RECAST(E)ING AN "ALIEN" VEIL ON THE ASIAN BODY: THE WESTERN IMAGINARY AND SOUTH ASIAN IDENTITY IN YOUTH LITERATURE

Hari R. Adhikari

243 pages May 2012

This dissertation explores the identities of South Asian youths in the discourses of youth literatures written in English by postcolonial South Asian (home) authors, South Asian diaspora authors, and Western authors.

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This dissertation explores the ideological constructions of the identity of South Asian children and young adults, especially in the discourses of literatures targeted for younger audiences. By categorizing these novels in terms of the authors' strategic positions as having outsider views (Western authors writing about South Asian youth), insider-outsider views (South Asian diaspora authors writing from "exile"), and insider views (South Asian authors based in home countries), I examine these literatures as "pre-texts," "con-texts," and "post-texts." I have discovered that these discourses have been "disOrienting" South Asian youth at different levels, and the Westernizing tendency observed in these discourses is at once empowering and disempowering readers in the formative stages of their identities. I have analyzed the patterns seen in the novels of Roland Smith, Patricia McCormick, Suzanne Fisher Staples, Tanuja Desai Hidier, Kiran Desai, Salman Rushdie, Shyam Selvadurai, and Arundhati Roy.

As the literatures written from these different contexts all involve texts which often tend to be "contrary" to the lived realities and actual social expectations of South

Asian youths, the process of these youths' identity formation becomes further complicated. My research provides a mapping of these complex processes of casting and recasting "alien" veils on South Asian youths, wherever they may be living. Finally, I argue that the cross-cultural analysis of international children's and young adult literatures provides opportunities to both teachers and students to understand themselves and the world around them better.

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THE WESTERN IMAGINARY AND SOUTH ASIAN

IDENTITY IN YOUTH LITERATURE

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

SOUTH ASIAN (SA) YOUTHS IN WESTERN/ ADULT IMAGINARY: LOSS, LACK, OR LONGING?

> "Mom, you won't believe what the Secret Service agents told me," said a startled Chelsea our first day [to Nepal]. "They said the hotel pool was drained before we arrived, and they refilled it with bottled water!" I never learned if this was true, but it would not have surprised me.
>
> (*Living History*, Hillary Rodham Clinton 281)

Speaking the Silence: Who Does the Speaking, Why, and for Whom?

Chelsea Clinton had just turned fifteen when she visited South Asia in 1995 with her mother Hillary Clinton, the First Lady of the United States. Clinton had decided to take Chelsea to the trip while the daughter was "blooming into a poised, thoughtful young woman" because "I wanted to share some of the last adventures of her childhood, and I wanted to watch her react to the extraordinary world we were about to enter, to see it through her eyes as well as my own" (268). In *Living History: Hillary Rodham Clinton*, Clinton makes it clear that her visit was meant to "demonstrate that this strategic and volatile part of the world was important to the United States . . ." (268). Why was this part of the world (South Asia) so important to the United States? Why was it significant

that the leaders of the United States like Clinton and potential leaders like Chelsea know about the subcontinent? What could they learn from the land, people, and cultures in South Asia, and what did they want to teach the people in this part of the world? Furthermore, would Chelsea get to see a more realistic picture of South Asia from this kind of state visit than those she could find in literature representing the region? Would she hear more authentic voices of South Asian (hereafter abbreviated as SA) youths of her age than what she had read in literature? What images of SA youths do the children in the United States encounter in literature? Who speaks about these youths, and for whom? This study aims to explore answers to these questions on the discourses of the literatures about SA youths targeted for young audiences, especially in Europe and the United States. In this chapter, I will first introduce the context of childhood in South Asia and youth literatures on SA children and young adults, and then I will present a theoretical framework for analyzing the complex trajectory of growing up South Asian.

In the bestselling book published in 2003, from which the above extract is taken, Hillary Clinton acknowledges that she learned the theme of her visit to South Asia, "the voices of women," from the poem of Anasuya Sengupta, an Indian high school student in spite of the fact that the purpose of the visit was preplanned. Clinton quotes the lines from Sengupta's poem, "*We seek only to give words/ to those who cannot speak* (Emphasis in the original, Clinton 278). On the surface level, Clinton's acknowledgement ruptures both the traditional hierarchy of adults as teachers and children as learners and the Orientalist hierarchy of Westerners as the civilized and non-Westerners as savages waiting to be "civilized." As for Chelsea's learning about Nepal, and her curiosity as to

what the Secret Service Agents had said, however, Clinton never considered it necessary to find out whether the swimming pool was all filled with bottled water or whether it was just a rumor based on the image of Nepal as a dirty country, as it is depicted in Western media and literary discourses. “The Americans I met all had stories of getting sick after spending time in Nepal, making it sound like an inevitable rite of passage” (281). This hearsay was enough for her, because, as she says, even if the rumor were true, “it would not have surprised [her]” (281). Perhaps, what she heard perfectly matched the image of Nepal that she had.

The information Chelsea was getting from the Secret Service Agents and other diplomatic sources was not the only factor that had colored Chelsea’s views about South Asia. Like many of the youths in her country, she had already stored a romantic view of this part of the world. For example, at one point of the visit, when she arrives at the Taj Mahal in India, Chelsea says, “When I was little, this was sort of the embodiment of the fairy-tale palace for me. I would see pictures of it and would dream I was a princess or whatever. Now that I’m here it’s spectacular” (279). Chelsea’s responses to what she hears about Nepal, India or South Asia as a whole speaks volumes to how Western children build up romantic views of other parts of the world. This leads me to ask, in what way, are they “Oriented,” or more appropriately speaking, disoriented about understanding South Asia in particular, and the Third World in general? Along with my main concern about how SA children are “disOriented” in their understanding of themselves and the West, I am also curious about the kinds of literatures that Western (especially American) youths read about South Asia and the impact of such readings.

Literatures and Literary Criticism on SA Children and Young Adults

SA youths have been subjects for representation in diverse genres of literature. However, my concern in this research is the representations of their identities in youth literatures. In terms of the strategic locations of the authorships, I categorize youth literatures in English about SA youths into three major types. First, there is a plethora of youth literatures written by SA writers writing from home such as R. K. Narayan, Arundhati Roy, Kanak Mani Dixit, among others, but surprisingly, very few of them have become popular in the West. Second, there are texts written by SA diasporic authors such as Tanuja Desai Hidier, Kiran Desai, Salman Rushdie, Shyam Selvadurai, and others who are based in the West. Their texts are much more popular in the West than in their home countries in South Asia. Last but not the least, Western writers from George Orwell to Roland Smith, Patricia McCormick, and Suzanne Fisher Staples have written a lot about SA youths. Relatively better received by Western teachers and academics, these texts are based on the authors' experiences of staying in South Asia as representatives of colonial rulers, or most recently, on the author's putatively grounded research on childhood, youth, and parent-child relationships in this region. In this context, it is imperative that we look into the ideological constructions of South Asia and SA youths, especially in literatures targeted for younger audience, as they can leave a lasting influence in the audiences.

Along with the recent development in postcolonial studies that integrates major theories of resistance like cultural studies, feminism, and gender, a few but significant works have been produced by deploying postcolonial theory to inform discussions of

colonial and postcolonial texts. Roderick McGillis's book *Voices of the Other: Children's Literature and the Postcolonial Context* and *The Nimble Reader: Literary Theory and Children's Literature* are significant contributions to the debate. McGillis writes of children's literature in general: "The colonizers are the publishers, writers, teachers, librarians, and parents. . . . The primitives are our children, still defined in Lockean fashion as impressionable slates upon which we inscribe correct cultural practice" (*Voices,* 119). Meena Khorana's edited collection *Critical Perspectives on Postcolonial African Children's and Young Adult Literature* and *The Indian Subcontinent in Literature for Children and Young Adults* are some other comprehensive works in this field. Clare Bradford's *Unsettling Narratives: Postcolonial Readings of Children's Literature* also raises very pertinent questions about the authenticity in representations of indigenous children by cosmopolitan writers. However, compared to the abundance of critical work applying postcolonial theory in other genres and disciplines, scholarship on the postcolonial reading of children's and young adult literature is still scarce. Commenting on such relative neglect of postcolonial studies in children's literature, Bradford says, "Interrogations of postcolonial theory itself as it applies to readings of children's literature are almost absent from critical discourses" (7). It is amazing that South Asia, which produced a majority of postcolonial theorists, has not found literary critics except Khorana and a few others to apply postcolonial theory in the scholarship of youth literatures depicting the identity of SA children and youths. In spite of her immense contribution in promoting youth literatures from Asia and Africa, postcolonial reading of Western and non-Western youth literatures representing SA youths' identities has

remained a lacuna even in Khorana's work. I find that this gap in scholarships on South Asia is also responsible for perpetuating the stereotypes that Western youths like Chelsea embody in their views about South Asia.

Youth literatures on South Asia cannot be analyzed only by using children's literature theories employed in the analysis of Western texts. If we consider the SA cultural and socio-economic distinctions from Europe and Africa, the history of the region's interaction with the West, and its experience of direct colonial rule and hegemonic neo-colonial influence, we cannot avoid some major distinctions between colonialist and postcolonial discourses. For this, I will draw upon Abdul R. JanMohamed's distinction between colonialist and postcolonial discourses in terms of their ideological functions. I am not using JanMohamed's categorization for the purpose of branding some texts as colonialists and others as postcolonial; however, they will help me analyze and evaluate the ideologies embedded in the novels in question or those ideologies that they reinforce.

I will also introduce Edward Said's theory of Orientalism and Homi Bhabha's theorization of "third space," "hybridity," and "ambivalence" to talk about the Western and SA diaspora authors. I find it immensely helpful to analyze the confusions and contradictions we notice in SA children and youths growing up in South Asia as well as in the West, and their parents' ambivalence when it comes to the choice between SA and Western values. I have found it helpful to draw on the theory of "subaltern studies" propounded by Ranjit Guha, Gayatri Spivak, and others, by especially focusing on Spivak's analysis of the "veil" (*burqa* or *purdah*) and "widow burning" (*sati*) because

they have always remained significant motifs in literatures about SA women, young or old. I will also bring in the post-structuralist thinker Jacques Lacan and his theory of the "gaze" and "objet petit a" in order to analyze the politics of representation in the works of Western and SA diaspora authors. It will also be useful to make references of Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks, Ashis Nandy, and Azzdine Haddour for their insights about the impact of the West in the Third World psyche.

As for the application of these theories in children's and young adult literatures, I will draw upon the models of postcolonial analysis from Bradford, McGillis, and Khorana, and psychoanalytical approach from Karen Coats. The works of Roberta Trites and Maria Nikolajeva will be introduced particularly in the analysis of power and subjectivity in children's and young adult literature, with reference to the discourses of these novels. All these theories will be used to analyze who speaks the voices of the youths in South Asia, muted by "heteronormative," "aetonormative," Western universalist, and national and cultural discourses at the different stages of growing up. In addition, Gregory Jurkovic's psychological theory of "parentification" of children and Satadru Sen's historical and anthropological analysis of "infantilization and criminalization" of childhood in colonial South Asia be will be employed for interpreting the distinct patterns of parent-child relations in colonial and neo-colonial contexts.

Growing up South Asian: A Trajectory

Coming-of-age, the transitional phase from childhood to adolescence, has always been an extremely productive space for adult politics. SA youths, for instance, have

recently been in the spotlight among writers of literary narratives and producers of films and television programs in the West. Because of the region's more than three hundred year old history of connection with the West, from imperialism to neo-colonialism and globalization, it is essential to make a reference to how the literature representing SA youths draws upon the notions of youth, childhood, and children's literature developed around the periphery of the British Empire. "Childhood was an important ingredient in the making of empire, race and nationhood," Sen reminds us, "at a time when new meanings were attached to perceived distinctions between white and black children, girl and boy children, aristocratic and middle class children, 'westernized' and 'authentic' children, and between the offspring of the elite and those of the poor and provincial" (2). My main curiosity is whether this is still true, at a time when none of the countries in South Asia is directly under colonial occupation. It is important that we analyze whether contemporary youth literatures have still been reinforcing the image of SA youths as the Other of the European youths, or if there has been any significant change augmented by the recent phenomenon of global connectedness.

Politically, the empires have shrunk back, and the countries in South Asia – almost all of which were once parts of Western empires – have become ostensibly free from direct colonial rules. However, SA youths, whether they live in South Asia, Europe, Africa, Australia, or the Americas, have always been subject to multiple layers of Othering in the normative discourses of Western Universalists and nationalists in SA countries. These youths encounter many such discourses everywhere, from home and neighborhoods to classrooms and playgrounds at schools. Most important, those youths

who do not easily succumb to social rules are either "abjected" or hailed as being different from what they are, hailed by discourses as subtle as nursery rhymes and picture books to the ubiquitous media as well as national and international legal machineries. Especially since the nightmarish events of 9/11 in 2001, SA youths have been in constant threat of being branded "terrorists." Thus, growing up SA entails a complex process of cast(e)ing and recast(e)ing the veils of various kinds such as race, class, caste, ethnicity, nationhood, and the most significant of all, the veil of "aliens" while living in the Western World. It will be wrong to blame only the distant forces of colonialism or the domestic manifestations of neo-colonialism, for these youths constantly receive very "disOrienting" or Westernizing signals from their own parents, relatives and elders in their own communities. It is extremely vital that we study the ambivalence in the elders in terms of adopting Western modernity to reform their old, restrictive and discriminatory cultural practices built around caste systems, arranged and child marriages, property rights, and the lack of freedom of expression.

"Caste" and "veil" are the two major tropes commonly used in Western or "Westernized" political, cultural, and literary discourses to describe "South Asianness." These tropes are often associated with two major religious and cultural groups, the Hindu and Muslim, which dominate the six nations in the region: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, and Pakistan, while in Sri Lanka, the Tamil Hindus are second after the dominant Sinhalese Buddhists. In these discourses, caste is allegedly responsible for the subjugation of one section of the population by another to the extent of rendering some

people "untouchable."[1] Caste practice was not only used by the upper caste Hindus to subjugate the so-called lower caste people, but, as Krishna Manavalli argues, it also became a primary subject of social classification and knowledge in colonial period. Manavalli writes, ". . . understanding caste allowed one [the British colonizer] better to control India" (68). Nicholas B. Dirks also suggests, "[I]t was under the British that 'caste' became a single term capable of expressing, organizing, and above all 'systematizing' India's diverse forms of social identity, community, and organization" (5). Caste is still a significant determining factor in shaping people's identities in most of the countries in the region. On the other hand, the "veil," basically refers to the mask worn by Muslim women to cover their body as a symbol of their cultural identity. However, the veil is seen as "symbolic of the suppression and exploitation of the 'oriental' woman both by man and, conversely, by the gaze of the Western colonialising and neo-imperialist world powers" (Grace 1).

Like literatures in general, the coming-of-age narratives representing South Asia are replete with these two major tropes, along with others like abuse, poverty, and exile

[1] In *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*, Nicholas B. Dirks lists the Hindu caste hierarchy as: the *Brahmans*, or the *Brahmins* as the most noble tribe who can officiate in the priesthood, the *Ksatriyas* as the second, who ought to be military men, the *Baishyas* or *Vaisyas*, as the third who are for the most part, merchants, bankers, and bunias or shop-keepers, and *Sudras* as the last tribe of the hierarchy who ought to be menial servants and that they are incapable to raise themselves to any superior rank.

(both domestic and international displacement of people due to warfare or desire for economic advancement). In other words, the tropes of abuse, *burqa*, caste, poverty, and exile appear in these narratives as if they are the signifiers of SA identity, in spite of the fact that "South Asia" is an amorphous category that transcends national boundaries of these seven countries. For instance, Afghanistan, Myanmar, and Tibet also share demographic and topographic traits that are often identified as SA. Muslims in the Middle East and Arab world also wear veils, with some variations in form and significance. Likewise, abuse, poverty and exile (meaning displacement) are common phenomena all over the world. Considering the degree of their visibility in the narratives, I will primarily focus on the literatures that represent the youths in the five major countries in the Indian subcontinent: Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka[2].

Childhood and teen life in South Asia and SA families in the West are complex and pluralistic in nature. The patterns vary in terms of locations, dominant cultural practices, and socio-economic levels. However, we cannot completely ignore the general picture because the stereotypes found in Western media and literatures are primarily based on such generalized attributes. What is the pattern of child-raising in South Asia in general? What do parents want their children to be? Do they want their children to resist Western values or do they want their children to assimilate Western cultures and values

[2] South Asia generally refers to seven countries namely, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Mal Dives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka under the umbrella organization called South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. Currently Afghanistan has also joined the organization as the eighth member nation.

into their SA identities? In other words, how are these children oriented or (dis)Oriented, for that matter? How are the recent trends of immigration and transnationalization of education and job markets complicating parent-child relations in this region? What could be those forces at work behind the social construction of the identities of SA youths and their relations with parents? And who is responsible for the conflicts in families and beyond? After laying a framework of these forces in this chapter, I aim to show how they are reflected in the literatures for the youths by foreign, diaspora and home authors in the second, third and fourth chapters respectively.

Apparently, a huge percentage of SA youths subsist under the poverty line, which further complicates child-reading practices and parent-child relations. Most government programs targeting them depend on aid, in cash or goods, obtained from developed (mainly Western) countries[3]. As Judith Slater puts it, "Schooling in Asian countries is also influenced by colonization patterns or effects of occupation and war. The model of education adopted is usually based on that of the host country or it is some hybrid of the American or European system of education" (2). Urban children, and to some extent even the children in rural areas, are gradually Westernized due to the hegemonic forces seeping in via cultural, academic, religious, and family institutions. Children from rich families are educated in the West, or at least sent to English medium private schools inside the country. Many of those from the poor families go to poorly funded public schools or drop out and get married, get abducted by militia groups, get sold in brothels

[3] There has to be a separate study of what kind of programs get support and how they reflect underlying neo-colonial interests.

or are abused as child labors at home, in the community or elsewhere. They are discriminated on the basis of color, caste, class, and gender. Thus, as SA children appear in the Western media, it seems like they need "rescuing" from all these forces that impede their individual growth.

In fact, the problem of representation is much more complicated than what it looks like on the surface. In the second part of this chapter, I will present some major forces that complicate childhood and parent-child relations in the sub-continent. I will discuss the ways in which these children and youths are disOriented, exoticized, infantilized and criminalized, and parentified or adultified. I am not arguing that these disOrienting forces are all essentially detrimental; for some of them have proven to be instrumental for the youths to find better means of survival in the contemporary world of globalization (which I would argue is more properly called "Westernization"). Overall, most of these processes have subjected the lives of SA youths, both at home and abroad, to victimization, alienation, and discrimination. However, disOrientation and parentification have also empowered them to face the challenges posed by rapid globalization. Before discussing these issues, however, I will review the literature representing SA identity.

South Asia and SA Youths in Literature

> The one by whom the abject exists is the *deject* [the outcast] who places (himself), *separates* (himself), situates (himself) and therefore *strays* instead of getting its bearings, desiring, belonging, or refusing. . . . A

> tireless builder, the deject is in short a *stray* [a lost soul]. . . . And the more he strays the more he is saved. (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 8)

South Asia occupies a prominent space in postcolonial literature and theories of "alterity" in anthropology, and in history as well as literary criticism. Specifically, Arjun Apadurai's cultural-anthropological theory of "social imaginary," Bhabha's theorization of "hybridity," "mimicry," and "ambivalence," Guha and Spivak's theorization of "subalterneity," and Nandy's idea of "political psychology" have had significant influence in the Western academia, especially in the last few decades. In the same way, Rushdie, Roy, Desai, V. S. Naipaul, Michael Ondaatje, Jhumpa Lahiri, Bharati Mukherjee, Hanif Kureishi are some of the literary figures of South Asia and SA diaspora well established in the West. Other than in children's and young adult literature, much work has been done in other disciplines about the identities of SA youths since the days of Western imperial rule to the present era of globalization or neo-colonialism.

In *Teen Life in Asia*, Judith Slater, has made a comprehensive collection of anthropological narratives that explore the lives of the youths in Asia with separate chapters on India and Nepal. Comparing the trends in Asian youth cultures with those in the United States, Slater comments, "Teens in Asia and teens in the United States tend to have similar desires and needs, to like similar foods, and to enjoy similar types of recreation, while the similarities noted above provide a surface impression that teens in Asia are just like those in America, this is only partly true" (3). Slater sums up, "What remains to be seen is what teens do with their unique heritage and how they, tomorrow's

adults, propel their countries ahead" (3). The best thing about the articles in the book is that they provide details of what happens in a typical day of a youth in each country.

Likewise, Sunaina Marr Maira's milestone work on diaspora youth culture entitled *Desi in the House: Indian American Youth Culture in New York City* uses "an eclectic theoretical approach, integrating models and concepts from anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, psychology, and literary criticism" to analyze "the subjectivity of individual experiences and the implications of collective response to social and material contexts focused on second generation Indian youths [which also implies the youths of the whole Indian sub-continent] in New York" (24). Borrowing the term coined by Appadurai in 1996, Maira's anthropological study of the SA American "youthscape" in New York brings to light the "often hidden contradictions of citizenship and belonging, work and leisure, multiculturalism and education, that second-generation youth manage daily" (17). In spite of its narrow focus on second generation SA youths, it raises a number of pertinent issues relevant to cross-cultural study such as nostalgia, negotiation, ideologies, resistance, and ethnic authenticity.

Relating the notion of childhood with the Empire, in *Colonial Childhoods: The Juvenile Periphery of India 1850-1945,* Sen stresses the need to politicize the nature of childhood and adolescence in order to get a better picture of Indian history under colonial rule. Primarily focused on the study of how the condition of childhood in India was identified and imagined by adults, Sen demonstrates the ways in which the children themselves influenced the processes of identification and imagination (8). According to Sen, "the elite Indians who were deeply ambivalent about the institutionalization of their

'own' children frequently assisted in the colonialization of other inferior natives" (5). Thus childhood became a window through which "the native elite imagined the impact of colonialism upon the Indian self, derived their reformulations of the self, and engaged in the variations of the 'passive revolution'" (7). Hence, SA youths have drawn the attention of the scholars from diverse disciplines like history, anthropology, and social sciences.

Critical analysis of Western youth literature representing South Asia has so far been almost completely neglected. I do not mean to say that there is no literature depicting SA youths. Khorana's book *The Indian Subcontinent in Literature for Children and Young Adults*, published two decades ago, lists over nine hundred books produced indigenously from the five major countries in the region, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Although these books were either originally written in English or translated into English by local authors, they demonstrate a significant impact of and on Western tradition of children's literature during and after the British Colonial rule in the region. "Western books on the subcontinent," Khorana argues, "although they are better written, illustrated, and produced, nevertheless follow a similar trend in subject matter as the ones published indigenously" (xxiv). Besides Khorana's work and a limited number of journal articles, little critical work has been done on the identities of SA youths in Western youth literature. Thus, my scholarship aims at exploring this relatively neglected territory in the discourses of youth literature originally written in English.

In Western literary imagination, SA youths have occupied a significant space ever since the colonial period. A cursory look at the body of youth literature, popular in the West, also reveals the questionable representation of SA characters and settings in the

books of writers like Kipling (*Kim* and *The Jungle Book)* and Herman Hesse (*Siddhartha)* to the most recent works of Western writers like Staples (*Shabanu* trilogy and *Shiva's Fire*), McCormick (*Sold*), Deborah Ellis (*The Breadwinner* trilogy), and Smith (*Peak*), to name a few. Likewise, SA diaspora writers have expended considerable amount of ink in representing SA youths in their novels set either in South Asia or in Europe and America. Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (cited hereafter as *Haroun*) and *Luka and the Fire of Life* (cited hereafter as *Luka*), Hidier's *Born Confused*, Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (cited hereafter *as Inheritance*), Mitali Perkins' *Secret Keeper* and *Monsoon Summer*, Marina Budhos's *Ask Me No Questions*, Samrat Upadhyay's *The Guru of Love*, Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*, and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* primarily contain SA characters and settings. Ruskin Bond's contribution to literature for young readers, however, stands out particularly because of his unique subject position as a Western diaspora author based in South Asia (India).

In addition to novels, Western young readers encounter alluring and often disturbing images of SA history, myths, cultures, religions, and landscapes that leave them with a craving for the "exotic" land, people and cultures, in the movies like *Slumdog Millionaire*, and *Bend it Like Beckham*, which portray the lives of SA youths at home or abroad. The other category of texts that present the experiences, problems, and potentials of SA youths to the Western young audiences are the novels written in English by home authors (SA) but published both locally in SA countries as well as internationally by multinational companies whether they are targeted for younger audiences or not. Arundhati Roy's *God of Small Things* is one of this kind which has

become popular in both South Asia and the West. Great SA authors like R. K. Narayan, Dhan Gopal Mukerji, Rabindranath Tagore, and Laxmi Prasad Devkota are other major writers who have also written in English and published locally by targeting young readers.

