vital structure of the home where national borders, transnational narratives and cross-cultural interactions simultaneously merge. Biju and Sai lead parallel lives despite the intricate links between their public and private lives which are most prominent when Biju returns to Kalimpong and Sai sees “two figures leaping at each other as the gate opens.” (324) The actuality of Biju’s return locates Sai

²¹⁵ See Angelia Poon’s essay, “(In)visible Scripts, Hidden Costs: Narrating the Postcolonial Globe in Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss*.”

as the embodiment of the corporeal reality of home in the narrative, beckoning the migrants back to their origins while nursing a desire to escape her surroundings and travel.

While, for Biju, Sai developed a dialectical relationship in the narrative that explored fragmentations of identity and home, Jemubhai saw Sai's arrival as a jolt into his past, "his own journeys, his own arrivals and departures..." (35) Sai carries a trunk as well as an Anglophilia (Jay, 127) like that of her grandfather. In fact, Jemubhai himself traces similarities with his granddaughter in the lines,

Sai, it had turned out, was more his kin than he had thought imaginable. There was something familiar about her; she had the same accent and manners. [...] The journey he had started so long ago had continued in his descendants." (210)

Importantly, Sai was not only a bearer of Jemubhai's journeys but also his distorted national, cultural and masculine identity. Jemubhai, as a "foreigner in his own country" (29) and his own body is consistently conscious of himself. Suspended both in colonial history and in the identity politics of Kalimpong, Jemubhai was significantly 'othered' due to his anglicised and upper-class presence. Sai was also subjected to such kind of segregation especially at the hands of Gyan's nationalism,

“She who could speak no language but English and pidgin Hindi, [...] She could not eat with her hands, could not squat down on the ground on her haunches to wait for a bus; who had never been to a temple but for architectural interest...” (176)

Further, in an attempt to hide the remnants of his cultural identity on his skin, Jemubhai carried a powder puff with him. Angelia Poon, in the essay ““(In)visible scripts, hidden costs: Narrating the postcolonial globe in Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss*,” defines as the “overdetermined symbol of his desire for whiteness which his extended Indian family comically struggles and fails to see as anything else but evidence of his effeminacy.” (Poon, 551) This struggle with his masculinity had prompted the judge to inflict pain on his wife, Nimi, who is later abandoned and concealed in history. In *The Inheritance of Loss*, Through Nimi, Desai recreates journeys across borders and explores the fragments, fissures and splits of identity that are often initially lost but are not beyond recollection. She is introduced as a young, spirited, naïve bride who is chosen for Jemubhai. Shaped by his experiences of humiliation and racial inferiority, Jemubhai transfers his internalised self-loathing onto her. Nimi’s fate is particularly chilling as after repeated abuse she is sent away. Her presence as a woman who also endured the pitfalls of colonial domination through her husband’s insecurities as the colonial ‘other’ was remembered upon Sai’s arrival. Sai senses the silence around her, a reminder of the ways in which patriarchal and colonial structures work in tandem to suppress women’s voices. While in Angelia Poon’s words, “Nimi’s invisible narrative is part of the legacy of loss bequeathed to Sai as the latter grows up not knowing anything about her grandmother,” (Poon, 552) Sai engenders the strong and supportive structure of a home

that holds on to the voiceless female figures who have buttressed the postcolonial nation. However, Nimi's absence in the narrative is deeply evocative in itself. Her suffering encapsulates the personal costs of colonialism that women bear and whose stories remain buried beneath the weight of history. Further, Nimi's body, violated by her husband's aggression and insecurities, is a constant reminder of the domestic space holding on to the silent histories of women, obliquely reflecting on Sai's inability to leave its confines. For instance, Sai's yearning for the "farther she did not know, [...] for something beyond the ordinary." (69) and need to preserve her beauty in a "place whose time had already past," (74) is a poignant reminder of the fact that she is forever distant from the globalising world. Therefore, while the domestic space in Desai's narrative recreates homecoming journeys for Biju and Jemubhai, it encumbers the women in its fixities.

The nationalist threads that contribute to the formation of postcolonial India are explored, in Desai's narrative, as a part of the shifting borders of northern India. Gyan's character explores the dualities of his identity in the context of the developing postcolonial nation. While generations of his family served in the British Army during colonial rule and were raised amidst reverberating nationalist sentiments, Gyan finds his footing in the Gorkha National Liberation Front where he decides to fight for equal rights for the Nepalis of India. Interestingly, in public places like markets Gyan visualises "history being wrought," (157) and is quick to contrast it with "his tea parties with Sai on the verandah." (161) In fact, he refers to his surrounding of protests and struggles as a 'masculine environment' against which Sai emerges as a naïve perpetrator of westernisation and an outsider to the

widening chasm of economic disparity. In a pivotal scene Desai examines the idea of home in the tempestuous times of political contestation through Sai. As she explores Gyan's house which appeared to camouflage with its unflinchingly real surroundings,

“...the house slipping back, not into the picturesque poverty that tourists liked to photograph but into something truly dismal – modernity proffered in its meanest form, brand new one day, in ruin the next.” (256)

Gyan's house symbolises the undulating historical and political structures that have constantly governed his understanding of Sai, whose livelihood Gyan held as a contemptuous reminder of his struggle for equality. Desai, therefore, recreates home as a fluid and traversing space that is well affected by the historical and political dissonances in the society. While Gyan and Sai's love emerged in the clandestine and domestic space of home, their differences were also strikingly clear over the socio-political discrepancies of the idea of home. In fact, Aparajita Sagar, in “Homes and Postcoloniality,” comments on the idea of home as in amalgamation of private and public spaces,

“With home and the outside so readily exchanging positions, each site can potentially borrow from the disciplinary regimes of the other, its systems of coercion and blandishment, punishment and reward. Both home and the outside, then, are categories that are mutually constitutive and contingent, lacking a content that can be fixed or known in advance of their manipulation in a specific discourse.” (Sagar, 237)

It is in Sagar's expanded idea of home that Sai can be precariously situated. Interlinking Biju's diasporic journey, Jemubhai's colonial migration and Gyan's contested national identity to the vicissitudes of home, Sai metamorphoses as a figure of refuge and memory-making. She is moulded into distinct ideas of home by the three mobile masculine identities in the narrative – Jemubhai's reservoir of the past, Gyan's desire for equal opportunities in the postcolonial present and Biju's imaginative journey of return. Sai, therefore, becomes symbolic of the tensions between belonging and alienation, modernity and tradition and rootedness and displacement. She witnesses the fractures of these migrating identities and bears them silently. Finally, Sai does not find a resolution or restitution herself, and it is this lack of a stable place to belong, the ambiguity around a physical home that makes her a figure of home. She embodies the fragility of home in a postcolonial world. Through Sai, Desai offers a deeply moving portrait of home as a continuously negotiated space of loss and becoming.

Conclusion:

In Kiran Desai's *Inheritance of Loss*, home is subjected to an entanglement of colonial histories, cross-cultural movements and territorial changes making it recuperate conflicts across borders. Her narrative does not dwell on the destabilisation of home and identity due to contemporary migrations. Rather she, ironically, places home as a metaphor for the transitions that happen around it. For instance, in the very first chapter Desai presents Jemubhai's home 'Cho Oyu' in Kalimpong and describes the piercing of the Gorkhaland narrative into its anglicised setting. Three boys torturing Jemubhai to say "Jai Gorkha"

inside his living room responds to the unsettled issues of border-making and border-crossing outside of it. The “messy map” (9) of India with “Darjeeling stolen from here, Kalimpong plucked from there” (9) is not only first encountered within the interiorities of home but also juxtaposed by the need to establish one. The desire to find spaces of refuge is prevalent all through *Cho Oyu* where men like the cook make a room in a corner of the kitchen and Jemubhai finds solace in the regularities of biscuits, tea and his pet dog, Mutt. This is also the space where Sai’s attempts to forge intimacy with Gyan collapses, making it both a shelter and a ruin for her. However, *Cho Oyu* stands as one of the central metaphors of impermanence and instability the novel: Its decaying, disrepair and disuse is not contrasted with the lives of other migrating figures, rather it is used to suggest that emerging forms of home – Biju’s life in restaurants, apartments and storage spaces and Gyan’s issues around the reclamation of a homeland – are equally unstable in the modern world. It is Sai’s presence in the domestic space that ultimately connects the narratives of globalisation and cosmopolitanism. She emerges as a solace from racial and cultural barriers as well as transnational discord, offering the travelling men a fixed point that they can return to. Home is effectively intertwined in masculine aspirations of global interaction in Desai’s narrative. Biju’s determination to receive a Green Card that channelises his return, Jemubhai’s homecoming with a colonial baggage of self-loathing, and Gyan’s occasional retreat into domestic spaces with Sai from the epochal histories of nation-building accentuate the presence of home within the consistency of mobility and transition. Migrants often carry the image of a stable, remembered home – one they hope to return to or rebuild elsewhere. Homes, however, are haunted by history, marred by disconnection or rendered unreachable by political or economic factors. Through her male