Considering the vastness of the area, I focus on the encounters of SA youths with their Western counterparts as represented in the novels originally written in English, and published and marketed primarily for Western audiences. Although references will be made to many of the texts mentioned above, the analysis will primarily focus on Staples' *Shabanu* and *Haveli,* Smith's *Peak,* and McCormick's *Sold* as examples of Western texts. I will also discuss Rushdie's *Haroun* and *Luka*, Hidier's *Born Confused,* Selvadurai's *Funny Boy,* and Desai's *Inheritance* as diasporic representations. Finally, I will dedicate a full chapter on Roy's *God of Small Things* since it engages multiple issues of growing up in the sub-continent. I chose to concentrate on the works of these authors with a view to representing the three categories of texts based on their distinct subject positions mentioned above, without any intention of homogenizing SA youths in the models presented in these narratives.

Among these authors, Staples's novels will be discussed as examples of those neo-colonialist Western authors who write about SA youths based on the putatively "exotic" and "almost unlivable" world in one or more of the countries in South Asia. Smith's youth hero encounters the native in their (the native's) homelands, whereas McCormick presents a complex trajectory of a young "brown" female protagonist from Nepal who gets rescued from the abusive "brown men and women" by an unidentified

"white man." Then Rushdie will be presented as a postcolonial writer of SA origin, renowned for his works that present a counter-argument to colonialist ideologies by blurring the East-West binaries imposed by most colonialist texts. Hidier is a second generation SA diaspora author whose novel *Born Confused* portrays the life of a SA youth growing up as an "alien" with her Asian body in a Western world by locating the novel in the metropolitan area of New York in the United States. In this research, I use Desai's work as representative of SA diaspora writers, who position themselves in the borderline between the root culture (SA) and target culture (Western). At last, Roy's novel will be discussed as a single powerful example of home based writing for its portrayal of the disOriented youths struggling against local and global forces in South Asia. I will analyze the novels of each of the categories by problematizing the subject positions of the authors in relation to their oeuvre and the ways in which they handle the forces that disOrient, infantilize, criminalize, exoticize, and parentify the youths in and from this region.

Since the portrayal of encounters between the West and non-West has been my primary criteria for selection, each of these novels presents one or more critical moments in which the characters representing SA values and worldviews find themselves face to face with those who represent or advocate for Western values. The significance of these moments lies in how they reveal the authors' explicit and implicit ideologies. In spite of the fact that numerous other factors influence the authors' narrative choices, how the authors position themselves in the narratives provide effective clues to why they do or do not ascribe agency to specific characters. In other words, the narratives often differ in

their treatments of "the other" in accordance with the authors' subject positions (including their race, gender, class, and sexuality). In some of these discourses, the authors appear to be clearly upholding the values of one race, class, gender, or nationality and exoticize, or even demonize those of the other. Others have mixed approaches to cultural differences, ranging from an attitude of ambivalence to a search for a balance between the Western and non-Western cultures.

Recent Trends in Literary Representation

"South Asianness" is such a fluid category that it signifies various geo-political and cultural aspects of the Southern part of Asia known as the Indian sub-continent. In spite of the commonality and diversity among the peoples and cultures in SA countries, the term "South Asian" is used as a homogenous category in Orientalist or colonialist discourses. The presence of this term, especially in literature for children and young adults by Western writers, is mainly confined to a few reductive categories like poverty, child abuse, the Hindu caste system, and the Muslim culture of the veil. In portraying the life of people in this region, Western writers seem to be affected by the grand illusion of Orientalism, in which one sees only what one wants to see in this objectified Other space. Besides making their career in this area, their texts become the mirrors in which they can see only how their cultures (Western, Christian, or both) are superior to others from the South Asia leave the same impression on their readers.

First of all, in the portrayals of SA youths by Western authors represented here, the non-Western young protagonists suffer from one or more of such social vices as

abuse, burqa, caste, poverty, or exile. When these characters fall under the "traps" of religious, social, or economic adversities, the Western representative, young or old, makes an appearance at the scene for the rescue with angelic kindness and Herculean courage. Interestingly, in most cases, the rescuer is either British or American, or Christian, or both. In some cases, however, the West is represented by characters of SA origin with a Western upbringing. As JanMohamed writes, "In all cases, however, they pit *civilized societies* against the *barbaric aberrations of an Other*, and they always end with the elimination of the threat posed by the Other and the legitimation of the values of the good, civilized society" (emphasis added, 72). In chapter II, I will demonstrate this trend in the novels of Staples, Smith, and McCormick.

Postcolonial diasporic narratives about SA youths, on the other hand, are more careful in blurring the boundaries in their portrayals of cultural encounters. In spite of representing the youths' life as objective reality, these texts portray and problematize the general characteristics of South Asianness that have often been subject to stereotyping in Western literatures. For instance, Hidier's *Born Confused* and Desai's *Inheritance* make more realistic representations of the encounter, whereas Rushdie's *Haroun* uses magical realism to blur the boundaries. The writers of SA origin appear less reductive in that sense. However, they still seem to re-inscribe some of the Western values in order to gain acceptance in the West. For instance, authors like Desai and Hidier tend to present these images of the non-West almost like the Western authors, especially in their approaches to representing children living in South Asia. Rushdie, however, handles these issues more tactfully, though he is also criticized for his use of patriarchal language in his novels. In

the third chapter, I will critically examine these narratives using the theoretical insights presented below.

In the narratives of the postcolonial home authors, on the contrary, it is very hard to find a singular pattern since they come from different cultural, national, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. Secondly, as they are based in their own home countries in the sub-continent, it is not urgent for them to respond to the stereotypes about South Asianness prevalent in the West. Rather, they are invested in responding to the legacy of the Empire, impact of the recently ubiquitous globalization, and the regional as well as local politics including postcolonial nationalism upon the youths living in specific locations. The fourth chapter will therefore analyze Roy's *The God of Small Things* (cited hereafter as *God*) as an example of the novels by home authors. Although this novel is explicitly marketed for grown-ups, it still provides comprehensive insights into the issue of growing up in South Asia. It becomes a mirror to the manner in which young people in the region challenge the traditional, social, cultural, and political systems in order to form their new identities.

In the end, the fifth chapter will demonstrate the trend of emphasizing the Euro-American canons in teaching literature courses in American schools and colleges in spite of their slogans for multiculturalism. As an alternative to those localized and nationalized curricula, I will present a pedagogical approach for teaching international children's and young adult literatures to promote global citizenship. I will also present a model for border-crossing through literature courses, examples of assignments, and schema for evaluation by using the insights from my internship teaching at Illinois State University.

Orientalized and Re-Orientalized Youth

In his book *Orientalism* (1978), Said describes Orientalism as a means for the West to grasp and domesticate the Other, referring to the process of one culture attempting "to control the Other by fashioning it, as a malleable object, according to one's own imaginings." Said identifies and articulates the processes of Orientalism, the relationship of power and dominance where the Oriental was submitted to being made the Oriental. He argues that Orientalism distorts within its field of vision whatever is inconsistent with its scheme of things. One of the common techniques of Orientalization is making repetitive comparisons and contrasts between Western and non-Western places, peoples, and cultures in order to show the superiority of one race over another. Arguing how such comparisons reinforce cultural hegemony, Said writes: "Orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible *positional* superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand" (emphasis in the original 7). As Said puts it, such references should be read as "not neutral (any more than class and gender are neutral) but as politically charged, beseeching the attention and elucidation its considerable proportions require" (*Culture and Imperialism* 93). It is therefore imperative to expose such comparisons and contrasts between South Asia and the West found in literature for young audiences with close attention to why certain child or adolescent characters are Orientalized and others are not. Following Said, Lorinda B. Cohoon also argues that "it is critical to explore the non-neutrality of Orientalizing perspectives in children's literature, and to consider their function in texts [representing the Third World children] which are often read as

representations of the lives of white, middle-class girls and the private, domestic sphere" (51). Thus, reading and interpreting texts by Western authors without paying attention to their Orientalizing ideologies will leave the reader with an incomplete understanding of South Asia.

Previously, Orientalization of South Asianness was primarily a Western phenomenon, but with the proliferation of the writing from SA diaspora authors in the last few decades, the scenario has significantly changed. In spite of themselves being SA by origin, the very positionality of these diaspora authors has enabled them, voluntarily or otherwise, to further Orientalize South Asia. Lisa Lau defines this phenomenon as "re-Orientalism."

> Orientalism has long been evident in the literature written about South Asia from the days of colonialism, which began with non-South Asians writing and representing the Indian Sub-Continent and its people. However, even in contemporary South Asian literature in English by South Asians, the process of Orientalism can be seen to be still occurring. The curious development over these few recent decades is that Orientalism is no longer only the relationship of the dominance and representation of the Oriental by the non-Oriental or Occidental, but that this role appears to have been taken over (in part at least) by other Orientals, namely, the diasporic authors. This process of Orientalism by Orientals is what I will be terming as 'Re-Orientalism'. . . . In Re-Orientalism, we have the curious case in which the positionality of the powerful is simultaneously

> that of the insider and outsider, where the representing power can be simultaneously self and other. (572).

Lau clarifies that some may regard this phenomenon simply as Orientalism, as it has ever been, because diaspora writers are based mainly in the Occident. But having been located outside of the Orient, and relative to the writers based within South Asia, ". . . diasporic South Asian writers are in a position of power and dominance, particularly where the issue of literary representation and image construction is concerned" (572). Even Said's theory is considered as Western thought in some parts of Asia. "Said's theory, ironically, contributed to the hegemony of English as well as American academism, at the time his work was adamantly criticizing Orientalism" (Nishihara 243).

Including the authors writing for young audiences, the dominance of the whole literary genre on South Asia by diaspora authors "simply overwhelms that of the home authors (those writing from within South Asia)" (Lau 575-76). These diaspora authors are not completely alien to the Orient, but they derive both ancestry and identity from the Orient (and indeed many have very immediate and strong links to the Orient). In her book *The Perishable Empire*, Meenakshi Mukherjee also articulates her fear of the erasure of the diversity of India, identifying the threat as coming from the category of writers called "The Third World Cosmopolitans" (178). By this, she indicates that the postcolonial writers, "who are globally visible, who are taught in postcolonial classrooms the world over, and who are hailed in the review pages of Western journals as interpreters and authentic voices of the non-Western world hardly ever include a writer from India who does not write in English" (Mukherjee 178). Lau also acknowledges that apart from the

issue of India's multilingual literary heritage, even if we consider only the literature written in English, Mukherjee would still have cause to be concerned. It may still be the case that those taught in postcolonial classrooms the world over, "hailed and feted by the Western world as interpreters and authentic voices, may still not include a writer from within South Asia" (577). Thus, the knowledge about South Asia will be mediated by these migrant authors that Mitchell Cohen prefers to call "rooted cosmopolitans."[4] For instance, Rushdie situates himself "in a position of perpetual in-betweenness, a migrant caught between three countries, unable to exist comfortably in any one" (Shailaja Sharma 599). And most of what the Westerners understand about South Asia comes from writers like him.

The case is getting much more serious within the region of South Asia where SA Diasporic literature is dictating the arena (of literature on South Asia). The hyper-visibility of Indian diaspora authors is also gradually eroding the identities of writers from other countries in the sub-continent. In one way, the Indian writers writing about India also claim authenticity while speaking for the whole sub-continent, whereas on the other side, Western audiences tend to consider these globally visible authors' representations as ground reality. The writers from other countries in the region, especially the indigenous writers writing in vernacular languages, are put under constant threat of disappearance. James Clifford expresses his concerns about the plight of expansive notions of indigenous or native affiliation before they begin to lose specificity and fall into more generalized "post-colonial" discourse of displacement (15). He argues that indigenous authors writing for global audiences find themselves occupying "the

[4] See Cohen, Mitchell. "Rooted Cosmopolitanism." *Dissent* (Fall 1992): 478-83.

sometimes fraught borderland" between "indigenous" and "diasporic affiliations and identities." He adds, "I hope we will actively inhabit and explore, not flee from, the mutually constitutive tension of indigenous and diasporist visions and experiences" (15). In my analysis, I aim to do exactly the same, to explore how these Orientalizing, reOrientalizing, and disOrientalizing forces influence home authors' representations ultimately influencing SA youths in the formative stages of their identities, and how these forces color Western youths' understanding of themselves and the Other.

Colonized and Neo-colonized Youth

More than a decade after the publication of Said's *Orientalism*, Perry Nodelman published an article titled "The Other: Orientalism, Colonialism and Children's Literature" by applying Said's theory to child readers rather than to the children of colonized peoples and cultures, as they are represented in children's books. Nodelman's proposal that children constitute a colonized group spoken for by adults just as Orientals are spoken for by Orientalists opened up debate about the subjectivity of children as a colonized group (qtd. in Bradford 7). For instance, in her most recent and comprehensive work on postcolonial reading of "unsettling narratives," Clare Bradford argues, "[C]hildren stand in a quite different relationship to adults than do Orientals to Orientalists, since children are always seen as occupying a state or stage that will lead to adulthood, whereas Orientals never transmute into Orientalists and are thus always and inescapably inferior" (7). Bradford contends that "Nodelman's use of postcolonial theory sidesteps the question of race, which is central to the binary distinctions between

‘civilized’ and ‘primitive’ on which colonialism and colonial relations were built” (7). If we consider the ensuing debate, SA children, leaving aside a small fraction of those coming from privileged groups, are multiply colonized. Besides the larger force of neo-colonialism, at least in linguistic and cultural levels, they are colonized by the nationalist and local discourses like caste-based Hindu cultural discourse, gendered Muslim discourse, and so on.

Initially, postcolonialism also tended to dichotomize literature in an attempt to reverse the hierarchies built around the superiority of the European white males by categorizing them into colonialist and postcolonial literature in terms of the underlying ideologies. For instance, Abdur JanMohamed writes, “Colonialist literature is an exploration and a representation of a world at the boundaries of ‘civilization,’ a world that has not (yet) been domesticated by European signification or codified in detail by its ideology” (64). On the other hand, postcolonial literature, which JanMohammed characterizes as the Third World's literary dialogue with Western cultures, is “marked by two broad characteristics: its attempt to negate the prior European negation of colonized cultures and its adoption and creative modification of Western languages and artistic forms in conjunction with indigenous languages and forms” (84-85). However, later a development in postcolonial theory has established itself as a theory of resistance and revisioning. Bhabha’s theorization of hybridity which will be discussed in detail later is primarily a revisionist and resistance type.

Most colonialist discourses, to use Said’s and JanMohammed’s theorization, are built up with the narratives produced by Western authors. In these narratives, the non-

Western young protagonists are repetitively presented as sufferers of one or more of such social vices as abuse, burqa, caste, poverty, and exile, as I mentioned above. Unlike authors from home countries in South Asia, these Western writers still reinforce the Orientalist hierarchy, privileging the West over the non-West. Categorizing such texts as "colonial discourses," Bhabha also argues that these discourses produce knowledges of colonizer and colonized which are stereotypical but antithetical (70). Bhabha writes, "The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction" (70). Even today, the identity of SA children, very much like that of their "native" parents, is influenced by Western texts that depict them as helpless, docile, perverse, and mysterious creatures. Clearly, such constructions, evident in the discursivity of these novels, imply the need for intervention from the West if only these children are to be saved and civilized. This is one of the strongest forces of colonialism at work in most of the Western literature for children and young adults representing South Asia.

Bhabha also argues that the stereotype is the primary point of subjectification in colonial discourse in the formation of one's own superior self (75). Writers like Staples, Smith, and McCormick clearly employ these narratives to justify the necessity for intervention in which they can act their own superiority in the guise of compassion. This is very much like the old story of "the white man's burden," derived from the age-old history of Western supremacy and Orientalism. Said expresses it this way: "The relationship between occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of

varying degrees of a complex hegemony" (*Orientalism* 5). Such Orientalist scholarship, which claims to be objective, embodies within itself racism, ethnocentricism, imperialism, and convictions about Western propriety and superiority. After all, as Bhabha argues, repetition is fundamental in sustaining colonial hierarchy (Said 22).

To sum up, I am not going to argue that these narratives are completely removed from reality. Said has made it clear that "[i]t would be wrong to conclude that the Orient was essentially an idea, or a creation with no corresponding reality" (*Orientalism* 5). But I am bothered by the way these narratives excessively focus on specific problems, and ignore other problems like disOrientation, parentification, intra-racial racism, etc. They also undermine other SA realities such as community approaches to child rearing, joint families, religious harmony, free movement across national borders, and the abundance of oral traditions, among many other things that make SA cultures unique. Moreover, the colonizing discourses deprive the children in the region from seeing the adverse impact of colonialism and neo-colonialism in their lives.

(Dis)Oriented Youth

SA youths are bound to identify themselves with the fictional images they see in books imported from the West. They go through some kinds of neurotic phases in their life, due to the dual forces of those images, one Orienting and the other disOrienting them, simultaneously at work. According to Lacanian psychoanalysis, such idealized images control their body just like the babies in the mirror stages of their identity formation. Coats writes:

> . . . the baby will be in a position to know him/herself, but only in a fictional way, because the Imaginary register of ideal images has come into being and has determined the only way in which we can know anything – through alienation (knowing oneself through an external image), duality (the result of a deep ambivalence caused by the alienation between the subject and its ideal image), and identification (the attempt to dissolve the subject into the ideal image and say, "This is me"). (19)

Although Coats makes reference to this Lacanian model to demonstrate the general framework of identification in mirror stage, the duality functions in more extended forms of cultural identification with regard to SA youths. As a result of the Westernizing tendency all around, the youths aim at gratifying the desires of their parents by negotiating their own desires.

Next, Lacan defines the subject of psychoanalysis as one who doubts or suffers the loss of his being. "His symptom emerges from that which is outside signification" (Seshadri-Crooks 63). To demonstrate this neurotic condition, in relation with "colored" people's approach to whiteness, Seshadri-Crooks quotes Joseph Conrad's nameless captain narrator in *Heart of Darkness,* who begins with an expression of a profound sense of being an outsider: "what I felt most was my being a stranger to the ship; and if all truth must be told, I was somewhat of a stranger to myself" (368-69). Seshedri-Crooks continues, "The captain's fantasy more specifically is that of being united with the *objet a*, the thing from which the subject must separate in order to constitute itself" (67). I find a close connection of the narrator's fantasy in *Heart of Darkness* to that of SA people.

Being inextricably connected to the West after the long historical interaction with the Western colonizers, directly or indirectly, SAs seem to be unable to separate themselves completely from the West in order to emphasize South Asianness. For instance, we see exactly similar situation in these peoples' approaches to the English language and Western culture. The English language has always become the *objet a* that is the "extimate part of the Other" (Seshadri-Crooks 68). Following this schema, the first thing they have to do is to separate from other SAs or their local or national identity, in order to become Western. In order to remain SA, however, they have to resist the temptation for the Western modernity, including the English language. But, the ground reality is that neither is possible.

By using the Lacanian term "extimacy" to designate the paradoxical status of the "Real in the Symbolic," or the manner in which the Other of language is engaged in its lack, Seshadri-Crooks elaborates that "in relation to the system of race, "extimacy" refers to the illegal desire of Whiteness to overcome difference and to plug the lack that sustains the inter-subjective relations of race" (68). As Lacan argues, the extimated *objet a* becomes the alterity of *jouissance*, which the Other cannot tolerate (Seshadri-Crooks 68). In case of most SA people, becoming Western, or orienting children towards Western "civilization" has always become the "extimate" part of their fantasy. The novels of home authors as well as of diaspora authors demonstrate this case extensively. However, if we look at the discourses of the novels by Western writers, the Western people do not yet seem to be ready to put their SA counterparts on equal footing. The SAs are "just the neurotic Other," those that cannot be anything but "Oriental."

In her introduction to *The Indian Subcontinent in Literature for Children and Young Adults*, Khorana states that fact that India derived the concept of children's literature as a separate discipline from the West (xi). Khorana writes:

> The British educational policy, designed to produce a class of administrators for the Civil Service and governmental posts, resulted in the neglect of local languages and indigenous religious institutions like the madrassahs, gurukuls, and Buddhist viharas that had traditionally nourished the culture and literature of the subcontinent. This led to a marked class structure in education as upper class children were generally instructed in English, hence producing an English-speaking elite that was educated at western-style schools, reading and demanding imported books in English. (xi-xii)

Although Khorana is talking specifically about India, the situation was more or less the same in almost all other countries in the sub-continent. Until 1947, Pakistan and Bangladesh were still parts of India and what is stated above applies very well to the two countries until and even after their independence. Nepal was never formally under British rule, but the Rana regime gave its loyalty to the British by curtailing education, intellectual activity, and freedom of thought and expression not only because it posed a threat to the Rana's political control, but also because it could spread anti-British sentiments. Sri Lanka, Khorana argues, perhaps has the best library services in the subcontinent (xii). But that became possible only due to the influence of Western traditions brought forth by the colonial occupation of the country, one after another.

Hence, SA youths, and the whole education system, is very much Westernized, which is one of the significant aspect of "disOrientation." The colonizing, and recently the neo-colonizing ideologies, interpellate these youths to embody Western values, embedded in Western books, without a single hint to put them on equal status as Western youths. This is where lies the paradox of growing up as SA, a life of contradiction and confusion between becoming and unbecoming the "Orient."

It is also worth noting that the parents in these countries are buying books in English for their children or sending them to English medium schools not under compulsion like in the days of direct colonial rule. The desire to become Western, or the desire for Whiteness for that matter, has been rooted in their psyche so deeply that they want to gratify their desires through their children's "disOrientation." Thus, it is no wonder that the sale of the cosmetic product called "Fair and Lovely" is so pervasive in South Asia. In terms of who SAs have wanted to be like, Britain was previously the dominant imaginary figure against which South Asia constructed its image, but this trend is slowly shifting toward the United States. As validated by Seshadri-Crooks, the first thing SA youths realize as they grow up is that they are not Western enough. Most parents are thrilled if their children speak English with the accent and fluency closer to that of the native speakers of the language. However, once the youths begin to exhibit Western modernity through adoption of Western fashions, music, and so on, the parents consider them to have deviated from their SA identity, or become "too British, or too American." This is one of the main conflicts in the families of most SA diaspora in Europe and America as observed in the works of diasporic authors.

Infantilized and Criminalized Youth

One of the most effective strategies of the British colonialists in India was the "criminalization" of the native youths and infantilization of both the youth and the adult (Sen 3). Although criminalization was the strategy they had used since the beginning of colonialism, it became more intense after the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 which threatened the empire. Children were kept under strict scrutiny of school administrations and juvenile detention centers. In order to remain outside those centers, children in those days had to act docile by tolerating whatever was imposed upon them. On the contrary, the British colonists' children were encouraged to aspire for adventures. Adventures into the exotic territory of the empire were considered to be formative for their imperial imagination.

In his study of the "juvenile periphery" in colonial South Asia, Sen also argues that during that era, children and young adults were always relegated to the fringes. "To be a child, in Britain and its colonies in the nineteenth century," Sen adds, "was to be excluded from various forms of political, economic, social, and sexual privilege, and consigned to innocence and dependency" (2). Chandra Talpade Mohanty also attests that the natives (even adults) were infantilized within the colonialist discourse, which buttressed the colonial rhetoric of civilization – the alleged need to educate, humanize, and shape the identities of the colonized (466). According to Sen, "childhood was partially delinked from age, and constructed with reference to a 'nature' that was revealed by encounters with the judicial system and articulated in terms of plasticity and hardness" (51). Within the framework of the empire, native childhood was a further marginality, deriving not only from the notions of adulthood, but also from assumptions of race, moral

content (based on their religions), and political status. Sen's analysis demonstrates the way British experts who were engaged in the juvenile periphery of India generally saw native children as "distorted mirror images of the children they imagined at 'home'" (3). Hence, it is important to explore the contours of the cultural construction of SA youths' identity as "delinquent juveniles," especially as portrayed in the literary narratives targeted for the younger audiences in the West.

I see a very close relation between the notion of infantilization with Nikolajeva's theorization of "aetonormativity." Nikolajeva prefers to use the term "aetonormativity" to describe the power relationship between adults and children in general. Nikolajeva argues that "in real as well as in fictive world, adults are and will always be superior to children and such power hierarchy is non-negotiable" (203). However, Nikolajeva expresses her dilemma about the possibility of writing the genuine experiences of children and young adults due to the unequal power position between sender and recipient (120). Trites argues that instead of being true to adolescent experiences, Young Adult novels exercise the authority of the adult. Trites states, "This conflict with authority that is embedded in most texts for adolescents in turn provides the author with opportunities for using ideology to manipulate the adolescent reader. In that sense, authors themselves become authority figures in adolescent literature" (xii). Yet, Nikolajeva sounds positive about young readers still being able to enjoy narratives even though they share the young protagonist's subjectivity of being under the influence of the adult norms, power, and politics. Her main concern is that "adults can never fully interrogate their own power position, and the overwhelming majority of children's books do not even attempt at such

interrogation, either by ignoring the issue altogether or by unconditionally affirming adult norms" (203). I doubt if adult norms in a literary text can be blurred, as Nikolajeva argues. In the chapters two, three, and four, I also aim to expose the impact of "aetonormativity" (Nikolajeva) and adult authority (Trites) in the identity formation of SA youths.

Adultified and Parentified Youth

Contrary to the process of infantilization imposed by the Western imperialists, a huge fraction of children in South Asia are forced to early maturity by their parents or other adults in their communities. Compared to their Western counterparts, children and youths in the sub-continent go to the workforce much earlier. For instance, in an agrarian economy like Nepal's, youths are expected to support their parents on their farms as early as ten years of age. There are areas in which children drop out of school simply because they have to support their family. Gregory J. Jurkovic defines such a phenomenon in which "children who either directly or indirectly perform caregiving functions in the family and fulfill parental needs and fantasies, often at the expense of their own development and self-realization" as "parentification" or "adultification" (4).

According to Jurkovic, parentification can involve both ethical and unethical concerns. In ethical family relationships, parents are sensitive to asymmetries vis-à-vis their children. Although they enjoy their children's loyalty, concern, and growth, and increasingly alternate subject and object roles with them in developmentally appropriate ways, they accept the fact that their contributions outweigh those of their offspring (5).

Unethical parenting, on the other hand, involves a breakdown in the dialogic relation between parents and their offspring, a process that often has its roots in the miscarriage of just and trustworthy relation that leads to the misapplication of parental authority. Ethical parentification is based on filial devotion of "reciprocity and responsibility" whereas unethical parentification involves "the unilateral and self-serving use of children by parental figures to satisfy possessive, dependent, aggressive, and sexual needs," and thus can be destructive (6). Whether it is ethical or unethical, "complementary unconscious processes, role assignments, functional interdependencies, boundary issues, exploitations, caring and therapeutic tendencies, attachment patterns, and co-dependency are some of the constituent parts of parentification" (4).

In the Western representation of the youths in South Asia, such "adultification" or enforced maturity is portrayed repetitively. Sun Jo (*Peak*) and Laxmi (*Sold*) are perfect examples of the adultified children. They do not resist being sent out of home at an early age in order to fulfill parental roles for their siblings or surviving parents. Adultification has, in fact, always been a big problem in South Asia due to widespread poverty, fragmentation of arable land, and overdependence on agriculture. As a result, millions of children's childhood is snatched off from them, first by their parents at home, and then by their employers. Many of these are victimized by the substitute parents, like their masters or bosses. However, instead of highlighting the factors leading to adultification and victimization, Western literature, media and humanitarian organizations tarnish the identity of the whole race with abusiveness. Such acts often render the family poorer as they fail to sustain their economic sources without the support of the junior members of

the family. The issues of sweatshops and the exploitation of Bangladeshi youths in garment factory and Nepalese youths in carpet and tourism industries are some examples of adultified children that have gained media attention in the West.

Another factor leading to adultification is the caste system in Hinduism and gender discrimination in Muslim cultures. In the Hindu caste system, for instance, the so called untouchables were considered ineligible to learn from sacred scriptures until recently. Due to being illiterate, many of the children of these families enter the labor force (as bonded labors in many cases) much earlier than those in upper caste families. And girl children, both in Hindu and Muslim cultures, are expected to take care of their younger siblings, leading to the need to drop out of school to be home for fulfilling caretaking roles. Early marriage is another cause for parentification and adultification. Reluctance to engage in family planning, and polygamy practiced among fundamentalist Muslim communities are some additional factors resulting in unwanted marriages and victimizations. And for the West, these economic and cultural realities become good reasons to highlight the superiority of the Westerners as the rescuers of such children.

Exoticized, Eroticized, and Romanticized Youth

Indomitable mountains and uninhabitable deserts in South Asia have proved to be fertile for Western writers and adventure lovers. In youth literature, these geographical realities serve as spaces for the encounters of the Western agents to get face to face with the native youths and infantilized adults far from Western notions of modernity. For instance, “the metaphor of the desert does not refer to a ‘concrete’ referent but constitutes

a discursive space within which the identity of the colonized is effaced," argues Haddour. "This metaphorical vision of the colonial space as 'wilderness,'" Haddour adds, "enabled the colonizer to penetrate and exploit 'unmetaphorically' the colonized" (103). According to Haddour, "the desert emerged as the symbol of conquest, an empty space for occupation, an ideal which activated a systematic exploitation of a domain in which the colonized was completely 'absent' or assumed 'the fixed status of an object frozen once and for all in time by the gaze of Western percipients'" (103). Haddour's argument also validates Said's definition of Orientalism as a network of European institutions and attitudes sharply delineating an East that is markedly exotic and "Other."

Similarly, In *Tigers of the Snow and Other Virtual Sherpas,* Vincanne Adams critically examines the success of the modernizing apparatuses delivered by Westerners to Sherpas in the high mountains of Nepal.[5] He argues that this examination leads one to the gaze of Westerners, and particularly to Western desires to locate in Sherpas both sameness and differences. Vincanne writes:

> Sherpas are denied the ability to be anything but different from the West – they are traditional, exotic, Other. In the second instance, Sherpa Others who are seen as "modern" are simply deemed mimics of Westerners. In both cases Sherpas are defined by the West. Not only do both perspectives erase the presence of other non-Westerners in Sherpa lives, but both also

[5] The Sherpa is an ethnic group from the most mountainous region of Nepal. They are highly regarded as skilled mountaineers and experts in their local terrain.

> point to the agency of Westerners and the lack of agency of Sherpas in the construction of their own identities. (67)

Similar to the young Sherpas like Sun Jo in the mountains in Smith's *Peak*, the inhabitants of the deserts, like Shabanu's family in Staples's novels, serve as the "exotic Other" for the Western self.

Generally, the exoticization of the Third World is a common phenomenon that Said and other critics of Orientalism have long emphasized. The Western writers writing about the experiences of SA youths widely exoticize non-Western children. It is the Other that needs to be known and then tamed for the ego-fulfillment of the Western self. The desert and the mountains need to be known, named, and conquered. They are not fertile for the production of food crops, but they are extremely useful for the production of the exotic images of the non-West. Therefore, the pristine world of South Asia and the children and youths in the region have been used as exotic lands and species for the Western "enlightened" souls or "superior races" to make adventures for finding themselves. The stories of Western youths making trips to India, Pakistan, or Nepal and returning home mature are often repeated plots in these narratives. Western Bildungsromans use this pristine, exotic world for the purpose of Western youths' adventures. *Peak* is an example of the Western youth novels set in the exotic non-West. The writing of the SA diaspora also follows more or less the same trajectory. The way these authors represent the SA youths growing up in the West, and travelling to their home countries for growing up, also attests to the Western hegemony and exoticized as well as romanticized images of youths in South Asia.

Conclusion

SA youths are alienated at home and "alienized" in the West. In the first place, the aetonormativity practiced globally renders children as entities that need to be trained to become adults. SA youths are no exceptions to this reality. They are further alienated by the Westernizing tendencies of their parents. Once they move to the Western countries, they are alienized and ostracized for their differences. As immigrant children, they have to adopt the strategy of becoming Western or at least acting like the Western youths at school, whereas they are expected to behave or act like SAs at home. This trapped childhood among the contradictory forces often leaves them confused. Who do I want to be like? What do my parents want me to be, successful in the West or resistant to Western values and fashions in order to fit into my SA family and community? If adolescents try to adapt in the West, they are considered to have become too Western, and if they act like SAs at school, they are considered "aliens."

CHAPTER II

WRITING THE OTHER WITH BENEVOLENCE: POSTCOLONIAL WESTERN NARRATIVES ON SA YOUTHS

> If identity could be thought of as a space, then the Sherpa identities presented in this text, and my own identity as author of this text, might be described as heterotopias. Like Foucault's mirror, my text is the place where I am reflected in the Sherpas I write about who are on the other side of that text and those identities. But whereas Foucault's mirror reflects in one direction, the mirror between me, as a Westerner, and the Sherpas permits reflected visibility between different onlookers. It is in texts such as this that Sherpas also discover their manifold virtual presence, in which their own identities are affirmed and denied. (Vincanne Adams 40)

As discussed in the first chapter, myths of "veil," "sati," "caste," and "untouchability" are throwbacks that continue to define South Asia in Western literary and cultural discourses even in postcolonial contexts. The young adult novels of Staples, McCormick, and Smith, written during the last three decades, carry on the colonialist ideology of Third World women and children waiting for the benevolent gesture of the West to be rescued from the cruelty of their husbands and fathers. In her groundbreaking essay on this form of colonialism, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak coined the expression "white men saving brown women from brown men" to describe the British

abolition of *sati* in the nineteenth century (50). According to Spivak, saving brown women, from the practice of widow burning in particular, and other abuses in general, became a part of the civilizing mission that justified the need to perpetuate colonial control over most countries in the subcontinent of South Asia. Spivak writes, "This benevolent first-world appropriation and reinscription of the Third World as an Other is the founding characteristic of much third-worldism in the U.S. human sciences today" (43). Thus, both European and American perspectives to South Asia concur to the point that SA women and children must be saved in spite of themselves. As Spivak suggests, the Western fantasy about South Asia has not significantly changed, in spite of the Empire's retreat from the sub-continent more than a half century ago. In this chapter, I am concerned with SA youths represented in postcolonial Western literature who are the victims of patriarchal ideology, aetonormativity, and/or the cultural hegemony of the colonial West. Created as exceptions among other "natives" of similar age-groups, these youths are entrusted to confront local discourses with their semi-Westernized subjectivity, even to the point of suicide.

Even in today's global political economy, such warfare of image formation and cultural construction of South Asia as the inferior Other of the West has remained unchanged. In fact, it has increased with the recent growth in the production and consumption of young adult novels in the United States. Failing to provide unbiased impressions of South Asia and the West, these novels continue the ideological constructions of the Westerner as the benevolent self and SA youths as the Other by exoticizing, eroticizing, infantilizing, and romanticizing them as I discussed in detail in

the earlier chapter. In what follows, I will analyze the imperial logic of writing "the Other" as an act of discovery, liberation, protection, and civilization of the "docile," "dubious," and "deprived" youths from South Asia observed in the discourses of Western novels. I will focus my analysis particularly on the clash of global and local discourses, and contradictory knowledge flow in the heterotopic image formations of SA youths in selected young adult novels by postcolonial Western authors.

Alienation at Home: Foreign Self in Local Body

The Lacanian schema that "desire is the desire of the Other" and "the unconscious is the discourse of the Other" necessarily entails that the human subject is a social subject (qtd. in Thormann 299). Janet Thormann uses this model to explain how the subject identifies with the lacking object and thereby tries to attain an impossible jouissance (299). Likewise, Bruce Fink asserts that Lacan identifies jouissance in two orders: one before the subject's entry into the symbolic order, "corresponding to an unmediated relation between mother and child, a real connection between them," and another that is "refound in fantasy, in the subject's relation to the byproduct of symbolization: *object a*" (87). The first order of jouissance means "what comes to substitute for the lost 'mother-child-unity,' a unity which was perhaps never as united as all that since it was a unity owing only to the child's sacrifice or foregoing of subjectivity" (87). The second order of jouissance "takes the place of the former 'wholeness' or 'completeness,' and fantasy – which stages this second order jouissance – which takes the subject beyond his or her nothingness, his or her mere existence as a marker at the level of alienation, supplying a

sense of being" (87). Entering into social exchange through language, Thormann explains, desire pursues an object beyond whatever would fulfill the subject's immediate needs, its satisfaction never adequate to the love it wants (299). As language takes form by excluding the thing, the lacking substance of complete enjoyment, or jouissance, it is covered over by the object of drive, the *object a,* that is detached from the body. Due to this absence or gap, and the prohibition imposed by the local nationalist or cultural discourses, the subject wants to be what the lacking Other desires. Coats attests, "At the level of language, we attempt to overcome our finitude by installing what Lacan calls "master signifiers." "These master signifiers work by suggesting plenitude; their signifieds are impossible concepts of wholeness" (Coats123).

In an increasingly global economy, the master signifiers of the dominating international regime "infiltrate local cultures and economics, introducing new ideals for identification and new forms of coercion and reinforcing established forms of injustice" (Thormann 299). The global discourse, because it has the power to determine forms of social exchange "universally," enters into the unconscious processes of subjects everywhere to construct desire. In this context, I want to begin by demonstrating the way in which the evolving self of a youth becomes the meeting point for local and international discourses where the subject's desire for jouissance is always postponed. I will problematize the models of subject formation suggested by these authors for resolving the problems without going into the nuances of the specific cultural context where these youths are growing up. I argue that the ideological emphasis on Western ideals and justification of foreign intervention embedded in outsiders' (Western)

representations of the Third World cultures still reinforce the imperial logic by interpellating the Third World youths to break free from the "repressive" local discourses.

Globalization has left hardly any part of the world untouched. The young generation, even in the rural areas of the subcontinent of South Asia, has been introduced to multiple ways of responding to their desires – individual, familial, and cultural. Judith Slatter contends, "Traditional patterns of behavior for young people, and what is expected of them by the adults, are in a state of flux, and in more open societies, adolescents are emerging as a powerful force for influence and growth in Africa, Asia, and Latin America" (xiii). But these influences and the choices globalization offer do not come without costs. Western representations of SA youths often fail to see the darker side of the impact of the Western modernity and the infringement of Western values seeping into the lives of these youths through multiple channels.

Leaving aside the desires created by the transportation, communication, and entertainment industries, even the activities of "well-meaning" social workers (like Staples and McCormick because they went to South Asia as development workers) confuse SA youths about what they should desire for. When the ideal image of a grown up constructed by the local cultural discourses contradict the images promoted by Western cultural and literary discourses, the life of these youths becomes further vulnerable. *Shabanu, Sold,* and *Peak* all present such clashes between global and local discourses in terms of the protagonists' economies of desire. They are excellent examples of Arjun Appadurai's understanding of the global economy's infiltration of local

economies of desire, consumption, and political power, as they show "the ways in which local historical trajectories flow into complicated transnational structures" and represent "the nature of locality as a lived experience in a globalized, deterritorialized world" (52, 65). In these novels, the infiltration of global discourse renders hybridization of identity among the protagonists. In their portrayals, the mutually contradicting cultures find reasons for justifying the superiority of one over the other. The female or the feminized male SA bodies become the manifestations of the disjunction between local discourse and rebellious Western ideals. After all, most Western young adult novels acknowledge the power of adolescents as rebellions in spite of their common ideology that demands for regulating that power.

Shabanu in Staples' trilogy becomes aware of what her chief desire as a Muslim girl should be right from the beginning of the novel. She knows for sure that she will not be able to live peacefully if she cannot bear a son, nor will she be able to transgress the normative local discourses of gender and patriarchy easily. As early as twelve years old, she overhears Auntie's discriminatory remarks on Mama, "If God had blessed you with sons, we wouldn't have to break our fingers over wedding dresses" (3). It becomes obvious to Shabanu that her birth as a girl has been enough for the impending abuse and discrimination that she could lessen if not avert completely, only by giving birth to a son. The genesis of her unconscious desire for a son, manifest in her prayers for Phulan, is the desire of the Other, first of her mother who had to face the hardships of living without sons, and then that of the society as a whole. Partial fulfillment of this desire is made when Mithoo, a baby camel, is born out of a mother suffering from a probable snakebite.

After being pulled out from the dying mother's womb, and rejected by other nursing camels, Mithoo relies on Shabanu, the substitute mother. Shabanu says, "He follows me closely, as if I am his mother" (17). One must note that Mithoo grows "enormous in a month, all white curly fur, big round feet, his head as high as my own" (20). The desire for whiteness, or all that it stands for, is instilled into Shabanu's unconscious by the author (a white American), perhaps to award this exceptional child with a son who could free her from patriarchal domination, at least in a level of fantasy. Thus, Shabanu's struggle against local discourse of patriarchy with the ideological support of the "universal" discourse of gender equity, implicitly inscribed in her identity, begins right from the beginning of the novel. She becomes an alien at home with all those gestures that contradict with local cultural norms.

Since then, the local discourse of gender discrimination and arranged marriage is reinforced with stories she hears one after another. As Coats suggests, "In every culture, individual subjectivities and desires are constructed, constrained, and contained within and through the stories the culture tells" (122). The story of the Bugti girl running away from her parents and her potential abuse, the story of Auntie Sharma and her daughter Fatima living as outcasts, the story of the Muslim child abused in Channan Pir, and the story of Anarkali's sacrifice are only a few examples of gender discrimination and consequent victimization that sow the seeds of rebellion in Shabanu's unconscious. Along with them, the author goes on instilling in Shabanu Western worldviews. Right from her first exposure to the city life in Sibi Fair, Shabanu begins to display her preference for Western values in the way she supports her father. She does not want to be

confined to the women's space imposed by the age-old Muslim culture. As if a veil is nothing but a burden, she says, "I try to imagine myself a veiled woman with a family of my own. A shiver steals across my shoulders" (50). Clearly, there is an intrusion of the global (which is synonymous to Western, since globalization is primarily a Western phenomenon) discourse in her evolving identity.

In most other events that follow, Shabanu acts like a Western woman, confident, independent, and adventurous such as she does during the sale of camels, the desert storm, her grandfather's death, and so on. By the time Shabanu witnesses the predatory advancement of Nazir's party toward Phulan, she challenges the opponents, the male and the rich, an entirely unthinkable act for other women in her culture. "We are not tenants," Shabanu says, "You have no claim over us!" (155). Finally, Shabanu becomes ready to take any risk for breaking herself free from the discourses of aetonormativity, Muslim orthodoxy, and male chauvinism.

> "I'll go to live with Sharma," I say, and Mama's slap sends my head flying and my eyes reeling.
>
> "Shabanu," she says, her face harder than I've ever seen it before, "you are to say nothing more. It is done." (193)

With Sharma's counsel, Shabanu begins to talk about "choice," "rebellion," "pleasure," and "curiosity" (208-09). The climactic scene of local discourse clashing with global discourse takes place toward the end the novel when Shabanu runs away from home under the spell of Western ideology of freedom from the savages. She says, "I keep waiting for the enormity of my flight to frighten me or to make me sorry – knowing that

I'm letting Mama and Dadi down, that Murad could lose his farm, that I could be caught and beaten" (236).

Even till this point, Shabanu's inner conflict is between the desire of her own (though this desire is the desire of the Western author imposed on the non-Western character) and that of the others in the family. She is worried about Mama, Phulan, Dadi, and Murad, the young man to whom she has been betrothed. At the same time in a typically Western fashion she says, "I am letting Mama and Dadi down," at which point the discourse of the Other – the global master discourse – intervenes at its fullest. The final scene in *Shabanu*, when she is being beaten by Dadi whose "fury is like Tipu, bloodlust in his eyes," is so significant that Staples wants to use this scene to evoke a feeling in her implied readers to sympathize with Shabanu (240). Dadi's sobbing with remorse serves the purpose of poetic justice; however, Shabanu is not herself at this point. She is carrying out the desire of Sharma, whose voice whispers in her ear, "The secret is keeping your innermost beauty, the secrets of your soul, locked in your heart, so that he must always reach out to you for it" (240).

All in all, Shabanu's suffering is not only caused by patriarchal Muslim cultures, but also by the infringement of the Western ideals that defer her jouissance. She has run away on a camel followed by no one but Mithoo, her "white son" born without having to sleep with the brutal desert men like Rahim, or Murad who fails to speak even a single word in her favor, and instead, agrees to marry the girl that was engaged with his deceased brother. Phulan astonishes Shabanu as he readily accepts the new arrangement, clearly an act of submission to local discourse. Shabanu's subversive act, however,

further complicates her life. Her obsessive desire for the life of wholeness where her own desires also count (in fact, the desire created by the master discourse that she has "introjected" as her own) interpellates her to challenge the desire of the local other. As Coats puts it, "Since the 'Real,' this 'pure life instinct,' is what has been perceived as lost in the coming into being of the subject, the subject obsessively seeks to recover it through the introjection of certain objects that act as representatives of this wholeness" (81). To me, Shabanu is in search of freedom, the *objet petit a*, that she has allegedly lost along with her birth as a girl in a Muslim family in the deserts of Pakistan, a kind of "uncharted territory" since the book does not provide any reference to British colonial rule in the region. I will return to this notion of history slightly later.

In any case, Shabanu's decision for an escape – in mimicry of a rebellious Western young adult – poses more problems than providing solace to her unsettled adolescent self. Deterritorialized from the identity structure offered by local cultural discourse, Shabanu's choice jettisons her away from her repressive culture but fails to chart a reliable alternative for landing her dreams. The Western ideals she has inherited from the people like Sharma engender dreams of liberation, but eventually, she has to face the reality that stings her awake. Her self-sacrifice for the sake of Mithoo provides a clear hint for the readers, of what is expected from them, the foreign intervention to rescue this poor young woman. Staples does not fail to manipulate the common ideology of young adult novels that the power of rebellion in young adults should be regulated if they are to attain moral agency. However, one should not forget that Staples wants Shabanu to break free from this "repressive" Muslim culture, and at the same time, does

not want her to fall into the grip of Sharma, the typical "Oriental" woman (as depicted in Orientalist texts) who uses subtle subterfuge as a solution to social problems. In this context where the state and legal machinery are portrayed as non-existent, Western readers cannot wait for a foreign intervention to materialize, at least partially with the entry of Omar (the American university graduate) in the novel's sequel, *Haveli*.

McCormick's *Sold* is another novel constructed in the similar Orientalizing mold. Based on her research in Nepal and India, where she "interviewed the women of Calcutta's red-light district and girls who have been rescued from the sex trade" (as stated in the blurb published in the novel's cover page), McCormick weaves the story of Laxmi, who is sold in the brothel of Calcutta by her stepfather for a meager sum of 800 Nepali Rupees (about ten dollars with the current exchange rate). Here, Laxmi has an obsessive desire for "home." With the death of her father, and her mother's remarriage to a man who is addicted to drinking and gambling, Laxmi knows that her mother's desire for a safe home with a protective male figure remains ever unfulfilled. Following the existing cultural discourse of a complete "home" with a male figure, Ama has been bearing with the good for nothing husband. "'Even a man who gambles away what little we have on a fancy hat and a new coat,' she says, 'is better than no man at all'" (McCormick 38). In order to gratify this desire of her mother for a home with a "tin roof" and "enough food and clothes for the family," Laxmi becomes ready to leave "home." She consoles the mother horrified with the proposal of sending her away, "'If I go, you will have money enough for rice and curds, milk and sugar. Enough for a coat for the baby and a sweater for you . . . . Enough, for a tin roof'" (49). Clearly, Laxmi's primal desire is nothing but

the desire of the (m)other, who is also given an equal status with "home" and "heaven" in Nepalese culture, and this desire is exactly what makes her so blind that she loses her power of reasoning and chooses to alienate herself from home.

Hailed by the evolving (global) culture into the ideology that a daughter should develop independence, the voice of the oppressor becomes Laxmi's voice each time she comes across the chance to escape from being sold. When Bajai Sita, the local shopkeeper (local agent of the girl-trafficker) says that her family will get nothing if she does not obey her new auntie and asks if she understands it, Laxmi says, "I don't. I don't understand at all. A great deal of money [about ten dollars] has just been paid for work I have not yet done. *But I nod*" (emphasis added, 54). When Uncle Husband, the trafficker, wants her to tell the "bad border men" that he is her husband, Laxmi remembers the "pretend game" she used to play with Gita and obeys the trafficker sincerely as if it was also nothing more than a pretend game. Krishna, the fantasized image of a husband in her childhood game, is temporarily substituted by the trafficker. As the border man asks by pointing at the fake documents, "Is this your husband?" she makes a positive gesture (79). In this way Laxmi's desire becomes one with the desire of the other, which ultimately results in her being sold for 10,000 rupees to a brothel in the city of Calcutta in India (106).

Even within the oppressive space of the brothel, Laxmi and her fellow victims become influenced by the Western master signifier of "freedom." In a country where the Bollywood movies and dozens of television channels dominate the imaginary of young adults, the girls are allured by the American TV show *The Bold and the Beautiful* in spite

of their inability to speak English (136). Laxmi also learns a few English words from Harrish, the David Beckham boy. By the time an American man comes for her rescue, she has already started to identify with the television images. However, due to the repetitive encounters with devilish "Oriental" men, she becomes suspicious of the American who visits the brothel in the guise of a client. Perhaps, to avoid the gesture of racism, McCormick creates a drunken man speaking English who also visits the brothel. However, Laxmi's ultimate rescue is made by the American as if neither Indian nor Nepalese have moral power to fight such social evils. Only in front of him does Laxmi give her introduction in the language she has learned from the David Beckham boy:

> I see my American. There are other men with him. Indian men, and the American lady from the picture.
>
> *"My name is Laxmi,"* I say.
>
> *"I am from Nepal.*
>
> *I am fourteen years old."* (Emphasis in the original, 263)

Thus, aligning with an alien identity becomes the only solution for Laxmi to escape from the tortures in the brothel. The circularity of the events demonstrate that the global discourse of freedom and white man's saving grace frees her not only from the barbarous men at home, but also from the grip of the abusive women in the brothel.