characters, Desai portrays home as something always contested. *The Inheritance of Loss*, therefore, reinstates home as an unstable and ambiguous space, grappling with the challenges of cross-border interactions, where all that is left is the need to cultivate a sense of rootedness in an increasingly discordant world. Sai's presence within the interiorities of home, isolated from the crevices and fissures of dislocated nations and identities, propagates this anchorage of home. While Sai's desire to travel herself is expounded in the narrative, the three dislocated men, with their separate diasporic experiences, negotiate their process of identity-creation with the relationships they built with her. Sai's narrative is an interjection, an intricately woven narration in the vastness of global interaction wrapped with a fear of falling through the cracks like that of her grandmother's. However, as a prominent female figure, Sai is an essential reminder of borders, boundaries and home in the disorientations of globalisation. However, what separates Sai from the other male characters is the aspirations that enable them to cross borders. Biju and Jemubhai are the prime examples of this. While Jemubhai is sent abroad for better education prospects, Biju is sent as a worker migrant to help his family gather out economically. No such aspiration is associated with Sai. Living in Cho Oyu but emotionally adrift, Sai represents the psychological dimensions of home. For her the house is less a sanctuary than a space devoid of the same ambitions that the male characters in the novel are encouraged to have. Her presence is deeply rooted in the idea of a home that holds the memory of a violent patriarch, a disconnected lineage and an enforced isolation from the political tumult and transnational interactions developing outside of it.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Reconfiguring Women in Transnational Spaces: Looking Ahead in English Literatures of the Indian Subcontinent

The major thrust of this research is the portrayal of women characters in late twentieth century Indian diaspora literature amidst changing trends of mobility and migration. Migration, including voluntary or involuntary border-crossing, is an important form of spatial relocation that, having displaced countless people from their origin and their native lands, developed hybrid forms of locations, cultures and identities. Additionally, it generated newfound national frontiers, promoted and reimagined the spatial, territorial and locational limits of home. It is within the simultaneous negotiation of authenticity and hybridity associated with the idea of home that my research situates the late twentieth century literatures of the post-Rushdie period – largely identified by the period after the publication and acclaim of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. As a timeline that was fuelled by writers from India whose narratives dissuade the grandeur of nationalism, it prominently engaged with the human condition of 'migrancy' where deeply fissured migrant identities was scrutinised and analysed for their celebratory and apparently global existence. The traumatic historical associations with migration, therefore, developed into a dialogue with the world at large where migrant and displaced identities were inherently translational, travelling across linguistic, cultural, social, political and national boundaries. Expatriate and immigrant writers confronted their dissociation from their homeland with literary trends that gained global popularity which, in more ways than one, struggled to put forward the actual experience and suffering of displacement. Further, while, Indian diaspora writers navigated displacement, alienation and other strenuous relationships

with the nation, they attempted to situate the literary interventions in global platforms where their voices blurred the boundaries of the nation. The national and the global, therefore, develop as individual yet interconnected areas which continue to influence the position of literatures in English.

My extensive study on twentieth century English Literatures of the Indian subcontinent, exploring aspects such as placement/displacement, negotiate intersections of national/global, homeliness/worldliness and territoriality/alienation, offering a rich lens through which to explore women character arcs in literature. Home, associated with fixity, anchorage and origination, and women characters entrusted with the custodianship of national and cultural linkages, remained contested amidst ongoing migrations and diasporic resettlements. The writers of the relevant period, whose works are integral to my research and exploration, including Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Jhumpa Lahiri and Kiran Desai, have been a part of noteworthy literary trends. They promote a thorough evaluation of the challenges of diasporic existence as borders are questioned and nations are reconstructed. Adding to the intersection of gender in Indian diaspora literature, my research situates women characters in the context of twentieth century postcolonial mobility and the turn of globalisation. I have argued that it continues to be located within the realms of history, to be narrated; a home, to be imagined; and a body, to “encapsulate tradition and culture.”²¹⁶ Exploring the idea that women characters are enmeshed within broad categories of home

²¹⁶ See Susan Stanford Friedman’s essay, “Bodies on the Move: A Poetics of Home and Diaspora.”

and its changing relations with the nation or homeland, the bodily identity, and diasporic journeys, my research areas and drawn conclusions argue that female characters in English literatures of the Indian subcontinent cross various physical, emotional as well as cultural boundaries in literary interventions in an attempt to subvert the existing national and cultural boundaries. They, however, continue to be read as fierce purveyors of home and woven into narratives of the home/land, the body and hopes of return.