Exoticization and Romanticization of SA Youths

The exoticization of the subcontinent of South Asia, its peoples, and cultures is one of the common strategies found in Western literary discourses. In her comprehensive

analysis of the exotic, Dorothy M. Figueira maintains that the "exotic" offers an initial signification of "foreignness" (1). Figueira suggests that the exotic exerts a special force that can be strangely or unfamiliarly beautiful and enticing. Besides other purposes, "[t]he exotic also provides a fertile base for philosophical, religious, and literary speculation and serves as an exemplar justifying preexisting cultural trends" (2). Figueira rejects the postcolonialists' claim that there is the "disturbing" hidden agenda of consolidating the hegemony of the "Euro-American man" behind the exoticizing tradition in literature on South Asia. I do not totally disagree with her claim that exoticism primarily concerns itself with the "privileging of other cultures, where the exotic not only is fetishized but also empowers" (2, 10). However, setting a fiction in an exotic space or focalizing it around characters from other cultures does much more than merely giving space for them in literary discourses, which Figueira highlights as the chief purpose of "exoticization." I borrow Figueira's argument to argue that there is always an ideological underpinning in these exoticizing narratives on SA youths and the empowerment logic appearing on the surface further complicates the identity of the subject being portrayed.

In the present novels written in the Western tradition of bildungsroman, either the author or the protagonist makes an expedition to South Asia as a sort of "exotic quest." Wild topographical terrain, formidable mountains, and almost uninhabitable deserts become preferred settings for these narratives. Likewise, narrow streets, favela-like communities, and unplanned urban settings, presented as evidences of the mimicry of Western urbanization by these "irrational" "Oriental" minds, are juxtaposed with the pristine rural settings waiting for the Western modernity to scribe their existence. The

rural landscapes are populated by innocent or uncanny people characterized by their poverty, superstition, and nomadic life styles, whereas the urban dwellers are mostly depicted as mimics of Western modernity, characterized by corrupt politics, dubious commercial motives, and malicious intentions. These authors strip their native protagonists, mostly the subalterns, of their nations' political histories to justify why the natives are inherently barbarians and need to be civilized in Western fashion. Spivak maintains, "If, in the contest of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (41). Shabanu and Laxmi are the female subalterns whose political histories are almost erased from the novels on purpose.

It is evident that Western authors need these settings to quench their own exotic quest for self-understanding. As Figueira writes, "When people who are world-weary or have lost faith seek a new system of belief in the exotic, they travel farther from home than the ordinary seeker for Self or Truth" (13). The texts they produce about these exotic lands, peoples, and cultures as Others, which Foucault describes as "heterotopic spaces," become two sided mirrors wherein the virtual images of both the authors as well as the represented natives become visible (qtd. in Adams 39). Just as the natives try to shape their identities under the gaze of the Westerners, the Western authors encounter with the fantasy image of the West (their own) in the eyes of the natives. In this situation, the authors either try to challenge the stereotypes, or become complacent with the images of superiority and then gear their work toward consolidating those images. Thus, as Said argues, writing the Other also becomes an act of writing or revising one's own self.

Metaphors of desert landscape, vegetation, and animals are dominantly employed to describe humans in Staples' trilogy of *Shabanu, Haveli* and *The House of Djinn.* Most of the events in the trilogy take place in the desert of Cholistan in Pakistan that merges with another desert called the Thar extending across Pakistan and into India. This geographical space seems to have been very liberating for the voyeuristic eyes of the implied author. According to Haddour, "the metaphor of the desert expresses a feeling of expansion; it provides a geographical space for the Western ego both to experience the essence of liberty and to feel the nobility of being" (74). Shabanu's family hardly knows anything about the history of British colonialization. However, they are aware of the invasions made by Mughal emperors, as evinced by the Derabar fort which Shabanu's family passes by in their seasonal movements from one settlement in the desert to another.

The remnant of history, handed down by Grandfather, is made vague and disjunctive by the loss of his memory, which is clearly deliberate. Megan Lynn Isaac writes, "For Grandfather the many centuries of the region's history have become one great story. He recalls a river that hasn't flowed for centuries and mixes up the battles of one empire with those of another" (20). This fragmented history renders complete oblivion to the era of British colonialism which did not end without fracturing the colony in South Asia into India and Pakistan in 1947, and Bangladesh in 1973. The narrative gap suggests that the residents of this area were suffering due to being neglected by the local rulers, not by British colonizers. For instance, the Abassi Prince "kept seventy wives in richly decorated underground cells" like prisoners (Staples, *Shabanu* 38). Staples adds, ".

. . willingly or unwillingly they lived their lives according to the wishes of their fathers and their prince" (38). Relatives of Shabanu's mother (formerly Hindus) were brought to the desert from India by the Rajput prince to build the fort at Derawar. And they were converted to Islam by the ruler called Akbar four hundred years ago. "The Hindu Raja of Bikaner had seized all of Cholistan from Qutb-ub-din, the Abassi general. But we fought valiantly," Grandfather remembers; "We drove the raja back to India and built fort doors higher than trees, with sword blades at the top so his elephants couldn't knock them down. But the camels saved the day!" (94). In fact, Grandfather is confusing the history of Pakistan's independence from India, and is referring to their independence from the British colonial rule, which happened simultaneously. The part of the history under British rule is omitted, on purpose, so as to leave an impression on the readers that there was no role of the Europeans in rendering these poor people nomads. Nandy explains such a colonial logic as follows:

> India's later degradation was not due to colonial rule – which, if anything, had improved Indian culture by fighting against its irrational, oppressive, retrogressive elements – but due to aspects of the traditional Indian culture which in spite of some good points carried the seeds of India's later cultural downfall. (18)

On the pretext of such a downfall, Staples employs other nature-based metaphors as an effective medium to describe the desert people as exotics in the eyes of "civilized" Euro-Americans. To name a few examples: Shabanu wakes up in the morning "shivering like a baby camel" (6), her grandfather's voice is "rough as the windblown sand" (7), and

Dadi's eyes are "as furious as Tipu's" – which is one of their male camels (27). Furthermore, Shabanu describes the breasts of her coming of age sister as "each the size of a camel dropping" (28) and her beauty like "a flower blooming in the desert sunset" (92). She defines the family's prayer positions "like hens laying eggs" (107). None of these metaphors place these desert people above the level of animals. most significant of all, the description of the protagonist as "the daughter of wind," in the subtitle of *Shabanu*, is enough to signify her prelapsarian status, in need of cultural inscription, to become a signifier.

To use Said's argument, such Western textualities about the non-West generate the risk of being viewed in isolation from how these textualities have been received, accepted, modified, challenged, overthrown or reproduced by the intelligentsias of colonized countries (qtd. in Figueira 3). Staples, who worked in South Asia as a consultant to the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), makes truth claims through interviews that her portrayals are based on reality. Staples argues that she learned Urdu, the language of the desert people, in order to get firsthand knowledge. She asserts, "A translator (usually a man) wants to tell you what he thinks the person you're interviewing (especially when it's a woman) should have said" (qtd. in Isaac 8). What fascinates me most is that Staples wants her readers to trust her unquestionably in spite of herself being an outsider to the culture being represented, while she holds no trust in the men belonging to the culture being represented. I do not want to claim that natives are better informants than the outsiders, but as Clare Bradford argues, "such information asserts truth claims that blur the lines between truth, facts, and fiction" (49-50).

One can easily infer that Staples' chief motive is to show patriarchy and violence on women as the main evils that have plagued the lives of these nomads, while years of atrocities perpetrated by Western colonizers does not count at all. All that Shabanu has learned from the desert life and Muslim culture is that men are allegedly superior to women, and are cruel and vengeful like camels. Referring to the Bugti men in search of their daughter who had run away with her boyfriend, Dadi says, "You know, little one . . . these men will kill the woman when they find her" (44). This anecdote is inserted purposefully to foreshadow what is in store for Shabanu's future. As Mohanty argues in such "discursive hegemonization and the systematization of the oppression of the women in the third world that power is exercised in much of recent Western feminist writing" (63). Mohanty writes:

> An analysis of 'sexual difference' in the form of a cross-culturally singular, monolithic notion of patriarchy or male dominance leads to the construction of a similarly reductive and homogeneous notion of what I shall call the 'third-world difference' - that stable, ahistorical something that apparently oppresses most if not all the women in these countries. It is in the production of this 'third-world difference' that western feminisms appropriate and colonize the constitutive complexities which characterize the lives of women in these countries. (63)

In such discursive homogenization, women and girls are just objects of male pleasure, to be consumed or bartered. What best justifies the need for Shabanu's rescue is also expressed with the metaphors of desert animals. "I am not afraid of myself. I feel like

nothing else can ever hurt me again. Like Guluband, I have been betrayed and sold. And Mithoo, like me, has lost his greatest gift by wanting to follow his heart" (*Shabanu,* 239). Metaphors like these, scattered all over Staples' novels, fill the readers' minds with nothing but the desire to revolt against the abuse of women and girls in this region. Ellen Butler Donovan argues that such a style helps to "disorient" the Western readers so that they can come up with a desire to fight such social evils (42-43). However, Donovan fails to observe the dis(O)rienting, or Westernizing effect already imposed into Shabanu.

McCormick also follows suit in her choice of metaphors and images to describe SA women and their plight. McCormick employs animal metaphors and images to show that the condition of women and children (primarily girls) in Nepal and India is hardly better than that of animals, while she portrays men as predators. The women are either helpless or corrupt. When Laxmi is being delivered across the country in "carts," placed along with animals, she says, "I am to sit in the back, in the open, along with the cucumbers and chickens, while Auntie [the merciless agent of the traffickers] gets in front" (63). As the "Auntie" bargains about the price of the girl with the male involved in trafficking girls across the border, they settle on an amount described as "nearly enough money to buy a water buffalo" (75). Besides these animal metaphors, Laxmi's description of the women emptying their bowls at the spot where the train stops is not only of backwardness or animalistic but extremely exotic. "Then, all around me, the women lift their skirts, squat like crows, and relieve themselves on the open ground" (84). These images are tremendously powerful to disorient the Western audience, as Donovan argues in the analysis of *Shabanu* trilogy. Likewise, Laxmi describes the movement of the

innocent girl arriving in the brothels of Calcutta (India) for the first time as "clenching her feet inside her new shoes like a poor frightened bat clinging to a branch" (134). Much worse than that is the way innocent girls like Laxmi are exploited by the owner of the brothel by forcing them to offer themselves to strangers for thirty rupees, "[t]hat is the price of a bottle of Coca-Cola at Bajai Sita's store" (146).

McCormick's metaphors are also powerful in showing the alleged gender bias among children and the inhuman treatment of the returnees from brothels in her portrayal of poor Nepalese societies. She writes, "A son will always be a son, they say. But a girl is like a goat. Good as long as she gives you milk and butter. But not worth crying over when it's time to make a stew" (8). No matter what his character is like, a man in McCormick's representation of Nepalese society is considered to be the symbol of power in a family. Laxmi's mother says, "Even a man who gambles away what little we have on a fancy hat and a new coat . . . is better than no man at all" (38). But if a girl returns home after going through untold sufferings in Indian brothels, she is despised for bringing disgrace to the family. When Monica comes back to the brothel, she describes how the father who walked with the support of the cane she had sent. "He needs a cane," she says. "But he is still as strong as a goat." Showing angry purple bruises in her arms and shoulders, Monica complains, "He did this with his cane" (193). The fact was that Monica's own father who was walking with the aid of the cane she had sent him had beaten her for the disgrace she had brought to the family. It becomes unbearable to Laxmi when Monica reveals that she was not even allowed to meet her own daughter, who was told in her absence that "Monica was dead" (194). All these metaphors and descriptions

are put together to justify the need for intervention from outside, by deleting the history of struggles against women trafficking that have been and are continuing to take place at local and bilateral levels in the sub-continent.

Smith, on the other hand, concentrates on the exotic landscape of the Himalayas, the animals, and the Sherpa tribe inhabiting the villages surrounding Mt. Everest. Whenever Peak, the young adult narrator, finds something that does not match with his fantasy image of Nepal and the Nepalese, he resorts to exoticization. For instance, as he finds Zopa handing a bundle of notes to his grandson, Peak comments, "I didn't think Buddhist monks were supposed even to look at money" (58). Likewise, to Peak, the urbanization of Kathmandu is far beyond the image of Nepal he had. He encounters the exotic Nepal of his mind only after he leaves Kathmandu. He observes, "Away from the city, Nepal was everything I had imagined to be. Beautiful valleys, rustic villages, fields tilled by oxen-pulled plows, all against the backdrop of the massive, sparkling Himalayas" (62). This Western first person narrator describes the porters as truckers. "A good way to understand what the porters do for a living is to think of them as Himalayan truckers. The only difference is that their trucks have legs instead of wheels and are fueled by grass instead of diesel" (146). The Base Camp, according to Peak, is "a frozen outhouse/ garbage dump with decades of crap, discarded food containers, and busted gear" populated by corrupt Chinese officials, dubious Nepalese guides, poor and untrustworthy porters (74). All these descriptions create a fantasy land and alien creatures to quench the thirst of the Western audience for an escape from quotidian life in the Western metropolis.

On the contrary, the representative Western characters are portrayed as civilized people who serve mankind in spite of the "savage" natives and trying material circumstances. Besides, Western representatives make expeditions and explorations for name and fame as compared to the need for climbing to make a living for the natives. For instance, in *Peak*, the spirit of sportsmanship and entrepreneurship is specifically Western characteristics to boast of. Peak interprets the reason for his climb as a hobby, whereas it is a necessity for Sun-jo, his Nepali counterpart, to fund the education of his sisters. As Said argues, "Orientalism depends for its strategy on this positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand" (90). In other words, the West organizes knowledge in ways flattering to the Eurocentric imagination. For a Western reader, the sacrifice Peak makes ten feet below the summit of Everest, for the sake of Sun-jo, needs no exaggeration. Could Sun-jo make it to the summit without the aid of Peak? Did Peak, the teenager who grew up in New York, really have superior skills and perseverance than Sun-jo, the Sherpa? Why does Sun-jo not reject the idea of being the youngest man on top of Everest at the mercy of this foreigner? Couldn't he be satisfied by just setting a national record as the youngest Nepali on Everest? The narrative closure to these kinds of questions deserves a serious scrutiny.

Just as the landscape and culture become exotic to Peak, and the Western audience, the sacrifice on the part of Peak just ten feet below the summit of the highest mountain in the world is unusual for Nepalese climbers. Peak's benevolent gesture reiterates the colonialist ideology where intervention from the West is made

indispensable if the future of the women and youths in this region is to be secured. It is depicted in such a way that Sun-jo's sister's future will be jeopardized without Peak's support. Hence, Peak's sacrifice becomes an act of renunciation of fame comparable to renunciation of worldly pleasures and palatial comfort by the Buddha –surpassing the Buddhist monks like Zopa – as if Peak has attained "nirvana" by climbing up the mountain. It seems as though poor Sun-jo fails to fathom the depth of that sacrifice, Peak narrates, "Sun-jo stared at me like I was crazy, and maybe I was at that moment, but the decision I had made during the last few feet felt right" (230).

The philanthropic gesture of this adolescent hero who was abjected by his own society in New York, not more than a few months before his ascent to the summit of Everest, is overplayed. He has grown up to be a modern Buddha, much greater than any of the monks he encounters on the way to Everest. Sun-jo, however, does not show any sign of growth. He is just the recipient of support and object of knowledge being produced and disseminated by global media. Peak scribes the new page of the history of Everest expedition as he captures the moment of Sun-jo's being on top of Everest as the youngest man in its record. It is Peak who records the historic moment as the narrative goes, "When they reached the summit of the highest mountain in the world they took off their masks and smiled and waved for the camera" (231). Sun-jo's smile is far from being the expression of triumph. He becomes just a foil in Peak's journey to self-understanding, which he describes in a philosopher's tone of voice. "The only thing you'll find on the summit of Mount Everest is a divine view. The things that really matter lie far below" (246). Here, it is worth invoking Figueira, who says, "Exotic quests

presuppose a belief that culture provides its citizens with a right to spiritual and aesthetic compensation" (136). Western culture provides Peak this privileged position of being one who is capable of sacrifice. Just as Sagarmatha (Nepali) or Qomolangma (Tibetan) becomes "Everest" after the Western act of naming it, Peak's benevolent action names Sun-jo as the youngest man in Everest.

Contradictory Knowledge Flow and Heterotopic Image Formation

Considering the paucity of books for young American readers about SA children until the turn of the twentieth century, these authors' representations of the subcontinent must be acknowledged. Donovan writes: "*Shabanu* and *Haveli* offer particularly useful examples of the kinds of complexities involved in cross-cultural novels – that is, novels that seek to represent an unfamiliar culture to readers" (30). However, it is equally urgent to ensure that children do not get skewed knowledge about other peoples and their cultures. The "knowledge" in these novels flows through contradictory channels. While the paratextual elements such as maps, glossaries, appendices, and bibliographies reinforce the pretense of historical accuracy, the characters and events portrayed in the texts are almost completely stripped of their histories of colonial encounters, nationalist movements, and subtle neo-colonial interventions. The painful history of the SA people's struggle against Western imperialism and their ongoing struggles against marginalization and silencing do not count in these Western authors' representations of communal violence, family feud, and discriminations based on race, class, caste, gender and ethnicity. As stated earlier, these people are portrayed as innocent and docile, or

conceited and corrupt. Irrespective of their ages, what is most visible in the Western eyes is their gender.

Talking about the Western treatment of the Afghan people in a slightly different context, Mariam Cooke writes, “The rhetoric of empire conceals race, ethnicity, and class so that gender becomes these Afghans’ major defining characteristic. Politics in the era of U.S. empire disappears behind the veil of women’s victimization” (469). This notion is also true to the context of most other nations in the subcontinent, just as Cook puts it: “Citizens of the civilized world have a universally acknowledged duty to save Afghan women” (469). In the Western representations of “veil” and victimization of women, national borders do not become significant. Staples’ trilogy that somehow blurs the border between Pakistan and India serves exactly the same purpose. Shabanu says, “Sometimes our animals wander across the border, and when I go to fetch them I look hard to see how it differs from our Pakistan. But the same dunes roll on into India, and I can’t tell for certain exactly where Pakistan ends and India begins” (10). The border between Nepal and India in McCormick’s novel exists only as a weak administrative structure easily passable for cross border traffickers of young women from Nepal to India Smith’s novel, on the other hand, shows that national borders hardly matters for businessmen like Josh. However, Peak describes the Chinese people using different stereotypes than he does while describing the Nepalese. He focuses on the presence of the oppressive state in every sector in China. Captain Shek, a metonymic representation of the Chinese government, is depicted as a constant threat to all the climbers. Likewise, “The soldiers nearly dismantled the truck looking for contraband. They didn’t find any,

but they did manage to steal some of our stuff in the process. Food mostly. But no one called them on it" (Smith 65). In the context of Nepal, however, the state is almost non-existent.

All these contradictions work together to reinforce the polarized images of the civilized West and anarchic or authoritarian non-West. The Westerners and their agents, like Staples and McCormick themselves, are portrayed as kind, rational, altruistic, and non-discriminatory. This logic of empire prevalent in these books goes exactly along the line of U.S. government's logic for the rescue mission of Afghan women in the aftermath of September 11. Cooke rightly comments:

> Imperial logic genders and separates subject peoples so that the men are the Other and the women are civilizable. To defend our universal civilization we must rescue the women. To rescue these women [and children] we must attack these men. These women are to be rescued not because they are more "ours" than "theirs" but rather because they will have become more "ours" through the rescue mission. (469)

Staples' novels were written before the attacks of September 11 and McCormick's and Smith's novels at least five years after. However, novels like these play a significant role in creating western public opinion justifying Western intervention in this part of the world. I see hardly any change in these authors' works than the European tradition of writing about the "sati" in the eighteenth century. "When she escapes death with the aid of a man, the man is either a pariah who has nothing to lose or a European who is empowered by reason. . ." (Figueira, *Exotic,* 37). As the rhetoric of widow burning has

become obsolete, the women or feminized men, like Sun-jo in Peak, are "saved" from poverty and abuse (such as untouchability, women trafficking, child labor, and forced recruitment of women and children in warfare) only with the aid of the Americans empowered by a Christian missionary ethic or a Euro-American logic of modernity. Are all SAs Hindus and Muslims and are all the societies there oppressive? In the same way, are all the Westerners White and Christians and are all of them Orientalists? Nandy comments, "None of them is true but all of them are realities" (xiv). To me, such polarizations are neither true nor useful for world peace. Authors representing cross-cultural encounters must rise above such polarizations and stereotypes.

Staples' Shabanu and McCormick's Lakshmi straddle Western and SA world views in spite of the authors' repetitive attempts to thrust them into the category of docile Oriental women. On the one hand, they possess the potential for change, the ability to transform their allegedly "inherently deficient" societies; while on the other hand, they fail to take action in opportune moments. Shabanu could escape with Omar when she seduces him in the Haveli. But due to her questionably Oriental weakness, "a desert woman's desire to return to desert life," she lets the opportunity pass by. When Rahim is killed and Omar is wailing like an animal in pain, he says about Shabanu, "For as many seconds as I live on earth, you will always be in my heart" (*Haveli* 307). Observing this all from a secret location, Shabanu "wanted to run to him and fold him into her arms, as she had wanted to do with Mumtaz," but she does not do so (307). On the surface, Shabanu's act is portrayed as a sacrifice for the sake of her daughter; nevertheless the underlying motive is clear. In spite of his Western education, Omar cannot be trusted

fully as he bears the same Oriental blood as his uncles. Likewise, Shabanu's inclination for the life of the desert doesn't allow her to embrace the world of freedom because, as Cooke writes, she is not "ours" but only could have become "ours" for the Westerners as if "freedom" is something available only to Westerners (469). In like manner, Laxmi fails to accept the offer from the American missionary to help her escape from the miserable life in the brothels. "This pink man is the first man here to ask my name, but I don't give it to him" (203). Laxmi's calculated decision deserves appreciation considering the potential danger in case Mumtaz, the brothel owner, became suspicious of her actions. However, the scene is equally influential in fixating the image of an inferior Oriental woman in a subtle way.

Sun-jo in *Peak*, however, readily accepts the offer for support from his American co-climber because he is primarily portrayed as a docile object for the Western gaze. All that the readers get to know about Sun-jo, the feminized native, is made available through mediation by the American implied author. The readers never get any chance to listen to Sun-jo's say, as his voice is completely silenced. Along with Peak, readers are expected to wonder at the level of Sun-jo's communicative skills in English. Peak says, "His English was better than mine. He had kind of a British/Indian accent. Mine was kind of a Bronx/Cody, Wyoming, accent – which did not sound nearly as cool or refined as his" (55). It seems as if English becomes natural only if spoken by Euro-Americans. It becomes just "cool" if spoken correctly by a native. Linguistically, there are no signals to express the sense of wonder, but the readers are led to believe that Sun-jo was certainly trained to speak English to "become a Sherpa," a false expression, used by the author in

spite of the fact that one becomes Sherpa by birth, not by training. Sun-jo was educated in Northern India, possibly Darjeeling, which is a district known for its quality education since colonial times (54). This is a clear indication that Sun-jo's family is not poor and his education was not preparing him to be "a Sherpa," a porter in the author's sense of the term. Thus, the knowledge about the whole Sherpa tribe comes in a more skewed form into which Sun-jo tries to mold himself. As Adams argues in my epitaph for this chapter, in front of the Westerner, Sun-jo "permits reflected visibility." It is in Peak's narrative, that Sun-jo also discovers his manifold virtual presence, where his identity is "affirmed and denied" (Adams 40).

None of these novels fail to promote the image of America as a dreamland and Euro-Americans as demi-gods. Peak appears as a living manifestation of the Buddha in front of Sun-jo, especially on the summit. Josh, Peak's father, is portrayed as a rock star. "Men, women, trekkers, mountain climbers, old and young, gathered around Josh like he was a rock star (no pun intended). He signed autographs and answered questions until the concierge, politely but firmly, dispersed the crowd" (48). In *Sold*, Laxmi learns from Harish, the David Beckham boy, that "David Beckham is some kind of a god" (McCormick 165). And, the countries like Britain and America become dreamlands, almost like Heaven for these ill-fated women, while their own home country has turned into hell. McCormick writes:

> Everyone there is as rich as a king.
>
> The birds there are big as men.
>
> They eat a sweet treat made from snow.

> And the children play the kicking game with the black-and-white ball, like the one on TV. (174)

On the other hand, Mumtaz, the mistress, has spread a rumor about the Americans shaming the runaways in the street. “The Americans will try to trick you into running away, says Anita. Don’t be fooled. They will shame you and make you walk naked through the streets” (142). In spite of this rumor, the American’s presence is always cherished. “I am afraid, all of a sudden, that he is leaving. I wish there was a way to say something, to keep this American here a little longer” (247). Laxmi finds even the memory of the American’s presence empowering. “Now, while I wait for the American to return, and the men come to my bed. I clench the sheets in my hands, for fear that I will pound them to death with my fists. I grit my teeth, for fear that I will bite through their skin to their very bones” (254). Similarly, the women sold to the brothels watch American television programs like *The Bold and The Beautiful* while waiting for clients and wonder at the life in that part of the world. These images juxtaposed with the scenes of the brothel are enough to uplift the image of the West as the narrative does not provide any brighter side of India and Nepal in the whole book.

Portrayal of urban dysfunction is another aspect of empirical logic in colonial discourse. The description of Kathmandu in *Peak*, the city of Calcutta in *Sold,* and Rahimyar Khan in *Shabanu* are perfect examples of the failure of modernity in the hands of the natives. Opposed to Laxmi’s initial fantasy of the heavenly city based on Auntie’s description, she says, “I am afraid of this city where the lying-down people look like the dead. And the standing-up ones, like the walking dead” (88). Peak describes Kathmandu

as a “noisy, grimy, and polluted” city burying the image of Kathmandu as a city of “temples” replete in tourist magazines. “My eyes burned and I started choking as soon as we stepped outside the airport” (Smith 46). Certainly, the cities described in these novels are not clean, planned, and rich like New York where Peak comes from. However, since the readers do not get to know anything else about these cities, the available descriptions provide singular images directly relatable to Western children because they match exactly with the stereotypes about the Third world they get from popular media. How can these images provide realistic pictures of the people and places? Ignoring all this, they use terms from local languages, dropping them now and then, to add an impression of authenticity.

Questioning the authenticity of information in *Shabanu,* Nodelman and Reimer comment, “The combination of the foreign term, marked by its italicization, and the explanation . . . read as an exoticization of a culture different from the one the implied reader is assumed to be part of” (176). However, critics like Donovan deem this type of criticism to be “superficial and unjust” (34). Donovan argues that Staples’s use of the foreign words is to show how her strategy contributes to “a genuinely disorienting reading experience,” which also helps “to dislocate her readers from their own habits of thought and vision” (34). Donovan’s observation is that “no character in the novel can easily be identified as the author’s mouthpiece” (36). I am surprised by the way Donovan fails to read Omar’s American orientation. Sharma, Fatima, and the Christian lady who tutors Mumtaz in Haveli are all the characters who bear Western world views in some ways in spite of the lack of a single mouthpiece. Besides, Shabanu is clearly depicted as

an exception, unlike a desert girl, as she rationalizes every event in American ways. She is "freedom-loving, active, and adventurous" as compared to other women (Mama, Auntie, Phulan, etc.) who are allegedly content with the constraints that limit their freedom and self-expression (Bradford, "Representing Islam" 51). On the contrary, Bradford asserts that "the West is also powerfully present in *Shabanu* and *Haveli* since . . . these novels present a view of Muslim women seen through 'Western eyes'" (50). Here, Bradford is indicating the American viewpoint observed in the first person narration of Shabanu's life. According to Bradford, "a key strategy in Staples's novels is the construction of protagonists treated as exceptional within their cultures and hence as more 'like us' than those homogenized women with whom they are compared" (50). In addition to this dispassionate criticism, I also agree with Bradford when she says that Sharma is represented as "a wise woman in touch with the natural world and endowed with cunning and 'feminine' wiles that enable her to evade patriarchal orders" (51). The depiction of her familiar use of such strategies of deception and subterfuge is clearly a representational mode that accords with Orientalist stereotypes of Oriental women as subtle and devious.

Smith also relies on the rhetoric of exceptionalism while representing Zopa, Sun-jo's grandfather. Just like Sharma in *Shabanu*, Zopa is represented as a native who uses subterfuge to get his grandson involved in the expedition, to compete with Peak. The young adult narrator observes each and every activity of Zopa with suspicion. "His arm and calf muscles (what I could see of them beneath the hem of his orange robe) were well defined and powerful" unlike his mental picture of a Buddhist monk (57). Peak uses

Zopa's secret about his relation with Sun-jo until they get to the Base Camp as a testimony for his subterfuge that also attests to the Orientalist representation of the native. Unlike other native characters like Sun-jo, Gulu, Yash, etc., Zopa has an exceptional power with which he can predict weather, plan the expedition, and outwit Chinese officials. After Sun-jo ascends to the summit of the Everest and sets a new record with Peak's sacrifice, Peak is surprised to see the note left by Zopa at the Base Camp. Peak wonders at Zopa's power to predict what Peak had done. He exclaims, "How could Zopa possibly have known what I was planning to do? *I* didn't know what I was planning to do until I was ten feet away from the summit!" (emphasis in the original, 234). It seems as if Zopa had already visualized who would make it to the summit when he said, "You can never tell who the mountain will allow and who it will not" (142). In spite of acknowledging the power of Zopa, Peak describes him as a "cagey monk" (84).

Eroticization vs. Politicization of Sexuality

Introducing the evolving sexuality and rapidly changing body image at the time of puberty is one of the major aims of adolescent novels. In *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature,* Trites argues that adolescent literature is often an ideological tool used to curb teenagers' libido (85). Drawing on Michel Foucault's theorization of the discourse of sexuality and the distinction between Western and Eastern cultures in terms of their approaches to sexuality, Trites maintains that teenage sexuality in Western culture is defined in terms of deviancy (87). Thus, one of the chief

ideologies of adolescent novels, where sexuality becomes a site of power, knowledge, and pleasure, is to regulate teenagers' sexuality. Trites writes:

> . . . [A]dolescent novels that deal with sex, whether they are obviously ideological, usually contain within them some sort of power dynamic wherein the character's sexuality provides him or her with a locus of power. That power needs to be controlled before the narrative can achieve resolution. (85)

As a sign of maturation, an adolescent is expected to learn something from the experience of sex, for the representation to be acceptable (102). Following this expectation, Western adolescent novels depict sex as a rite of passage, whether it occurs as a matter of pleasure or not. Adolescents not only learn about their body and gender roles through their encounters with erotic atmosphere, virtual or real, but they also assert agency through sexual intercourse (100). Trites adds, "Adolescents use their sexuality to attract other people, to dominate other people, to submit to other people, to enjoy other people, to manipulate other people, to communicate with other people – in short, sexuality is a way for them to engage the Other" (115). Focused on the Western tradition of representing sex in adolescent literature, the book does not speak about the power of sexuality in discourses involving colonial/ postcolonial encounters. However, I am fascinated by Trites' notion of sexuality as a medium for the adolescents "to engage the Other." In what follows, I will consider the novels I analyzed above in terms of how they handle the erotic. Do they project sex as an elitist act of indulgence or as poor people's, especially young adults', acts of politics? Or do they portray the erotic in the manner of the Western

young adult novels as teenagers' exploration of his or her body and sexuality? I aim to see the nature of "Love laws," to use Arundhati Roy's terms, that govern sexuality in the cultures being represented, and causes and consequences of transgressing those "Love laws" (Roy 168).

In Staples's *Shabanu,* sexuality is primarily an act of violence perpetrated onto the female body, either for a male's sadistic pleasure or for procreation and birth. Often described with animal metaphors, a male enjoys the power of sex either to quench his animalist lust or to take revenge from the opponents. In an arranged marriage, the newly married couple, irrespective of their ages, are expected to involve in sexual intercourse and conceive a child, preferably a son. Most of the paraphernalia for marriage are there to ensure conception on the first night of the wedding. "'It's jasmine oil. You must rub Phulan with it in the days before the wedding,' Bibi Lal tells Mama. 'Add some cumin, and her skin will be fragrant and smooth and golden.' Phulan blushes with pleasure" (149). The newly constructed cottage for the bride and the groom is filled with fertility signs. "Kulsum paints a fish for fertility. Her hand deft and sure. . . . I paint camels for wealth and hand the brush to Mama. She paints a row of lines with arms and legs and appendages that indicate the sons she wishes for Phulan" (149).

For the lack of formal or informal education about body, sexuality, and hygiene, growing up in the desert communities as portrayed in the novel entails learning about their body and sex roles by observing the activities of animals or human males who have been depicted metaphorically, in animalistic terms. The first time Shabanu becomes aware of sexuality is when she observes the mating of camels. "Tipu nudges the object of

his desire and she shies away. He trots beside her as if he owns her. . . . All pretense of protest gives way, and with a quick flick of her tail, she kneels down" (22). As Shabanu observes them mate, she begins to rationalize it. "I wonder if it's the same with humans. Do females want to be owned? I steal a look at Phulan and she knows what I'm thinking. She bursts out laughing" (23). Phulan is completely innocent and is lost in the dreams of what is to come in her life after the marriage, but Shabanu rationalizes everything like a Western young adult as if it is necessary for her character with Western tinge. I do not mean to say that to rationalize is to be Western and to be innocent is to remain Pakistani. But Shabanu's way of rationalizing events is exceptional given her material condition and educational level. Foreshadowing the events in Shabanu's life, the narrative goes, "Each herd has one dominant camel. Only he mates with the females. The others must suppress their ardor. If a young camel challenges the stud, they fight to the death" (23). Described as *shutre keena,* or "camel vengeance," the author informs her readers through the mouth of the protagonist that "in the desert, men aren't so different from camels" (30). Thus, Staples describes the nature of sexuality among desert people as a male privilege and female suffering or subjugation. Aetonormativity is a powerful means to contain the younger ones' desire for sex. Even if the husband dies young, the females are expected never to remarry, but not vice versa. Kulsum, whose husband Lal Khan was killed young, expected to "be a widow forever, and her grief shows always, even when she smiles" (148). In this regard, Staples is manipulating this cultural reality in order to build up her argument that unless the young girls like Shabanu are rescued, they will be bound to face the fate of Kulsum.

In Staples's novels about South Asia, women's bodies are objects of pleasure for the rich and powerful men, to be consumed, enslaved, or offered to guests as gifts. The sexuality in girls has the power to attract men, and wealth, as Trites indicates (115), but to no avail for the freedom of these women. When Shabanu's family arrives to Mehrabpur to prepare for Phulan's wedding, the two sisters encounter the hunting party of the landlord called Nazir Mohammad, who approach them like predators. As one of them tries to seduce her for sex, saying "We'll pay you handsomely – land, jewelry, money, anything you like" (154), Shabanu remembers what Mama had warned them dozen times.

> Nazir Mohammad, the landowner, has hunting parties. He offers each of his guests a girl, usually a tenant from his land, for the time they are with him. When the man is finished with her, he gives her cash and sends her back to her family. Some people are grateful for the money and are willing to forget the indignity. But Hamir and Dadi won't, I'm certain. (154-55)

Staples does not go into the details about the financial status of those people who just become "grateful for the money and are willing to forget the indignity." Shabanu has a very high opinion of her father and the man she is supposed to marry. However, this means nothing in front of the power of the landlords. Her father becomes ready to offer Shabanu to Rahim, who was "old enough to be [her] grandfather," for all the things he has offered to give, in addition to helping to settle the matter of Hamir's murder (191). In the absence of the state and legal machinery, Rahim manipulates the situation for satisfying his desire for younger women, in spite of having three wives already. Here,

Staples does not miss the opportunity to portray feudalism as another stereotype about South Asia. Although her portrayal is based on actual practice, it is interesting that she also seems adamant to employ each and every stereotype about the Third World in her narrative.

Bearing a son is so important in this culture that all preparations for wedding are made in such a way that the newlywed bride will be ripe to conceive a son on the very first night of their wedding. They feed the bride with proteins of all kinds and groom her body with fragrances so as to enable them to conceive a son. All prayers are targeted to the same purpose. The family prayer in front of the sentinel over Channan Pir's mound of rocks, however, is ironic. It is the place where the Hindu raja had taken his infant child out into the desert and thrown "him onto a mound of dirt, leaving him to die in the wilderness," simply on the pretext of a Bokhari's prophecy that "a child conceived by one of his wives, a Muslim, will grow up to be a Muslim saint" (105). As the child was saved by a magnificent cradle carved of fragrant sandalwood descended from heaven, he "grew into a wise and gentle man, beloved of all people of the desert, Hindu and Muslim both" (106). The place where the child was thrown, now the shrine of Channan Pir, is considered as a holy place where "women pray for sons and good marriages for their daughters" (91). Shabanu's family offers prayers in this shrine for sons to Phulan and Hamir.

Women in this culture are under the influence of the patriarchal ideology so much that there is a lot of intra-gender discrimination in terms of who bears a son and who does not. "Auntie takes every opportunity to show Mama how superior she is for having borne

Uncle two sons" (108). Failing to bear sons is a disgrace, enough for a woman to be considered a witch. Sharma has had to lead the life of a single mother simply for not bearing a son. And Fatima is "a double disgrace" because "at sixteen she isn't married, doesn't want to marry, and Sharma has no intention of forcing her to marry" (97). Shabanu's responses to these issues are very subtle. Donovan contends that Shabanu's own nuanced perspective further opens "interpretive space" for Staples' Western readers. Without making a final judgment, as seen in Shabanu's hesitation, Donovan argues, Staples allows the readers to come to their own conclusions (43). How can young adult audience come up with their own conclusions, especially with regard to unfamiliar cultures? Donovan's expectations that Staples' trust in readers, "despite their status as children" to "engage new perspective and experiences" and generously exercise their imaginations to witness Shabanu's experience" is far-fetched (43-44).

The best example that Donovan cites to show that Staples uses a disorienting strategy is the last scene of *Shabanu* when Dadi violently beats Shabanu because she has run away from her impending marriage and confinement, including the veil. Commenting on this act of breaking the social boundaries, Donovan argues, "Readers using an American perspective will likely find the ending problematic" (42). She expects that American audience will be urged to escape from, disclose, and seek help for abuse (not as Shabanu bears with the beating), to oppose arranged marriage (not to accept it as Shabanu is likely to fall into), and not to give up the opportunity for independence and self-definition (as Shabanu misses the chance). To me, this is deliberate in the Orientalist

discourse of *Shabanu,* where the authors use some sample instances from the Third World to justify the need for Western intervention.

McCormick's major theme, the trafficking of young women across the country for prostitution is a rare topic in children's literature. If we look at it from the perspective of its power to disorient Western children and young adults, the novel's implied audiences, it is much more influential than *Shabanu.* Instead of going into the details of its reception among Western youths, which can be a topic for a separate study, my concern in this section is the literary representation of the Nepalese youths in the book. I am interested in the way McCormick handles the contentious topic of sex trade in literature for children. McCormick's book presents a grim picture of the region where human dignity seems to be out of question.

Childish and Childlike Indians: Infantilization and Criminalization of SA Youths

Childhood was an important ingredient in the making of empire, race and nationhood. While the European child served as model, measure, and foil, the native child was either of the two: the criminalized child from the margins of native society or the effete child of the decadent aristocracy (Sen 1). In the context of colonial India (which also included present Pakistan and Bangladesh), reformatories, boarding schools, and authoritative books were energized implying that children were essentially "small, perverse adults." Sen suggests, "The juvenile was thus produced as a deviant and the children's institution as a failure" (1). Some of the colonizers even claimed to have "discovered" the "native child," whereas, for others, the expression was an oxymoron,

because they believed that the term “native” contained the notions of “childlike” or “childish” nature in itself (1). This logic provided legitimacy to the colonizers to carry on their “child-saving” project in their colony from mid-nineteenth century till the end of the empire in mid twentieth century.

Ashis Nandy also explicates that colonialism picked up the modern ideas of growth and development popular in Europe in the eighteenth century, to draw a new parallel between primitivism and childhood (15). According to their theory of progress, it was the responsibility of the adult to “save” the child from a state of “unrepentant, reprobate sinfulness” through proper socialization, and help the child grow towards a Calvinist ideal of adulthood and maturity (Nandy 15). Nandy says, “What was childlikeness of the child and childishness of immature adults now also became the lovable and unlovable savagery of primitives and the primitivism of subject societies” (15-16). Therefore, the colonizers adopted separate strategies to deal with children by grouping them into two categories. On the first category were the young and even adult natives considered as the “childlike Indians,” who were “innocent, ignorant but willing to learn, masculine, loyal, thus corrigible,” and they could be reformed through “Westernization, modernization or Christianization”; while on the other hand, there were the “childish Indians,” who were “ignorant but unwilling to learn, ungrateful, sinful, savage, unpredictably violent, disloyal and, thus, incorrigible” and they needed to be repressed by “controlling rebellion, ensuring internal peace and providing tough administration and rule of law” (16). Thus, it became the duty of the European male adult to “complete the picture of a world where only the adult male [European] reflected as

reasonable approximation of a perfect human being" (16). With this ideology, the colonizers set to work to reorder Indian culture by "revaluing the traditional Hindu orientations to the male and the female," and coping with the "modern concepts of mature, adult normality as opposed to abnormal, immature, infantile primitivism" (18). Colonial literature about SA children and adolescents reinforced the spirit of colonialism and its "civilizing mission" which can be observed in most of the work of Rudyard Kipling. Therefore, Nandy puts it, "Kipling's idea of the effeminate, passive-aggressive, and 'half-savage-half-child' Indian was more than an Anglo-Indian stereotype: it was an aspect of Kipling's authenticity and Europe's other face" (38). Scrutiny of the truths in such claims was unthinkable.

In the introduction to her book, *Africa in Literature for Children and Young Adults*, Khorana attests that postcolonial Western literature still carries on the colonial bias by focusing on the superiority of Western civilization (xxii). The white characters are "do-gooders" who serve selflessly, Khorana argues, while the governments of Third World countries are portrayed as "dictatorial and unconcerned with human rights" (xxii). Although Khorana makes this comment with reference to Africa, I find it applicable to the novels on South Asia by the postcolonial Western writers like Staples, McCormick, and Smith that I have dwelt on in this chapter. Staples has constructed the character of Shabanu in the mold of the "childlike Indian" who appeared to be "corrigible" at the beginning. Staples uses all her authorial control to correct Shabanu by Westernizing and modernizing her in the first novel. However, Shabanu resists modernization and Westernization as she grows up. Staples' implicit efforts to Christianize her become

fruitless. In fact, Shabanu represents the ambivalence of the author who seems to be unsure whether she wanted Shabanu to become a telescopic image of a SA young woman or a mirror image of an American youth growing up among the nomads of Pakistani deserts.

Smith, on the other hand, constructs Sun-jo in Kipling's model of "effeminate," "passive-aggressive," "half-savage-half-child" Western youth who goes native. Although Sun-jo is not an "Anglo-Indian" like Kim, Sun-jo is a "semi-civilized" youth, educated in Western style but docile, dubious, and submissive like a "native" youth under British colonial rule. Unlike the Orientalist portrayal of a stereotypical SA child, poor, untouchable, or deserted "pariah," Sun-jo is the product of globalization. He was born in Tibet but illegally smuggled into Nepal by his father. "I was five when my father managed to get my mother and me across the border into Nepal. I am a free Tibetan" (Smith 131). Ki-tar Sherpa, Sun-jo's father, is employed by Peak's father, the American trekking businessman until Ki-tar dies in his effort to save the life of his boss, in one of the expeditions.

It seems like Smith is trying to create a fictional image of a Sherpa as described in Adams' ethnographic study of the Sherpas in his book *Tigers of the Snow and Other Virtual Sherpas* (1996). Adams also went to Nepal to write a book not as "traditional" ethnography of Sherpas but as a book that would permit reflected visibility for both the subject and objects of his representation. Adams clarifies, "My focus is not on Sherpas but on their relationships to people like me who choose to write about and 'represent' them" (25). It is worth quoting Adams'methodology at length.

> This ethnography is about the whole problem of locating "truths' in a world where truth is made impermanent by seduction – a seduction through which Sherpas become visible to Westerners and through which Westerners come to know themselves through Sherpas. I have chosen to write an ethnography of encounters rather than an ethnography of Sherpas because I want to highlight the way in which seductive representations of Sherpas . . . have become mixed up with Sherpa identities today. I want to highlight the way in which Sherpas and Westerners seduce each other, intertextually and extratextually, making my method a sort of ethnographic mimesis with my experiences of Sherpas – a creative imitation of real life, inevitably making it more real than reality itself. (25)

Unlike Adams' analysis, Smith's portrayal relies more on the logic of white man's supremacy where a juvenile delinquent, who is supposed to be in a juvenile detention center convicted with "criminal trespass, vandalism, reckless endangerment" (Smith 19), becomes a saintly figure who sacrifices everything that would come with the fame of being "the youngest man on top of the world" for the sake of a native. Doubtless, Smith prepares his Western readers to believe that Sun-jo would not reject the offer. Sun-jo's "trademark grin" (130) suggests that he is one of the porters who would collect "the leftovers from our camp and put it in theirs" (145). The narrator explains, "Reaching the top would save Sun-jo and his sisters" (230). As I argued earlier, whether Sun-jo really needs that money for his sisters, and if he is really happy on becoming famous with the act of kindness from a Westerner is a different question. Whether Sun-jo really deserves

to be “saved” or not can be the topic for another research . Peak, however, needs Sun-jo to accept the offer at any cost in order to testify that a white man is superior to a brown man.

McCormick, however, builds Laxmi’s character exactly as a ready child that waits for the “saving” gesture of a Euro-American from the “barbarous” males who exploit women taking advantage of the “anarchic” political environment. As portrayed in the book, there is almost no existence of government, except the reference to the inefficient “border men” (79) and corrupt police personnel who raid the brothel for money (159). “‘Is that man a goonda [thug]? I ask Shahanna. ‘He’s worse,’ she says. ‘He’s a policeman.’ I don’t understand” (159). Respect for human dignity and human rights seem to be out of question in this part of the world. At home, these girls are hungry and made to work on the farm; in the brothels, they are consumed like commodities. If they resist, they are beaten, burnt with cigarette butts, or tortured by putting chili powder in their private organs. Once they get old, they can neither continue to remain in the brothel, nor return home where they are rejected. What happens if a child is born in the brothel? They are used as a trap for their mothers. “What would Mumtaz want with a child? McCormick writes, “She will maim it – cut off a hand, a foot – and sell it to a beggar woman. . . . Softhearted people will give an extra rupee or two if you have a sick baby” (167). Horrified by such stories, these women are forced to continue with the abusive life in the brothel.

It seems like there are no organizations to help them by providing care and rehabilitation. In her Acknowledgements, McCormick admits that she was assisted in her

research by the organizations like Maiti Nepal, the Apne Aan Women's Center in Calcutta, Deepika Social Welfare Center for Women, and Children in the Red-light District of Calcutta. But her narrative does not mention anything about the existence of these organizations. To me this is deliberate on the part of the author to support the logic of her "child-saving" project where an American, with some Indian men and women as assistants, rescues Laxmi from the barbarity of the "Indians" a term often used for all the people in the subcontinent. As children, her Western audience would not generally bother to see if any paratextual information contradicted the facts used in her fiction. What they know is that "Indians" are either effete or sexual predators from whom the women and children need to be rescued.

McCormick makes her characters speak about the grim world outside the brothel, even worse than inside. Sahanna says, "Out there, you're no better than a dog. . . . Here at least we have a bed and food and clothes" (115). At one point, Laxmi laments, "I am torn and bleeding where the men have been. I pray the gods to make the hurting go away. . . . No one can hear me. Not even the gods" (125). How can she expect support from these people who veil their wives, sell their daughters, and visit brothels to gratify their lust? Some of the people that visit the brothels pay a higher price for the "pure one" because they think having sex with a virgin "will cure their disease" (196). After all, the maturity of these men's body does not count while their activities show how "childlike Indians" they are in Sen's terms.

Conclusion

Postcolonial Western literature on SA youths is an emerging field in the criticism of children's and young adult literature, replete with a plethora of problematic issues such as the authenticity of representation, a contradictory flow of knowledge, and many clashes between local and global discourses. The novels of McCormick, Staples, and Smith portraying the encounters between SA and Western worldviews pertaining to growing up, marriage, education, gender relation, child abuse, etc., not only bring SA youths to the limelight for the Western audience, but they also carry on the old imperialist ideology of the West occupying the subject position of the Self and the non-West as its inferior Other. Each of the novels analyzed above has its own concerns and strategies in handling West/ non-West relations. Therefore treating this group of novels as a monolithic Western approach to the SA would be an injustice to their contributions. Nevertheless, the way they homogenize SA peoples and cultures in their representations and justify the need for foreign (especially Western) intervention leaves any avid reader with questions such as: Is imperialism over yet? Is globalization a revised version of neo-colonialism? Do the texts like these contribute to reducing the gaps in terms of race, class, gender and nationality? In the next chapter, I will analyze some postcolonial diasporic novels to see how they respond to these and other relevant questions by referring back and forth to these novels as contexts, or contrary texts, for that matter.

CHAPTER III

WRITING THE VIRTUAL SELF (BACK AND FORTH) WITH VENGEANCE: DIASPORIC COUNTER-NARRATIVES ON SA YOUTHS

> "I have had more mothers than most mothers have children; giving birth to parents has been one of my stranger talents – a form of reverse fertility."
>
> (Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* 243)

In this chapter, I am looking at SA diaspora authors writing from different parts of the West. Their visions of the diaspora are very different, depending on the causes and consequences of immigration, generations in exile, genres of writing, settings of the novels, and their intended audiences. Among the novels analyzed in this chapter, Hidier's novel *Born Confused* set primarily in New York celebrates hybridity and migration in pursuing the identity quest of Dimple, the second generation immigrant youth. Rushdie's two fantasies *Haroun* and *Luka*, focused on young protagonists, navigate between Western and non-Western fairytales in portraying the young protagonists' responses to separation and death in the family. Desai's *Inheritance* set both in India and the United States is very critical of globalization and diaspora. Unlike them, Selvadurai's novel *Funny Boy* fully set in Sri Lanka deals with the coming of age experience of a youth who discovers his queer sexuality amidst humiliation and torture in postcolonial Sri Lankan society. Along with the cultural political turmoil in postcolonial Sri Lanka, the development of the theme of sexuality in the novel is equally prominent. A common

pattern among all these novels is that they all resist the tendency of promoting some values at the cost of others as observed in most of the Western novels on SA youths analyzed in chapter two.