Female figures have not remained understudied in the context of the Indian diaspora. Writers and theorists like Sandhya Rao Mehta,²¹⁷ Ruvani Ranasinha,²¹⁸ Amba Pande,²¹⁹ Yasmin Hussain²²⁰ and Sissy Helf,²²¹ to name a few, have researched extensively on women in the Indian diaspora and added to an exhaustive list of critical interpretations to the intersection of gender in Indian diaspora literature. However, it is imperative to note that the abovementioned theoretical interventions have largely situated the Indian diasporic female writer in the context of nation, migration and home in contemporary, essentially twentieth century, literature of the South Asian diaspora. While such an intervention enhances the study of diaspora relations and explores the uneven forces and power structures that have failed to harness the potential of female writers, the portrayal of literary female characters spanning the period (twentieth century) of literary

²¹⁷ See Sandhya Rao Mehta's book *Exploring Gender in the Literature of the Indian Diaspora*.

²¹⁸ See Ruvani Ranasinha's book *Contemporary Diasporic South Asian Women's Fiction Gender, Narration and Globalisation*.

²¹⁹ See Amba Pande's book *Women in the Indian Diaspora Historical Narratives and Contemporary Challenges*.

²²⁰ See Yasmin Hussain's book *Writing Diaspora South Asian Women, Culture and Ethnicity*.

²²¹ See Sissy Helf's book *Unreliable Truths: Transcultural Homeworlds in Indian Women's Fiction of the Diaspora*.

interventions, inclusive of all writers, calls for scrutiny and theorisation in present-day migration and postcolonial literatures. My research, therefore, diversifies the study of the Indian diaspora through its literary productions as its engagement with postcolonial mobilities, cultural transitions, regional translations, globality of literary platforms and the intricacies of home, roots and origin highlight the emerging diaspora women in contemporary writings. Additionally, diaspora relations are changing as national terrains continue to expand, creating more space as well as ambiguities for literary and cultural production. The contentions of (dis)location and (dis)placement associated with female characters that have been developed in my study can be extrapolated to incorporate the expanding potential for migration. Climate migrants, worker migrants, refugees and other kinds of people seeking refuge outside of national borders create an interesting interplay between transnational literatures and their inherent translative potential. My research ideas form critical engagements with such dispersals and arrivals within and beyond the idea of home. Benjamin's *The Goat Life*, Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* and Amitav Ghosh's *Hungry Tide* are some examples where migrations are intricately woven with translations of identities, cultures, homes and their meanings. In these three texts migration emerges as a human condition; It is shaped by fluidity, precarity and layered forms of displacement that increasingly define the twenty-first century. These novels resist traditional narratives of linear, hopeful migration, and instead present altered geographies of movement shaped by conflict, exploitation and climate change. For instance, the magical doors in *Exit West* symbolise a new kind of disembodied migration, collapsing space and time while revealing the psychic fragmentation of refugees who exist in states of continual transition. In *The Goat Life* Benjamin creates a narrative of forced labour under the Gulf's

kafala system. He exposes a darker underbelly of migration – one in which the promise of mobility is undone by captivity, servitude and the erasure of dignity. Meanwhile Ghosh's exploration of the Sundarbans in *The Hungry Tide* offers a powerful meditation on ecological displacement, where climate change, state violence and caste intersect to render entire communities disposable in the name of conservation and development. Ghosh's work also marks a pivotal moment in climate fictions emerging from the Indian subcontinent. The field has since grown to include novels like Anuradh Roy's *All the Lives We Never Lived*, where ecological and wartime dislocations intertwine; and Kanishk Tharoor's *Swimmer Among the Stars* which includes speculative and allegorical narratives that deal directly with the loss of languages, cultures and geographies in the face of climate change. Together these works navigate ecological destruction and migration tracing the ways in which land loss, climate instability and environmental policies create new routes and ruptures in the process of displacement. While these novels, amongst others, provide a crucial insight to the emerging forms of migration – transnational, indentured and climate induced – they also expose a significant silence: the figure of the female migrant is either peripheral or absent altogether. In foregrounding the male protagonists whose suffering and resilience dominate the narrative space, these texts inadvertently replicate the broader tendency within migration to obscure gendered dimensions of mobility, an area widely addressed and discussed in this thesis. Female migrants, whose journeys are often marked by unique vulnerabilities such as sexual violence, reproductive exploitation and the burden of care work, remain overshadowed. My research would provide the groundwork for such future endeavours on an urgent

recalibration of how migration is imagined and narrated incorporating the embodied experiences of women whose stories have yet to be fully heard.

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