Although these novels are primarily marketed to the western audiences, they differ in the age groups they are targeted for. As *Funny Boy* and *Born Confused* are geared toward youths, they follow the Western tradition of bildungsroman. The target audiences of *Haroun* and *Luka* are debatable because of the intensely allusive nature of Rushdie's language and content. Although Rushdie admits that he wrote *Horoun* for his son Zafar who grows up as an immigrant youth in the West, its readability is a matter of doubt for both Western and non-Western young audiences. *Luka* also follows the same pattern as a sequel to *Haroun*. Desai's *Inheritance,* however, is primarily geared toward adult audiences, but the novel also deals with a lot of significant issues pertaining to growing up in South Asia. Likewise, some of the characters located in South Asia are Westernized due to the legacy of earlier British colonization, while others are disOriented by the neo-colonial interventions of the West in their lives in South Asia. The diaspora characters are by nature trapped between the SA home cultures and the Western cultures of the outside world. By considering all these similarities and differences, this chapter will present a mapping of the identities of SA children and young adults in the discourses of SA diasporic writing.

Coming of Age in/of Postcolonial Diasporic Literature

The discourse of diaspora originally found its expression in the Jewish context, by emphasizing the discourse's power to provide a fitting alternative to territorialized notions of Jewish identity. As a noted postcolonial critic Bed P. Giri reminds us, postcolonial diaspora theory, however, came to prominence only in the 1990s, presenting the displaced subject as "a bearer of radical political sensibility" (215). This recent development, Giri argues, "disavows loyalty to territorial homelands, posits the experience of displacement as a source of political radicalism and epistemological insight, and more often than not, represents exile movement, and deterritorialization as a pursuit of self-empowerment and freedom – however unattainable these goals may, in fact, be" (216). By revising the classical meaning of diaspora as a condition of "catastrophic" loss and dispersion to "be lamented and, if possible, avoided altogether," diaspora is now being "recuperated as an alternative site of sociality and belonging, marked by mixed peoples and cultures, transgressive poetics/politics, and de-centered subjectivities" (216). In this chapter, I will briefly introduce postcolonial diaspora theory and then examine some SA diasporic novels as a counter-discourse to the colonializing literary discourses examined in the context of youth literature in the second chapter.

In the concluding section of *Culture and Imperialism*, Said famously theorized postcolonial diasporic writing as a hopeful counterpoint to the ongoing processes of colonialism and imperialism (326-37). Bhabha also studied specific aspects of postcolonial diasporic culture including art, cinema, literature, and music as important sites of radical or utopian political sensibility. In his essays, Bhabha represents hybridity as a tool "in the armory of counter-discursive politics – an insurgent sign that troubles the

trappings of hegemonic authority while hiding safely in the semiotic border zone called the interstitial space" (*Location* 38). Rushdie summed up this line of thought in the phrase "the empire writes back with a vengeance" (Giri 217). On the other hand, Arif Dirlik blames these postcolonial critics for having "mystified the ways in which totalizing structures persist in the midst of apparent disintegration and fluidity" (352). However, Dirlik acknowledges that "[n]ew diasporas have relocated the Self there [Third World] and the Other here [West], and consequently borders and boundaries have been confounded," especially since the nineties (356). Nevertheless, diasporic authors have played a prominent role in bringing the concerns of the Third World into global academic discourses.

Observing the phenomenon of SA diaspora authors and critics coming into the limelight in the United States around the turn of the twentieth century, Makarand Paranjape argues that SA postcolonial literature has "come of age." "What happens when a minority suddenly comes of age?" he adds, "It becomes globally *visible*" (emphasis in the original, 53). Paranjape observes that this global visibility of the SA diasporas is fueled by "the comprehensive rise of the expatriate or diasporic Indian and, at long last, the Government of India's interest in these people" (54). Although Paranjape is primarily talking about Indian diasporas, his argument also applies to other SA diasporas. Paranjape's metaphor of "coming of age" is pertinent in my study of diasporic literature about SA youths because not only does it reveal the liminal nature of the genre, but it also brings to light the revisionist and transformative power of postcolonialism as an epistemological tool, like the rebellious and resilient power contained in the youth, the

formative stage of our identities. If youths are driven by a desire to transcend institutionalized social structures, diaspora authors are characterized by their transcendence of national and cultural borders. Their experiences of split identity, the sense of dual belonging, and at times alienation from both locations – home and outside, become problems and at the same time empowering. In their writings, diaspora authors make strategic use of the cultures of home and host countries in creating a syncretic counter-discourse to singularizing colonialist and nationalist discourses. Diaspora youths, in these discourses, are both empowered and disempowered by this doubly liminal status.

Like the youth, the diasporas also construct, and are constructed by, the sociopolitical milieu they live in. Many young generations have the tendency to challenge established cultures as dated or repressive, while adults perceive youth cultures as deviant and transitory. However, people belonging to the two sides of the borders of age, though often blurred, do not completely detach themselves from each other; they rather complement each other in the process of growing up. Likewise, in the recent context of globalization, diaspora people and the people of their home and host countries complement one another (Paranjape 46). This reciprocal relation explains why the governments of host countries keep on revising their immigration policies according to the changing patterns of the people seeking immigration. In the same way, the people of the home countries are fascinated by what is happening outside the national borders, just as diaspora people keep themselves updated about the changes in their home countries. Regarding the relationship between diasporas and homelands, Paranjape points out, “It is not just the homeland that creates diasporas but that diasporas also create the homeland”

(46). Adesh Pal also agrees that these authors "*help* the homeland in its regeneration and transformation" no matter which country they are from (emphasis added, 127-28). Both Paranjape and Pal suggest that diaspora authors significantly contribute to the process of constructing SA identity from abroad.

Diaspoic representation and postcolonial criticism, however, have not always been "regenerative" for the homeland. Dirlik argues, "Postcolonial critics have engaged in valid criticism of past forms of ideological hegemony but have had little to say about its contemporary figurations" (356). Dirlik goes on to say that ethnic societies rarely enter into this discussion, let alone being affected by it (337). Likewise, postcolonial criticism focuses primarily on the over-valued diasporic intellectual (San Juan Jr. 278). Figueira even blames postcolonial critics, mostly those based in the West, for constructing the theoretical priority of the margin "in order to establish a location of power from which they themselves most directly benefit" (*Otherwise Occupied*, 47). To me, this phenomenon should not be portrayed merely as a problem, because the discourse of the diaspora has also contributed to the Western people in their understanding of themselves and the world.

In this context, we cannot underestimate the contribution of diasporic literature in the construction of SA youths' identities. My selection of Rushdie's *Haroun*, Hidier's *Born Confused*, Desai's *Inheritance,* and Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* will provide examples of who gets to be visible in these texts, why and how that visibility affects the young SA readers' process of growing up as SA at home or abroad, and what images of these youths are left on the minds of young Western readers. In what follows, I will engage

some recurring patterns, motifs, and ideologies by dwelling primarily on the diasporic consciousness represented in these texts. By diasporic consciousness, I mean what Kapil Kapoor calls "the absence of belonging" manifest in their handling of seven primary concerns pertaining to diaspora experience, namely, memory, return, strangeness, desire to integrate, transience, desire for permanence, a sense of belonging and embedding (39).

Arguing that diaspora experiences vary according to the context of migration sounds somehow obvious. However, in postcolonial diasporic literature, the term "context" bears both its literal sense and metaphorical intertextual connections. Examination of intertextual elements in these texts will reveal the authors' ideologies, especially in terms of "writing back" to the neo-colonialist or nationalist discourses. In his introduction to *The Arnold Anthology of Post-Colonial Literatures in English,* John Thieme invokes the power of postcolonial literatures to "interrogate Eurocentric conceptions of culture" which is possible only if we read them as "con-texts" (l). Thieme suggests that we "locate the postcolonial works in broader *contexts* than those offered by the apparently determinant *pretexts* for writing provided by their English 'parents'" (emphasis in the original, 4-5). Besides the need to contextualize or historicize these texts, Thieme emphasizes the need to study them as "con-texts" in relation to imperialist "pre-texts." "Although 'con-texts' is a term that may suggest oppositionality," Thieme adds, "it is used to refer to the full range of discursive situations (contexts), many of which have little or nothing to do with the canon, from which the counter-discursive works emerge" (2001, 5). Paranjape elaborates Theime's concept of "context" which

does much more than refer to those cultural, economic, social, and other factors that surround a text. Paranjape writes,

> That is the normal meaning of the word context . . . a context is also a *contrary* text. You see, like a pro-text, or a pre-text, this is the con-text. If so, what are the contexts of this diasporic text? I would say there are two kinds of contexts. One is a text by an Indian English writer who is actually living in India. . . .The second context is what I would call the vernacular writer. (58)

Thus, if Western texts work as contexts or "pre-texts," postcolonial diasporic texts become "con-texts" or contrary texts. In this sense, the postcolonial novels produced by SA home authors can be considered "contrary texts" for diasporic writing because, besides other concerns, home authors often "write back" to both Western and "Westernized" (diaspora) authors' constructions of South Asia.

As examples of diasporic "con-texts," the novels of Rushdie, Desai, Hidier, and Selvadurai facilitate a simultaneous critique of the nationalist and colonialist discourses which rely on the binaries like nation and diaspora, heterosexuality and homosexuality, and adult and young adults, especially found in the representations of SA youths by Western authors ("pretexts"). In this sense, these diasporic novels are involved in the process of "writing back with a vengeance" in order to dismantle the old stereotypes and recreate images closer to the multiplicity of SA reality. In problematizing the notions of "insider's views" on the construction of SA youth's identities in chapter four, I will consider the critiques of postcolonial diasporic literatures for their alleged collusion with

dominant national interests both in South Asia and abroad. Leaving aside the works of vernacular writers for my future project, I will primarily focus my next chapter on the way some representative home authors writing in English negotiate between Western and SA world views.

Identity Narratives: Needs and Challenges for Diaspora Youths

Storytelling is central to identity growth and self-perception, especially in coming of age narratives. As Jeremy Bruner puts it, "it is through narrative that we create and re-create selfhood, that self is a product of our telling and not some essence to be delved for in the recesses of subjectivity" (85-86). Among diaspora youths, the experience of confusions and contradictions that unsettles identity structures sparks the necessity for telling stories. Diasporic literature often depicts the protagonist's need for identity narratives in order to cope with the repetitive experience of the "absence of belonging" while living in exile or being alienated at home. Said points out, "exile, unlike nationalism, is fundamentally a discontinuous state of being. Exiles are cut off from their roots, their land, their past. . . . Exiles feel, therefore, an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives, usually by choosing to see themselves as part of a triumphant ideology or a restored people" (*Reflections*, 177). The novels I engage in this chapter portray the struggles of young protagonists beginning from the moments of disillusionment about the grand narratives like "family prestige," "national glory," "unity in diversity," "multiculturalism," "American Dream," etc., to the point of balance commonly anticipated in Western literature targeted for young audiences.

If we look at the trajectory of diaspora narratives, we see three major phases: separation, movement or dislocation, and relocation in their journey (Kapoor 36-39). Most diaspora youth novels are set in fairly stabilized locations, whether it is in home countries or abroad. As the young protagonists become aware of their self-image as being driven by ongoing struggles for recognition, the boundaries of their identity become gradually ruptured, unbalanced, or dislocated. With the realization of the discrepancies prevailing in the cultural, religious, social, and political structures between two countries, of their old and new homes, they begin to question the narratives that support those structures. Driven by the trauma of separation and struggle against various identity-constricting forces, the protagonists construct new and often hybrid narratives of their own for the purpose of relocating their identities. Insurgencies, separatist movements, terrorist attacks, and racial, cultural or religious conflicts are some of the commonly employed political contexts that destabilize young people's identities in SA diasporic texts. Most authors have very conflicted relationships with the countries of their birth, neither denouncing everything SA as seen in many Western representations, nor approving them as a way to resist the colonial and neo-colonial discourses. Nevertheless, these novels do not strictly follow the linear structure of separation, movement, and relocation. Even if they do, most novels concentrate on one phase and provide brief contours to the other phases for rendering completeness to the protagonist's journey.

Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* primarily deals with the period of awakening and unsettlement of Arjie's identity as a Tamil youth living among a Sinhalese majority, and as a homosexual in the family where such a "deviation" is considered "funny." It contains

minor physical journeys both within and out of the urban locations in Colombo, where Arjie encounters people who question the narratives of Sri Lankan nationalism, heteronormativitity and the remnants of the Westernized education system in Sri Lanka. However, he makes significant departures from restricted masculine spaces, Tamil family traditions, and aetonormative boundaries toward the end of the novel. Gayatri Gopinath, in her incisive analysis of *Funny Boy* and diasporic writing argues against understanding Arjie's presumed homosexuality through largely imported Western categories of sexuality, though such markers may indeed be present in Sri Lankan society (267). Instead, Arjie's narrative journeys possess radically different and distinct significations. Gopinath says, “It is through a particular deployment of SA popular culture that this defamiliarization of conventional markers of homosexuality take place, and that alternative strategies for signifying non-heteronormative desire are subsequently produced" (267). Andrew Lesk, on the other hand, considers Arjie’s struggle against the heteronormative narratives prevailing in Sri Lankan culture as a “queer insurrection” while the nation was ideologically fractured by the Tamil insurgency. Lesk contests that Arjie's attempts at queer insurrection “unwittingly mimic the repressive urges of (emerging) nation states” (33). Lesk writes:

> The queerness that Arjie symbolizes may well be mobilized as an intellectual insurgency by which to reconceptualize (sexual) citizenry and national belonging. Arjie does not, however, act upon the radical nature of his experiences. Though he is, as a youth, relatively disempowered, he

> does behave, up until the time of his expulsion, with an eye to how he can consolidate his prerogatives and maintain at least personal agency. (33)

Above all, Arjie persistently carries on his search for the narratives and signifiers for his emerging identity from the private spaces like his mother's bedroom, his grandmother's kitchen and Jegan's bedroom to more public spaces like family playground, school, his father's resorts and public stadiums, in spite of the challenges he faces in each of these spaces. In assessing the ways in which one might view Arjie's challenge to the status quo, Daniel Coleman sums up, "His is not a single choice between gay, and straight, Tamil and Sinahalese, upward and downward mobility, or colonial subject and postcolonial agent" (10). Unlike in many Western young adult fictions, Arjie does not show any sign of submission at all.

The narrative in Hidier's *Born Confused,* on the other hand, covers only the period of about three months in the life of Dimple, the second generation Indian immigrant youth living in New York. All the major events take place during the summer break preceding Dimple's high school senior year. However, the narrative tries to provide a full circle image of her awakening, struggle, and relocation. In addition to her movement back and forth between the gradually Westernizing Indian culture of home and mixed American cultures outside home, Dimple's journey back to India comes mostly in the form of flashbacks through her mother's memory and gifts from her grandfather. She navigates between the "Indian" culture (s) at home among her parents and relatives on one hand, and complex "American" cultures outside home among her friends on the other, though it is risky to depict each of these cultures as homogeneous entities. The two

mutually exclusive-looking worlds collide into her teenage psyche to the extent of making her feel schizophrenic. Dimple's mother comments on the daughter's condition, "But I know it is not just your fault, she continued. – It is this America – you cannot escape it, like those golden arches everywhere you turn. It is hard to resist it. But if I'd known the price we'd have to pay for this land of opportunity was our own daughter, I might never have left" (Hidier 83).

Unlike the diasporic texts by, and about, first generation immigrants such as *Funny Boy* that highlight the pains of separation, *Born Confused* addresses the concerns of second generation SA teens confused about their split identities. It captures the "exciting multicultural scene" in New York City, where the author lived after college (Comerford 33). Hidier argues that "issues of identity are human issues not unique to one culture. It's like the nightclub scenes. There are all these people of different ages and backgrounds, expressing their individuality through art. But they're all dancing to the same beat" (qtd. in Comerford 33). By the time she was writing the novel, Hidier was actually twice removed from India, the root of the Indian side of her identity. The author says:

> Writing *Born Confused* was a thrill. It was like having my cake and eating it too. I was getting to inhabit my two favorite cities at the same time. I was living in London and writing about New York. On one level, the book is a love song to New York. When I lived there in the '90s, it was exciting to witness how, almost overnight, Indian culture moved from underground to aboveground and became trendy. (qtd. in Comerford 33)

As Hidier notes, such metropolitan locations as New York present a new hybrid space for the encounters of multiple cultures from around the world. Like her heroine Dimple, Hidier's problem is not of lacking a stable location and welcoming home, as observed in many other diasporic texts, but that of being unable to choose between two almost equally important homes, London and New York. In *Born Confused*, Hidier makes a point that the second generation children come to a phase in their lives when they feel the need to explore their roots, through narratives, whether or not their parents show resistance or resilience in the younger generation's quest for roots.

Rushdie's *Haroun* also follows the structure of location, separation, and relocation almost as thoroughly as Haroun leaves the sad city, restores his father's power of storytelling, and returns home to find his family intact. The novella is primarily about the power of stories. According to Andrew S. Teverson, the antagonist named Khattam Shud stands for the archenemy of stories who is obsessed with the desire to establish a univocal interpretation of culture by policing who may and who may not speak, and the story sea, as "living embodiment of heteroglossia and polyphony," is a fluid rebuttal of the politics of exclusion (450). The aim of the novel, clearly, is to reveal the destructive potential of this viewpoint, "by showing how the frenzied pursuit of totalitarian rule results in a society riven with jealousy, suspicion, and mutual mistrust, and by showing how, contrary to the logic of authoritarian rule, freedom of speech and freedom of thought will ultimately create a stronger community" (450). Teverson also argues that the battle waged by the Guppees against Khattam Shud is not just a battle for the freedom of speech – it is also a battle fought over competing ideas of nationhood. Hence, the ocean

of stories is not just a vision of "free narratives" floating vacuously in a world of speech without consequences, it is also "an allegory of a utopian national culture that allows its members to be who they are without fear of persecution" (Taverson 453). In this hybrid version of Western and non-Western fairytales, Rushdie alludes to a lot of political events, of national, regional, and global dimensions. In addition, the author uses the fairytale pattern for showing a trajectory for adolescent readers to organize their chaotic emotions without sounding explicitly didactic. As Rushdie himself suggests, "This is a fable without a moral. It uses all the techniques in a fable without trying to operate a homily at the end" (Tushingham 5).

Haroun is all about narratives and the impossibility of one's identity without them. The family loses its balance as soon as the neighbor, Mr. Sengupta, questions the use of the stories. "What are all these stories? Life is not a story book or joke shop. All this fun will come to no good. What's the use of stories that aren't even true?" (20). Disturbed by the disappearance of his mother, Haroun repeats the same thing in front of his father, pointing at his father's failure to bring her back. The result is that "Rashid hid his face in his hands and wept" (22). Later, Haroun regrets: "'I started all this off. *What's the use of stories that aren't even true?* I asked that question and it broke my father's heart. So it's up to me to put things right. Something has to be done'" (emphasis in the original, 27). Thus, introjecting the lack and desire of his father as his own, Haroun sets his quest as the restoration of his father's power, which is very much different from what we observe in Western young adult novels. We rarely observe the young adults in Western novels struggling for the restoration of their parent's power; rather, they attain

moral agency of their own with little reference to the recovery of the parent figures. In *Haroun*, the whole journey to Gupland and Chupland is directed toward restoring Rashid Khalifa's storytelling power, not that of his son Haroun. As soon as the mission is accomplished, everything comes back to normal and their sad city in the country of Alifbay is renamed as "Kahani" which means "story" (209). Rashid regains his power as a storyteller. The time that had stopped after the story supply to the city was blocked by Khattum Shud is again on the move. "Outside, in the living room, his mother had begun to sing" (211). Thus, Rushdie's novel also reinforces the notion that stories are indispensable for sustaining identities. Instead of succumbing to aetonormativity, the children and teens in Western novels seem to transcend their parents' flaws, as it were to leave their damage behind rather than seeking to change their parents' status.

Desai's *Inheritance* primarily focuses on the first two phases of diaspora experiences, the sense of location and stability followed by movement or dislocation. Nevertheless, the novel does not fail to provide an outline for its major character's return to a previous location, no matter how brief it is. Sai, the protagonist, learns about how her identity was confined to the Westernized family of the Judge, completely detached from the people and the culture in the vicinity. In spite of being an Indian youth living in India, Sai has never seen the real India until Gyan enters into her life as a tutor. Sai, ventures to explore the new life outside Cho Oyu at the age of sixteen; Jemubhai, the Judge, embarks on his trip to Britain at the same age and returns home but is completely changed in his worldview, and Biju makes a failed journey to New York, at a relatively older age –

possibly in his twenties - and returns home with a complete disillusionment about the American dream.

However, these novels all exhibit a common pattern in which the protagonists find themselves as misfits in the mainstream narratives. Dimple does not find her position in either American or Indian-American immigrant narratives. She struggles to write her own narrative, one in which she can locate her hybrid identity. At first she finds this in-betweenness a problem, as if it can never be resolved. Dimple says, "So I came out the wrong way. And have been getting it all wrong ever since. I wished there was a way to go back and start over. But as my mother says, you cannot step in the same river twice" (Hidier 1). Both racially and culturally, Dimple finds herself as an oddity among the American youths. "As children, Gwyn and I grew into a friendship made up of silences and secret stares, one that can happen only between two people who don't fit in – in our case, the rich little girl who lived like an orphan and the brown little girl who existed as if she were still umbilically attached to her parents" (45). However, with her exposure to both American youth cultures with her best friend Gwyn, and SA youth and academic atmosphere at NYU, her transition becomes less traumatic than she had imagined it to be at the beginning. In spite of her initial aversion to anything Indian, she develops a friendship with Karsh, the guy of her mother's choice as her potential husband. As a preparation for the conference on SA Identity, Dimple does a lot of research on topics like "South Asia," "diaspora," "discourse and dialogue," "collective unconscious," etc., as a way of self-exploration. She makes remarkable progress in her understanding of her culturally rich identity often envied by her American friend Gwyn. Finally Dimple

admits, “Everyone had a story. Everyone was making a story, all the time. And this was only the beginning of mine” (500). Thus, relocation of identity becomes possible only after Dimple accepts the aspects of her identity that she had rejected earlier as indispensable and inescapable attributes for her self-formation.

The sense of alienation that Sai suffers in *Inheritance* is also the result of her rejection of the Indian self. She initially sees no meaning in Indian culture compared to the Western one she has partially acquired and partially inherited from her grandfather and other family members in Cho Oyu. “This Sai had learned. This underneath, and on top a flat creed: cake was better than *laddoos*, fork spoon knife better than hands, sipping the blood of Christ and consuming a wafer of his body was more civilized than garlanding a phallic symbol with marigolds. English was better than Hindi” (emphasis in the original, Desai 30). From the Library at the Gymkhana, Sai borrows books like *Wuthering Heights* and *Five Little Pigs* instead of texts that depict the life and politics in India. Although Sai has not physically moved out of South Asia, her home at Cho Oyu, is a virtually Western space inside India. DisOriented by all of these “pre-texts,” Sai looks at Gyan with the eyes of the heroines in Western texts like *Wuthering Heights* in search of an outlet for her unrequited love, without paying heed to the ongoing political movement (250). But Gyan, her lover and tutor, can never imagine himself being just a lover, outside the discourse of politics. The narrative voice successfully portrays the clash of these contradictory worldviews when Sai projects her confused mentality in interpreting Gyan’s behavior:

> "Sai had betrayed him, led him to betray others, his own people, his family, she had enticed him, sneaked up on him, spied on him, ruined him, caused him to behave badly. He couldn't wait for the day his mother would show him the photograph of the girls he was to marry, a charming girl, he hoped, with cheeks like two Simla apples, who hadn't allowed her mind to traverse the gutters and gray areas, and he would adore her for the miracles she was.
>
> Sai was not miraculous; she was an uninspiring person, a reflection of all the contradictions around her, a mirror that showed him himself far too clearly for comfort. (262)

Even if Gyan and Sai try their best to fix the misunderstanding between them, they fail again and again because Gyan is not as disOriented as Sai is. "*What will happen to me?!"* Sai later contemplates (emphasis in the original, 265). However, the narrative voice immediately intervenes, "Gyan would find adulthood and purity in a quest for a homeland and she would be left forever adolescent, trapped in shameful dramatics. This was the history that sustained her: the family that never cared, the lover who forgot. . . ." (265). In the case of Biju, the exiled youth in New York, struggling as an illegal immigrant in New York, however, the politics of identity is experienced at a more individual and psychological level than its public demonstration and institutional repression in India. He finds himself more alienated by fellow Indians than Americans. Thus, Desai demonstrates that youth in South Asia are more entangled with active local, national or regional politics than those in the West or those well-to-do Indians like Sai

who have internalized the Western values and lifestyles as inseparable components of their identities.

Nonetheless, Sai's initiation into the national politics through Gyan finally alerts her to the danger of a single story, that of "Western civilization" and "non-Western savagery." For instance, it takes a while for her to understand the extent of poverty and inequality in the country where people die every day, while the rich, like the Judge, enjoy a European standard of life even in remote areas of the country. The scene of the family's nervousness in their dog's disappearance and probably being killed is a perfect example of the discrepancy. People gathering in Thapa's Canteen laugh when the Judge fusses about the disappearance of his dog. "Dog died! The hilarity spread. They could barely stop laughing. In a place where people died without being given any attention. They died of TB, hepatitis, leprosy, plain old fever. . . . And no jobs, no work, nothing to eat – this commotion over a dog! Ha ha ha ha ha ha" (314). Gyan is concerned with all these national issues while his lover is worried about her dog. "'I haven't been coming for tuition because of all this trouble. . . . How is she?'" Gyan asks, whereas the Cook replies, "'She is very worried about the dog. She is crying all the time'" (314). At the end, even the conservative Westernized judge comes to the realization that "a human can be transformed into anything. It was possible to forget and sometimes essential to do so" (308). Sai also accepts that life is not "single" and unidirectional in its purpose. "Never again could she think there was but one narrative and that this narrative belonged only to herself, that she might create her own tiny happiness and live safely within it" (323).

DisOrientation from the reading of Western text is also visible in *Funny Boy*. Arjie, discovers his transgendered identity by reading the feminist narratives of Louisa May Alcott. Brought up in a well-to-do Tamil family with relatives and friends in the West, Arjie's excitement knows no bounds when he gets the three books of *Little Women* trilogy from Daryl Uncle who has secretly been in love with Arjie's mother. "I cried out in delight, and one by one I picked up *Good Wives*, *Little Men*, and *Jo's Boys.* I wanted to reach out and hug him, but, feeling that this was inappropriate, I thanked him instead" (109). Arjie doesn't dare to hug Daryl Uncle because his mother would not approve it. "She was looking at Daryl Uncle and there was an expression on her face I had never seen before" (109). In spite of the resistance from all corners, Arjie spares not a single opportunity to engage in activities that click with his evolving narrative of queer identity. In one way, Arjie's disOrienting upbringing prepares him to identify himself with Western female protagonists of the novels, whereas on the other hand, his SA culture makes him scrutinize his own emotions. Likewise, later in the new school ironically named "The Best School of All," Arjie is forced to memorize the two poems of the headmaster's choice. It is ironic that the school turns to be the worst for students with difference because of its emphasis on Western literary tradition and the practice of punishment inherited from the colonizers. Students that do not fit into the school's ideology are declared "ills and burdens" even against their minor errors or deviations from established norms. It's all for his queer friend Shehan that Arjie revolts against the social institutions. The discovery of his true self, as an outcome of this friendship with Shehan, changes his relationship with his parents completely. "My eyes came to rest on

my parents. As I gazed at Amma, I felt a sudden sadness. What happened between Shehan and me over the last few days had changed my relationship with her forever. I now inhabited a world they didn't understand and into which they couldn't follow me" (278). At this point, Arjie is not only referring to the realization of his transgressive sexuality, but also his Western upbringing in the non-Western context has disOriented him much more than his somehow Westernized parents.

Rites of Passage: Introduction to Politics and Quest for Origin

In most cultures, rites of passage are used to mark the socially recognized transition to sexual and emotional maturity. In addition to other rites of passages derived from both root cultures and host cultures, the children and adolescents in diaspora novels pass through unique experiences that function as rites of passage in the attainment of their hybrid identities. Depending on the causes of migration, generation of migrants and attitudes of the people in the host countries toward immigrants, the immigrant youths become aware about being different from the mainstream once they pass through the rites of passage, specifically in the form of their introduction to national or regional politics, and through a journey to home country or culture, either on physical or discursive levels. According to Avadhesh Kumar Singh, it is possible to see the phenomenon "holistically in terms of divergent version of the *rites de passage* or in terms of Northrope Fryean proposal pertaining to the myth of Quest" whatever the motive and destination or the immigration is (227). The myth of quest, the need to travel out of the comfort zone,

especially for the growth of the youth, is a common motif among diasporic youth literatures.

An introduction to local politics such as insurgencies and struggles for cultural or racial identity, is the most commonly employed rite of passage in diasporic novels. Selvadurai uses the Civil War and human rights violations in Sri Lanka after the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) waged war against the ruling Sinhalese in early seventies. Arjie begins to question his own identity as a Tamil youth and his relation to his father who abhors the activities of the Tigers as soon as Arjie learns about Jegan's involvement in Gandhiyam movement.[6] Orphaned by the impact of the Civil War, Jegan goes on to stay with Arjie's family and work for his father. Although Arjie had overheard some of the conversations between his mother and her secret lover Daryl Uncle about what was going on in Jaffna, Jegan is the first person from whom Arjie gets an insider's view as to the causes and consequences of the civil war. As he hears about Jegan's decision to join the Tigers after his best friend from Gandhiyam movement left for Canada to escape violence, Arjie begins to get a sense of the irrationality prevailing in the country and the fate of young-age friendship in times of political unrest.

> We sat on the rock for a long time, talking. He told me about the Tiger training camp in South India. He also spoke about his friend in the Gandhiyam movement. I could tell that he had loved him very much; his having been tortured had affected him deeply.

[6] Gandhiyam Movement is a movement initiated by politically active Tamils with LTTE leanings to assist Tamil refugees affected by the 1977 and 1981 riots (Rao 121).

> The bond between Jegan and me grew stronger after that conversation on the beach. (Selvadurai 172)

Jegan's stay with Arjie's family provides the latter an opportunity to review his own relationship with all of his family members. He learns a lot about the importance of peer-group friendship as opposed to the humiliating experience in the family. Arjie's reality of different sexuality never gets acknowledged, even though every adult member has hidden stories of breaking the boundaries at some point of their youth. By eavesdropping on his father's conversation with Jegan about the former's love affair with a girl in England, and seeing Amma's (the mother) secret relation with Daryl Uncle, Arjie becomes aware of the transgressions made by people in their own ways and the possibility of being trapped by family and social traditions to lead a life against one's will unless one acted wisely in time.

Desai sets her novel in the background of the Gorkhaland Movement in Northern Province of India where Nepali speaking people have been fighting for their separate identity for decades.[7] Gyan is one of the thousands of Nepalese immigrants in India who

[7]According to Lopita Nath, the Nepalese settled in Northeast India since 1820s either in search of economic opportunities or grazing lands for cattle across the seven states that constitute Northeast India. In the postcolonial years, the extent of such internal migration has increased with the settlement of the families of ex-British Gorkha army. There has been an escalation in the incidence of ethnic conflict in the various states of Northeast India in which Nepalese have often been victimized as the ethnic 'other' has been the most convincing during the last years of the twentieth century almost every state

has been marginalized by Indian nationalist politics. Due to her blooming friendship with Gyan, Sai ventures to leave Cho Oyu alone to explore its surrounding for the first time. This experience plays a significant role not only in her thriving desire for relationships outside Cho Oyu, but also about her understanding of social inequalities, ongoing struggles and violations of human rights in. As one of the insurgents says:

> "In 1947, brothers and sisters, the British left granting India her freedom, granting the Muslims Pakistan, granting special provisions for the scheduled castes and tribes, leafing everything taken care of, brothers and sisters —
>
> "Except us, EXCEPT US. The Nepalis of India. . . . India or England, they never had cause to doubt our loyalty. In the wars with Pakistan we fought our former comrades on the other side of the border. How our spirit cried. But we are Gorkhas. We are soldiers. Our character has never been in doubt. And have we been rewarded?? Have we been given compensation?? Are we given respect??

---

in Northeast India has experienced discrimination and persecution against the Nepalese, often forcing them to flee their place of settlement, thus leading to massive internal displacement of Nepali settlers. Anti-foreigner movements almost all over Northeast India, triggered by the son of the soil agitation in Assam, the Assam Movement (I979-85), which sought out Nepali and Bangladeshi migrants to be deported to their respective countries of origin, have made these migrants vulnerable to growing instances of nativist backlash (57).

"*No*! They spit on us." (Emphasis in the original, Desai 158)

Although Sai has somehow realized that she is also an outsider in the narrative of Indian nationalism, safely above the mainstream thus far, she does not fully comprehend the reason why the Nepali speaking citizens of the country had to fight for their identity in spite of the co-existence of multiple ethnic communities scattered all over the country, speaking languages of their own. On a personal level, Sai does not make a significant progress in developing an inter-individual identity; therefore, she does not develop moral agency at all. However, the development of moral agency in Gyan and Biju's return home after his failed struggles in New York are clear examples of Desai's calculated decision in favor of the recognition of local voices.

Written in a hybrid form of SA and Western fairytales, *Haroun* alludes to the separatist movement in Kashmir, along with the author's own life-threatening experience after Ayatollah Khamenei declared fatwa against him.[8] The unsettling of Haroun's identity is prompted not only by the act of censorship imposed by Khattum Shud, the Archenemy of stories, which renders Rashid speechless, but also by his mother's

[8] According to John Thieme, *fatwa* is an edict generally issued by a *mufti* or Muslim legal expert, under Sharia Law. Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini's pronouncement of a death sentence on the writer Rushdie in 1989 on the grounds that his novel *The Satanic Verses* (1988) contained material which blasphemed against the Prophet Muhammad is considered the most famous fatwa of modern times. The fatwa provoked considerable criticism in the West and Rushdie went into hiding for a number of years. Iran rescinded its support for the *fatwa* on Rushdie's life in 1998 (92).

disappearance. “After his mother left home, Haroun found that he couldn’t keep his mind on anything for very long, so, to be precise, for more than eleven minutes at a time” (Rashdie, *Haroun* 25). Just as Haroun can never imagine his life in the absence of his mother, his father becomes handicapped when the sources of his stories are blocked. “Rashid Khalifa, the legendary Ocean of Notions, the fabled Shah of Blah, stood up in front of a huge audience, opened his mouth, and found that he had run out of stories” (22). The absence of the mother or the source of inspiration is unthinkable for both Haroun and his father. Writing half a century before *Haroun*’s publication, and from home (India), R. K. Narayan beautifully portrays the condition of a child realizing the value of the mother only after separation in *The Bachelor of Arts*: “Mother is a sacred object. It is a commodity whose value we don’t realize as long as it is with us” (qtd. in Thieme 32). I can see a strong connection in terms of this loss. The loss that characterizes the relationships between Haroun and his mother, Rashid and the sources of stories, and also of diaspora authors and their motherlands. The acute sense of separation from the mother, or motherland and their journey to the real or fantasized world of mother culture works as rites of passages for the protagonists in their coming of age.

Hidier, on the other hand, employs the context of SA diaspora’s struggle for identity in the United States. The participation in the South Asian Identity Conference in NYU completely destabilizes Dimple’s American identity that she used to foreground until then. Initially Dimple would argue with her mother, insisting on her American self.

> – Dimple, she said. – You are a beautiful girl. You have hips. They're not going anywhere. This is the Indian body. We are not like these straight curveless Americans.
>
> – Mom, I *am* American. (Hidier 25)

After the conference, however, Dimple starts seeing things from the other side of the looking glass. She realizes that she could never subvert her South Asianness even if she tried to move away from it forever. Dimple says:

> And then I had a strange thought. I remembered what Sabina had said: *She puts the balls into Bollywood.* It made sense now, and I wished it didn't. I suddenly longed for a world where things were as they appeared. Now, my own seemed to be turning upside down and around. Like Gwyn's house when we were kids, but then it had been of my will, and now it had ambushed me, and I couldn't make it go back so easily. But maybe that's how things really were – upside down and around, a carousel with the earth for a sky and heaven at its feet. (Emphasis in the original, 301)

To Dimple, the participation in the South Asian Identity Conference works as a kind of involvement in identity politics and a journey to South Asia that opens up a window to who she is, why her parents have immigrated to the US, and how these SA immigrants have been struggling for visibility in their new homes abroad. She is not the only person living in confusion. Besides, Dimple learns a lot about her mother's past after the entry of

Radha Aunty into their world. The stories of her parents before they were married also provide her with a different perspective to life.

All in all, the introduction to identity politics and the ensuing quest for lost roots constitute the most significant rites of passage for the immigrant youths, especially in the process of realizing the hybrid nature of their identity. Often times, Western youths' rites of passages, like the high school prom, getting a driver's license, the first kiss, the first pay check, and the departure from home for work or study, conflict with the expectations of SA parents, SA youths go through their own rites of passages such as age-specific cultural rites, initiations of dress codes (including the veil), involvement in religious activities, among others (Staples, *Shabanu* 50).

Diaspora Youths and Multiple Transitions

In terms of the causes of migration, Singh uses a subtle metaphor of "getting into the sea" to categorize the narratives of diaspora writers into two types: one writing about "what happened to a person who was pushed into the Red Sea?" and the other about "what happened to the man who jumped into the Red Sea?" (225). Singh writes:

> There can be one answer to both the questions. That is that both the men in the first and second narratives got wet. The more complicated answer is that in first case the man who was pushed into the Red Sea got wet. He later constructed a narrative about his predicament at being pushed into the sea and the way he sustained himself against all the chance of being drowned. The protagonist of the second narrative speaks of not only being

> wet but also being wet differently, for he fell into the Red Sea. He advertises his 'wetness' and sells it off and makes a fortune out of it. He celebrates his new achievement and wants that the people of his country should celebrate it by re-defining an already existing category like diaspora discourse for their purpose. (225)

Singh defines the first category of diasporas as "pre-modern" or "gunny sack" diasporas, often sub-categorized into "pre-colonial" (traditional diasporas) and "colonial" (eighteenth- and nineteenth-century) diasporas. Writers of this category of diaspora were related to the exodus caused by religious persecution, political reasons like the partition of the Indian subcontinent or political exiles at the level of family or individuals (226). The term "gunny sack" is derived from the sack that the traditional diasporas brought with themselves, filled "with memorabilia like a fistful of soil of their homeland, their religious texts like the *Ramacharitmans* or *Hanumanchalisa*" as the memory of what they had left behind (226). Despite being written in the postcolonial period, the works of V.S. Naipaul and Caryll Philips fall into this category. The second category of writers is comprised of the present generation of diasporas from the Indian sub-continent who keep "queuing up before the foreign embassies for visas till they get one to reach their dream-land of green pasture" (226). Singh prefers to use the metaphor "ruck sack" diasporas to refer to the authors of the second category, like Rushdie, Bharati Mukherjee, Vikram Seth, Rohinton Mistry, Farooq Dhondhy, and Anurag Mathur (227). These authors suffer from no persecution, but seek a foreign land for better opportunity. "Diaspora is their desired Agent," Singh writes, "They are in the land of diaspora not because their

forefathers had to leave their native land under some compulsion beyond their control but because they shall be on their sojourn the length of which will be measured in terms of the duration of their academic degree or opportunities of engagement" (227). Singh also attests to the notion that, whether it is of "gunny sack" or "ruck sack" sort, the diaspora involves multiple transitioning from one point to the another, "from the point of origin to that of destination" (228). In this chapter, I am particularly concerned with the postcolonial diasporas which primarily comprise the "ruck sack" category.

Likewise, Said defines the condition of a diaspora as being in "exile." In *Reflections on Exile*, Said argues that "exile" is "essentially traumatic." So any facile talk about the "pleasures of exile" is unintelligible to him (177). Said indicates that even if the diasporas or the exiles celebrate their new achievements, they are not happy within. To me, this is more applicable to the old model in which the condition was considered as "catastrophic loss" to be lamented over. However, most novels analyzed here demonstrate that the experience of growing up as "exiles" becomes not only traumatic for the young generation, those in the critical phase of finding themselves and their places in respective societies, but also productive in this process, which is one of the major concerns of young adult novels. Desai's novel is distinct in the sense that it not only critiques globalization but also has little to celebrate in terms of hybridity and migration.

In this sense, Arji's story in *Funny Boy* is the narrative of being pushed into the sea, to put it in Singh's words. Like Selvadurai himself, Arjie was pushed into the sea-waves of sectarian politics by the violence from both the insurgents and the government of Sri Lanka. Although the Tamil insurgency and the government's suppression of human

rights remain primary concerns, the novel also attacks the remnants of the repressive education system developed under colonial times and the heteronormative family structure prevalent in Sri Lanka. The narrative presents multiple factors that forced people like the author to migrate into Western countries, rather than extending it to the story of transition into new home. On the surface, Selvadurai seems to have chosen to write only about the factors leading to migration, but the ideological underpinning of the novel is that South Asia, Sri Lanka in particular, is not a good place to grow up, not only in terms of political violence, but also in terms of people's attitudes toward a young man who is slowly discovering his unconventional sexuality considered to be "funny." Paranjape, argues that such a story conveniently supports "the very migration of the writer away" from the native country," and that is why "we have to examine its politics of representation, perhaps even to point out the low probability of such an incident actually happening" (63). In a slightly different context, Paranjape defines this kind of phenomenon seen in India as an "away from India and towards India hybridity" (63). However, the phenomenon of SA diaspora authors reinforcing the need for migration is not unique to India.

Funny Boy also demonstrates the psychopathology of a SA child who becomes critical of almost everything Sri Lankan, if not everything South Asian. It seems like Sri Lanka is made up of homogeneous families that do not approve of one's claim to having different sexualities. The school that criminalizes children for their failure to meet the unjustified expectations of their teachers, the communities that discriminate against children simply based on family heritage, and the government that suppresses the voices

of dissent, are all detestable to Arjie. Most SA adults that Arjie encounters in the family, at school, and in the community, are hypocrites, whereas those who bear the traces of Western blood are honest. This reminds me of what Nandy says while comparing Kipling and Aurobindo:

> Kipling was culturally an Indian child who grew up to become an ideologue of the moral and political superiority of the west. Aurobindo was culturally a European child who grew up to become a votary of the spiritual leadership of India. Kipling had to disown his Indianness to become his concept of the true European; Aurobindo had to own up his Indianness to become his version of the authentic Indian. . . . One is forced to conclude that, compared to Kipling's 'sickness of soul', Aurobindo's sickness of mind was a superior cognition of the human predicament . . . (85-86)

Nandy clearly demonstrates that Aurobindo had a genuine place for the West within Indian civilization, whereas for Kipling, India was not a civilization (86). Arjie, in that sense, is a Sri Lankan child who disavows his Sri Lankanness, which ultimately reinforces the notion that Sri Lanka is not a civilized country, and therefore migrating to Canada is the right thing to do. Thus, Selvadurai appears as an ideologue of migrants because he does not see the need to show how traumatic life in exile could be for the youths like Arjie after moving to the alien land. Desai, however, depicts the lives of both successful (like Saeed Saeed) as well as unsuccessful immigrants with the stories of Biju, and other fellow Indians in the US.

Biju's story in *Inheritance,* comprises both the aspects: what pushed him into the sea as well as what happened next. Biju's father has experienced the hardships of life as a cook for a family that "you couldn't be proud of, that let you down, showed you up, and made you into a fool" (55). In spite of himself being an Indian, his master, the Judge, hardly ever considered any other Indian as worthy of respect. If the cook begged for a raise, the Judge would growl, "All your expenses are paid for – housing, clothing, food, medicines. This is extra" (54). As his salary had hardly been changed in years, the cook also makes a failed attempt to complement his income with a liquor business to ensure a better future for Biju.

> This the cook had done for Biju, but also for himself, since the cook's desire was for modernity: toaster ovens, electric shavers, watches, cameras, cartoon colors. He dreamed at night not in the Freudian symbols that still enmeshed others but in modern codes, the digits of a telephone flying away before he could dial them, a garbled television. (55)

If we look at the situation from a Western perspective, starting a business venture might sound like a welcome step. But in South Asia, running a liquor shop for having your ends met is the last thing one would do. If they were Brahmins, the so-called upper caste, it would be the greatest disgrace. The novel, however, is slightly about the caste and motive of the cook.

Poverty is not less significant in pushing people out of their homeland. Shehan in *Funny Boy* is bound to stay with Arjie's family in spite of it being against his choice; he does this all for financial and political security in times of crisis. Likewise, life under dire

poverty engenders in Biju (in *Inheritance*) dreams of life in the West, some of which he also inherits from his father who had collected these dreams based on his encounters with Western and Westernized people in India. Besides the second hand information about Indian immigrants' success in America, Biju had himself observed the excitement in a man from his village who had got his visa to America on his sixteenth attempt. "'Never give up,' he'd advised the boys in the village, 'at some point, your lucky day will come'" (Desai 182).

On the other hand, Jemu has been to Britain with prospects for a better future, an excellent example of "ruck sack" diasporas. Jemu is pushed into the sea due to the disOrienting and aetonormative forces deeply rooted in elite Indian psyche since the beginning of colonial rule. When the principal of Jemu's school, Mr. McCooe, suggests to his father that Jemu take the local pleader's examination that would enable him to find employment in the courts of subordinate magistrates, his dreams become boundless. "He [the father] shared his dream with Jemubhai. So fantastic was their dreaming, it thrilled them like a fairy tale, and perhaps because this dream sailed too high in the sky to be tackled by logic. . . ." (59). Jemu's mother is hesitant in sending her "one-month-married" son who could hardly remember his fourteen years old wife. On the verge of embarking on Jemu's journey to the West, she bursts out, "Don't let him go. Don't let him go" (36). But her voice is far from being heard. The father, even though he is "a barely educated man," does not fail to make offerings for his Hindu Gods and Goddesses and pray for the son's success amidst the ambivalence of feeling brought forth by the

separation. “Don’t worry,” he shouted. “You’ll do first class first.” But his tone of terror undoes the reassurance of the words. “Throw the Coconut!” he shrieked” (37).[9]

Both Desai and Selvadurai’s novels touch upon the plight of the people who have migrated to India and Sri Lanka respectively. In *Inheritance*, Desai briefly introduces the predicament of the immigrants from the SA countries like Nepal and Tibet to India, which Paranjape defines as “towards India diaspora” (63). On the one hand, Darjeeling, where the novel is mostly set, has a majority of Nepali speaking people, with a majority of them having family roots in Nepal.[10] The Gurkhaland Movement is an example of the voices raised for demanding a separate state, arguing that the narrative of Indian

[9] Breaking a coconut in Hindu temples – especially in temples dedicated to Lord Ganesha – and before auspicious events and new beginning is considered highly beneficial in Hinduism. The offering of a coconut is a common offering to a deity in Hindu religion and it is distributed to family and friends later as “Prasad” or sacred food.

[10] According to Vidya Bir Singh Kansakar, the Anglo-Nepal War of 1814 and the subsequent treaty of peace signed between Nepal and the East India Company on December 8, 1816 resulted in the delimitation of Nepal-India border. The Mahakali River formed the western boundary, while the Mechi formed the boundary in the east along with ridges in the Darjeeling hills and Sikkim. Due to this treaty, thousands of Nepali speaking people fell into the Indian territory. In recognition of assistance of Nepalese army in quelling the 1857 mutiny in Lucknow, some parts of Western Nepal were retroceded to Nepal but Darjeeling and many cities remained in India. Ever since then, ethnic conflicts between Nepali speaking peoples and others have been going on (2-3).

nationalism has never been able to incorporate the voices of the people from this region, just like the story of the Tamils portrayed in Selvadurai's novel. Similarly, Desai also expends some pages for the Western immigrants to India like Old Mr. Gilby, who leads a simple life of an immigrant in Kalimpong, from where Sai borrows Western literature. These books play a significant role in shaping her identity with a keen sense of appreciation for freedom.

> Books were making her restless. She was beginning to read, faster, more, until she was inside the narrative and the narrative inside her, the pages going by so fast, her heart in her chest – she couldn't stop. In this way she had read *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Cider with Rosie*, and *Life with Father* from the Gymkhana Club library. . . . Cho Oyu and the judge's habits seemed curtailments to her then. (68-69)

Now, what is more fascinating to me is to ask why these diaspora authors return to their homeland for the setting and materials for their stories? Paranjape argues that a compulsive return to India is really a way of saying good-bye to India. "It is not a way of dealing with India but a self-justifying narrative of a passage not to India but from India" (48). Paranjape describes the situation of diaspora authors writing about India as an act of putting "one foot in India and couple of toes in Canada" (48). Selvadurai does exactly the same in *Funny Boy*, though the Tamil history dates back to a very long time. Desai also portrays this attitude very succinctly in a conversation between two Indians in a restaurant in New York, one the owner and the other working for AT &T.

> "You are Gujerati, no?"

"No."

"But your name is Gujerati??"

"Who are you??!!"

"AT&T, sir, offering special rates to India."

. . .

"But Your name is Gujerati?" Anxious voice.

"Veea Kampala, Uganda, Teepton, England, and Roanoke state of Vaergeenia! One time I went to Eeendya and, laet me tell you, you cannot pay me to go to that caantreey agaen!" (137-38)

The tension in the above dialogue is one of many examples of how India is used not only as material for commercial benefit, but also for justifying the superiority of the life in the West by juxtaposing what is problematic in India. Relocation back to India is not always desired by immigrants unless the experiences of alienation, economic exploitation and discrimination become too much, like what Biju suffered in *Inheritance*, not only from the people in the host country, but also from other fellow immigrants.

Postcolonial Con-texts: Rejection of Filiative Relationships for Affiliative Identifications

As I mentioned in the second chapter, the postcolonial subjects portrayed in Western imperialist discourses are abused and infantilized not only by external forces, but also by their own parents. In those narratives, the youths fail to develop agency due to the hierarchical family structures in their home countries or cultures even if they rebel

against the hegemonic structures. Failing to understand the ethos of affiliative postcolonial families, Western authors present stereotypical images of abused children and young adults in the hands of their "barbaric" parents. As youth get in touch with Westerners, they develop a kind of hybrid personality that further confuses them, rather than empowering them. In those narratives, the youths miss the opportunity to escape the oppressive filiative social structures due to their "inherent inferiority," resulting in an opportunity for Western "benevolent" figures to intervene. Thus, these narratives contribute to the perpetuation of cultural imperialism or neo-colonial intervention upon the postcolonial subjects.

Youth protagonists in postcolonial diasporic texts, however, gain relatively greater agency to fight social evils. According to Thieme, "If the postcolonial subject is to claim a space for herself, she needs to do so through affiliated rather than filiative acceptance" (12). As the epigraph from Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* in the beginning of this chapter shows, the child does not only develop power to lead the parent, but also claims to have given birth to multiple parents (Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* 243). "Saleem's self-imposed exile is the consequence of his filial rebellion, yet it (and he) remains inscribed in a filial relationship" (Kimmich 247). Just as the postcolonial young subjects attempt to overpower the voice of their parents, the diaspora writers, themselves as the exiled children of their parent nations, also attempt to resist the call of the countries and cultures of their old home to follow their root cultures. In addition, I will explore the causes and consequences of preferring maternal genealogy over paternal genealogy observed in the discourses of these postcolonial diasporic novels.

Like most protagonists in Western youth literature, Haroun is a child whose relation with his parents is based on filial structure. He grows up "in a home in which, instead of misery and frowns, he had his father's ready laughter and his mother's sweet voice raised in song" (15). His father is a powerful "storyteller Rashid Khalifa, whose cheerfulness was famous throughout that unhappy metropolis, and whose never-ending stream of tall, short and winding tales had earned him not one but two nicknames" (15). He has been Rashid the Ocean of Notions, to his admirers, whereas to his jealous rivals, he has been the Shah of Blah. In the fashion of Western fairy tales, the peace and stability of the Khalifa family, where Soraya, Haroun's mother, admires Rashid as a loving husband that "anyone could wish for," is disturbed by an external force. All of a sudden, the source of stories is blocked, Soraya runs off with Mr Sengupta, the neighbor, and the time stops for ever. Unlike Western texts, where the youth embarks on a journey, leaving the parents behind, Haroun leaves home along with his father for "the Town of G and the Valley of K, where the weather is still fine" (24). Thus, right from the beginning of the journey, the narrative takes a turn toward constructing a counter-discourse to Western tradition. Even in the alternative world of magic, Haroun is accompanied by his father. There, the hierarchy gets completely reversed after they swap their beds in the houseboat called *Arabian Nights Plus One* (emphasis in the original, 54). Likewise, in *Luka*, both the parents follow Luka in his journey to the magic world in the guise of Nobodaddy and Insultana of Ott respectively.

Nevertheless, Rushdie does not completely deviate from the Western tradition of separating the young protagonists from their parents. Haroun does not leave his father

behind because he is repressive, but because he is incapacitated by the lack of stories. Haroun is detached from his father during his entire adventure of Kahani until the son frees Batcheat and restores his father's source of stories. Luka is also detached from both Nobodaddy and Insultana before he gets to the heart of the World of Magic. The maturity in Haroun is indicated by his experience of the first kiss, pretty much in Western fashion.

> They went quickly, because Haroun hated long goodbyes. Saying goodbye to Blabbermouth proved particularly difficult, and if she hadn't leant forward without warning and kissed him, Haroun would probably never have found a way of kissing her; but when it was done, he found he wasn't embarrassed in the least, but felt extremely pleased; which made it even harder to leave. (*Haroun*, 202)

Kissing in public is not a common phenomenon in most SA cultures. In this hybrid construction, Haroun performs these feats with the power of his newly gained cultural hybridity and moral agency and returns to his father, not as a submissive child, but as the hero of the story that his father narrates on the way back home. As they arrive to the sad city, the hierarchy becomes completely affiliative. Like an adult, Haroun is concerned about the possibility of depression in his father on not seeing Soraya, though Rashid is no longer depressed. "But Rashid skipped out into the wet, and the wetter he got, as they walked through skin-deep muddy water, the more boyishly happy he became. Haroun began to catch his father's good mood, and soon the two of them were splashing and teasing each other like little children" (207). Thus, the journey not only provides a space

for Haroun's maturity, it also allows his father to return to his lost past, the pleasure of carefree adolescence.

Similarly, unlike adults giving birth to children, which Rashid and Soraya were no longer able to do, in the end of the novel, Haroun gives new life to his parents as if he were giving birth to this happy couple. This is exactly like what Saleem, in *Midnight's Children,* says about having given birth to more mothers than most mothers have children. "I have had more mothers than most mothers have children; giving birth to parents has been one of my stranger talents – a form of reverse fertility ---" (Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* 243). When Haroun asks why his parents haven't had more children, they say, "We used up our full quota of child-stuff just in making you" (19). Now, like Saleem, Haroun proves his reverse fertility by giving birth to two adults, twice the work of his parents.

Although the young protagonists in *Funny Boy, Born Confused,* and *Inheritance* do not explicitly disavow the filiative hierarchy, they do not fall back upon the aetonormative ideologies. Arjie's challenge to the authority of his parents, the headmaster, and the political leader, Dimple's preference for the "third space," with cross-cultural friendship, and Sai's transgression beyond the confinements of her family, are excellent examples of affiliative responses to the hierarchical family norms. Even among them, Arjie's act of rebellion is the most powerful response to the racial, sexual and nationalistic ideologies that impede his growth in one way or another.

The Immigrant Child and Eccentricity: Confusions and Contradictions in Diaspora Youths

> My mom said she imagined I was trying to sort out some great philosophical quandary, like Rodin's *Thinker* sculpture that she had seen on a trip to Paris in another lifetime. But I think that was just a polite way of saying I looked like I didn't get it. Born backwards and clueless. In other words, born confused.
>
> So I came out the wrong way. And have been getting it all wrong ever since. I wished there was a way to go back and start over. But as my mother says, you can't step in the same river twice. (Hidier 1)
>
> Could fulfillment ever be felt as deeply as loss? Romantically she decided that love must surely reside in the gap between desire and fulfillment, in the lack, not the contentment. Love was the ache, the anticipation, the retreat, everything around it but the emotion itself. (Desai 2-3)

The two quotations above, taken from the opening scenes of *Born Confused* and *The Inheritance*, clearly introduce the immigrant realities of confusion and loss. Both the novels focalize young adult female protagonists in search of their places in an alienating atmosphere. Dimple in *Born Confused* feels that her problem, the confusion, must have begun right from her birth. Amidst confusion between her Indian heritage and American upbringing, Dimple struggles for a stable identity almost until the end of the novel when she becomes ready to accept the Indian part of her identity. On the other hand, in

Inheritance, Sai encounters contradictions of various kinds even while living in her own country as a foreigner. Besides some scenes set in New York, this third person narrative, set mostly in northern India, presents the life of Sai who lives under the confinements made knowingly or unknowingly by her grandfather, the Western educated retired judge who even declines to identify himself as an Indian. Both the characters, the children of immigrant parents, feel alienated to the extent of being eccentric. This section will explore the nature, causes, and consequences of their eccentricity.

Defining the characteristics of English life in the late nineteenth century, J. S. Mill wrote, "In this age, the mere example of nonconformity, the mere refusal to bend the knee to custom, is itself a service. Precisely because the tyranny of opinion is such as to make eccentricity a reproach, it is desirable, in order to break through that tyranny, that people should be eccentric" (qtd. in Saville 781). Mill's characterization of eccentricity as readiness to take contradictions, nonconformity, and a refusal to bend the knee to custom generally applies to most young generations of all ages. In particular, the young adults have the tendency to rebel against established norms. As Trites writes, "'Do I dare disturb the universe?' is representative of an ethos that informs many adolescent novels" (2). However, this nonconformity often gets to the level of "eccentricity" and becomes a major conflict between immigrant people and their children, especially during their coming of age. Based on the discourses of these novels, I will argue that a phase of eccentricity is an inevitable and almost necessary element for immigrant children to create a more stable sense of self and home.

"Eccentricity" in general, lies on the opposite pole of "domesticity." The earliest usage of "eccentricity" recorded in the OED refers to the field of astronomy, to planetary orbits with decentered axes, or to a lack of concentricity in the celestial sphere. "Eccentric" is used figuratively to refer to odd human behavior, which according to Julia F. Saville, became a predominant figurative term only since the late eighteenth century. Saville adds, "Frequently, the astronomical nuances linger in the coupling of the term "eccentric" with the idea of an excursion away from the beaten track of humdrum living. Eccentricity thus becomes an assertion of individual liberty that will not capitulate to containment but instead celebrates excess" (782). Eccentrics thus create their own world of utopia for a continued space and happiness, not acquainted to others. In other words, eccentrics symbolically indulge in the "forbidden fruits." In literature about immigrant youths, eccentricity becomes not only a journey to selfhood, but also a journey out of utopia. It provides an outlet for their fantasies of autonomy and potency.

Eccentricity, in this regard, is primarily the result of the clash between the two generations (parents and children) and their perspectives of each other. Instead of each generation being essentially eccentric, they look eccentric in the gaze of the other. The older generation looks eccentric to the younger one, in the way they allegedly stick to their cultures, declining to change according to the need of time and space. On the other hand, the younger generation appears eccentric because they are the ones who actually deviate from the norms of the home in South Asia or source culture in order to fit in the target culture. If we look at the novels by SA immigrant writers, almost none of the novels advocate for the reinstatement of the old values, and almost none recommends

reconciliation. They propose a "third space," in Bhabha's terms, in that old values are questioned, contested, and combined for the construction of newer values, without an intention to present it as the only alternative.

Desai's *Inheritance* presents "contradiction" as a major theme to show that the "eccentrics" like Sai, Gyan, and Saeed find their places in their new worlds, whereas those who fail to embody change like Biju (the youth), the cook, and the judge (the old) suffer the most. On the other hand, in *Born Confused,* confusion becomes the key term that defines the life of the immigrants, both young and old. The first generation immigrants seem to be ready to accept both the aspects of their identity, SA as well as Asian American. For the second generation immigrants like Dimple, it takes a while to embody the Asian part of their identity. Dimple's confusion about her identity clears up only with the trials and tribulations she goes through amidst family expectation, peer pressure, and her personal aims and ambitions during the summer of her senior year.

Hidier's novel focalizes the second generation Indian American, defined as "American Born Confused Desi" or ABCD. Here, the main conflict is between the home culture (Indian Hindu) and outside cultures (mixed cultures such as American Christian or American homosexuals) in addition to being the conflict between young and old generation. The older generation people readily accept their status as *desi* (Indian) but the younger generation abject their Asian part at least for a while. Maira writes, "They have crossed national boundaries to identify collectively as "desi," a colloquial term for someone "native" to South Asia and one that has taken hold among many second-generation youth in the diaspora of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, or even

Indo-Caribbean, descent" (2). Dimple, however, tries to identify herself as an American, and is always lost in the efforts of being like her Caucasian friend Gwyn. Dimple says, "Looking at this black-and-white glass of a red, white, and blue moment, Gwyn appeared the very image of the American Dream itself, the blond-rooted blond haired, blue-eyed Marilyn for the skinny generation. And if I was her reverse twin – the negative to her positive – that made me? The Indian nightmare? The American scream?" (Hidier 12).

Dimple initially appears most eccentric to her parents, especially due to her refusal to act like an Indian in America, which she thinks could hinder her effort to fit in among her American friends. She is confused between her Indian and American selves in this critical phase of her life.

> So not quite Indian, and not quite American. Usually I felt more along the lines of Alien (however legal, as my Jersey birth certificate attests to). The only times I retreated to one or the other description were when my peers didn't understand me (then I figured it was because I was too Indian) or when my family didn't get it (clearly because I was too American). Sometimes I was too Indian in America, yes, but in India, I was definitely not Indian enough. (Hidier 13)

Dimple comes out of this confusion only after she goes through numerous heart-breaking incidents of culture clash. Dimple's eccentricity is the consequence of her day to day reality and the need to move back and forth between her two selves. It is after the occasion in which she participates in a SA concert and a Conference on South Asian Identities that she begins to come to terms with both the aspects of her identity. She

expresses the process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization of her identity as follows: “The music was viscous, then liquid. It slaked me, dripped into my fingers and toes and activated me. I began to sway, dancing in the dark with my secret partner. I forgot myself; I recognized myself” (Hidier 495). Dimple’s forgetting of the too American side of her identity and reinforcing the Indian side does not happen smoothly. Her attitude toward Indian food, dress, and other cultural items that she hated in the beginning gradually changes after she develops a crush on Karsh, the guy that her parents have visualized as an ideal husband, “the jeevansathi” for her. She says, “Now I knew firsthand that having my universe turned upside down didn’t have to be a bad thing: He’d [Karsh] already done that to me; I’d already done that to me” (499).

At the end, Dimple doesn’t care how her parents will take the changes in her personality since she has already developed agency. Going beyond the periphery of home, she has also started to think about other people, beginning right from her best friend Gwyn. With the brand new confidence that she has gained about the possibility of cross-cultural friendship without losing the Indian side of her self, Dimple says, “It would be a place where a postcard on a locker door would have a story behind it and my best friend in the world would be somewhere glued together and I would love her all the more for the cracks we’d allowed, then sealed” (500). Thus Dimple’s eccentricity becomes instrumental in her finding her own place by “bringing what had seemed then to be two different and distant lands together” (500).

Like the story of Dimple, the struggle to fit in to the extent of eccentricity becomes one of the major themes in *Inheritance*, which is a case not only in America but

also in India among Nepalese and Western diasporas. This novel offers all the pleasures of traditional narrative in a form and a voice that are utterly fresh. With very real and compelling main characters and a few wonderful minor ones as well, Desai explores such complicated issues as post-colonialism, racism, immigration, young love, regret, hope, the role of family, and the myths of both India and America. Sai holds the center stage with her Cambridge-educated Anglophile grandfather, a retired judge, who is her only living relative. There are also the melodramatic, yet eccentric, cook who represents the older generation and his young son struggling as an illegal immigrant in America. Berma maintains that "the cook, without a name, perhaps to bring home his insignificance in the Indian caste ladder, who lightens the atmosphere at the most unexpected moments in the story: in the midst of a terrorist take-over of their bungalow where he pleads with the terrorist since 'he knew instinctively how to cry', and readily admits, 'I am a fool' at the terrorists' reckoning" (22). Biju, in America, becomes extremely homesick while trying to make a near decent life in the US. Desai writes: "Biju had, in his innocence, done just what his father had, in his own innocence, told him to do. What could his father have known? This way of leaving your family for work had condemned them over several generations to have their hearts always in other places, their minds thinking about people elsewhere; they could never be in a single existence at one time" (311).

Unlike *Born Confused*, which primarily concentrates on Dimple's inner conflict in choosing between the two dominant aspects of her identity, *Inheritance* focuses not on an individual's story but on how several people, both young and old, make sense of themselves, view the world around them, and deal with the difficulties that they have

with contradictions. Although most characters in these novels are not children per se, they are the children of people who move or those who actually move and try to find themselves in their new stations. In a metaphorical sense, all the main characters in both the novels are the children of modernity, facing the difficulties brought forth by globalization, insurgency, and immigration. Some of these characters, like Biju, and the Judge in *Inheritance* and Dimple's parents in *Born Confused*, are examples of postcolonial subjects, the self-loathing "natives," and would be Englishmen or Americans.

When these characters find themselves in new environments, they are faced with the need to conform to social expectations. Usually, the older generations try to adhere to their root culture, believing in the absolutes such as religion, nationhood, and so on though they cannot completely resist transformation. Unlike Sai and Gyan, who take risk to venture into the "third space," Biju and the Judge demonstrate the pitfalls of believing in absolutes. Breaking the absolutes of any kind is one of the primary goals of postcolonial literature and literary criticism. Biju finally returns home to India due to the overt idealization of his home country and romanticization of childhood, but he cannot become happy there either. "Darkness fell and he sat right in the middle of the path – without his baggage, without his savings, worst of all, without his pride. Back from America with far less than he'd ever had" (317). The Judge is an incarnation of the child of colonialism, a perfect example of eccentric old generation, Bhabha's "mimic man." Despite himself being an Indian citizen, he hates India, Indian people, food, and culture. Here Desai is clearly portraying the continuities of old colonial legacy.

As for *Born Confused*, unlike Dimple's acceptance of identity as part Indian and part American, her Indian born parents cannot move out of their own circle of Indian diaspora in New York. Thus, the narratives of both Hidier and Desai present a sense of ambivalence in their characters who have to choose between the two worlds. If America appears to be a better place for SAs to improve their economic status (though not for all), even the memory of their home countries makes them feel at home when they feel uprooted and alienated in exile. It is this choice between contradiction and conformity that makes the immigrant children appear to be "eccentric" to their parents and vice versa.

Although the two novels do not go into the depth of the causes of immigration like Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*, they present the process and consequences of immigration and its impact on their children. Desai deals with postcolonial chaos in India, migrant workers, their dreams and aspirations, and then contrasts it with that of those in England and America. Hidier, on the other hand, focuses on the experiences of a second generation Indian immigrant in the US, lost in her own world of cosmopolitan life with loving Indian parents and a typical American friend who stands as her alter-ego. The factors that lead to their eccentricity are distinct. Biju's struggle in America is more economic, and legal, whereas Dimple's is of identity and cultural belonging, like that of Sai in India. Biju's experiences represent those of the first generation immigrant workers, who have to move from one location to another in search of work, poorly paid and ill-treated even by fellow immigrants more fortunate than them. Dimple, however, is one of "ruck sack" diasporas, those fortunate youths who have their loving and economically

well to do parents. Her struggle is representative of the second generation SA Americans, children of the "model minorities" trying to fit into American schools among the freedom-loving American youngsters like Gwyn and Julian. Both of them suffer as long as they remain rigid with regard to their chosen identity traits. The more they try to abject the others, the more they suffer. Opening themselves to multiculturalism by going through multiple phases of confusions and contradictions, gradually they make their transitions from childhood to adulthood. Dimple, Sai, and Gyan grow out of these binaries and finally accept the rejected aspects of their identities and fit in the new world, but Biju fails to do so and returns home to be more depressed.

Conclusion

The main concern of this chapter was to explore the sources of the potency, strategies, and the impact of adolescent rebellions of SA roots upon their societies as seen in the novels of Rushdie, Desai, Hidier, and Selvadurai. Like the protagonists in postcolonial Western young adult novels, adolescent heroes in postcolonial diasporic novels also go through the phase of rebellious adolescence as social outcasts and transgressors. In touch with the youths from both root and host cultures, diaspora youths are often confused about their sense of belonging. Navigation between the two cultures does not only empower them with possibilities for multiple spaces for locating their identities, but it also engenders the feelings of belonging to nowhere. In spite of the immediate challenges of fitting in, diaspora youths' identities are influenced by more distant factors connected with regional, national, and global politics. Unlike Western

young adult novels, in which the protagonists are usually expected to help them through status crises, most young adults in postcolonial diasporic novels break free from filiative hierarchy. Oftentimes, they even claim the power to lead their parents and other adults in their communities. Without submitting to the power of social institutions over an individual, these young adults demonstrate the power to present multiple alternatives to fill in the gaps created by the failure of social institutions like family, nation, and empire with hybrid and inclusive identity structures.

CHAPTER IV

WRITING THE SELF WITH(OUT) SELF-ESTEEM: LOCAL NARRATIVES FOR GLOBAL AUDIENCES

> "The problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete."
>
> (Chimamanda Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story")

South Asia appears as a monolithic category only to the Western eyes. It is not very difficult to discover a pattern in which Western representations reinforce the stereotypes that mask the lived realities of SA peoples by simply picking up a couple of popular books set on some parts of the region. In reality, the sub-continent is a multicultural space ethnically, politically, linguistically, and religiously. As I have pointed out in my earlier chapters, it comprises peoples of at least seven nationalities (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Mal Dives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka), four major religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity) besides groups of nonbelievers/ atheists, and thousands of other ethnic and linguistic communities. Hence, it is almost impossible to select a single novel that represents the multitude of cultures and races from each country in the sub-continent. Therefore, I have chosen to approach this problem by theorizing certain themes and issues that run through the lived experiences of SA youths, often abjected by adults, and the influences that play upon the process of their growing up in these diverse regions and cultures often. Coats identifies "abjection" as one of the

definitive themes in adolescent fictions (138). Coats relates adolescent's desire for the "cultivation of group identity," "reassertion of the body," and the "battle to establish one's place in the Symbolic order" with "abjection and its contribution to violent behavior as well as the strategies for dealing with abjection to reduce violence" (138, 143, 145). Likewise, Trites relates the major themes of young adult novels such as growth, rebellion against authority, sex and death, with the "issues of power" (x-xii). By drawing upon Coats' and Trites' views in this chapter, I will focus on four major aspects of coming of age experiences in South Asia namely, fitting in among family and friends, grappling with the body image and self-esteem, dealing with issues like love, sex, marriage, and divorce, and rebelling against social evils for attaining moral agency.

Although the sub-continent of South Asia is rich in tradition and folklore and collections of stories united around a central frame such as the "*Panchatantra*, *Hitopadesa, Jataka Tales*, and *Kathasaritasagara*, children's literature as a genre is relatively new. As Khorana puts it, "British colonial rule had a tremendous impact on children's literature in the subcontinent" (xii). Due to its distinct colonial experiences, "each country [in the subcontinent] has developed its own unique children's literature that promotes national pride and culture" (xiv). As a result, until recently, children and young adults in South Asia read if their parents could afford it, either traditional literatures which cannot be specifically categorized as children's literature in the Western academic terms, or modern ones that often promoted Western imperialism (via imported books from the West) or even those that reinforced native nationalist ideals (via local books). Therefore, Khorana argues, "They [native authors] need to explore the inner

world of the child through themes like conflict between modern and traditional values, rebellion against parents, relationships among various ethnic groups, and the changing global perspectives and issues raised by advancements in science and technology, and space exploration" (xxviii). Considering the impossibility of finding a single novel covering all these themes targeted toward younger audiences in all SA regions, I chose to analyze the Indian woman writer, Arundhati Roy's, novel *God* which highlights many of these issues and addresses a lot of modern themes that Khorana argues are important for understanding the lives of SA youths.

Although this novel is explicitly marketed for grown-ups, I believe that it still gives us comprehensive insights into the issue of growing up in South Asia. It becomes a mirror to the manner in which young people challenge the traditional social, cultural, and political systems in order to form their new identities. Moreover, I think it is necessary for children's literature as a discipline, not only to focus on books written "for" children, but also books that offer us crucial ideas "about" children/youth. As Beverley Lyon Clark claims, "children's literature is always written for both children and adults; to be published it needs to please at least some adults" (qtd. in Nodelman 207). Hence, in this dissertation I have been analyzing the books both ends of this spectrum (books written for children and books about children/youth) in exploring major issues related to SA youths. In this chapter, I will examine Roy's novel at length keeping in view, not only its wide readership in South Asia and abroad, but also as an alternative text that represents the social, cultural, and political factors that shape the lives of South Asia youth. I will also present it as a counter-text that resists a monolithic representation of SA, even as it

highlights the common problems that SA youths face across different regions. As Roy herself puts it, “It’s really a way of seeing, a way of presenting the irreconcilable sides of our nature, our ability to love so deeply yet be so brutal” (Abraham, 91).

Unlike the Orientalist views of Western authors of SA as a monolithic space characterized by the negative or exoticizing discourses of abuse, burqa, caste, dearth (poverty), and exile as determining factors for SA youths’ identities, Roy’s novel addresses a plethora of problems, both local and global, that impede the process of their self-formation in SA youth. Even if we scan through this single novel, we see that list of issues about SA youths it addresses could go on and on, even to cover all the letters in the English alphabet such as aetonormativity, Brahmanism, colonialism, displacement, ethnic violence, feudalism, globalization, heteronormativity, insurgency, jingoism, karma(ism), labor (child), marginalization, neo-colonialism, Orientalism, postcolonial nationalism, racism, sectarianism, trafficking, unionism, veil-system, Westernization, xenophobia, youth-crusade, and zombieism (voodoism). Although SA children and young adults share the common (“universal”) experiences of growing up, their lives are embroiled in the whirlwinds of these problems as soon as they step into the world. In the earlier chapters, I analyzed the ideological underpinnings and the resulting oversights about SA youths we see in Western and diasporic representations. I also showed how those texts not only confused the youths of SA origin but also misinformed, or at least inadequately informed, the Western readers about SA youths. In this chapter, I aim to demonstrate the forces that disorient and “disOrient” the youths in South Asia from the perspective of its cultural insiders by addressing as many of these factors I pointed out earlier as possible. I will

argue that most families in postcolonial South Asia suffer because of their disorienting and "disOrienting" childhoods. As portrayed in the discourse of *God,* such complex childhoods lead to more individual failures and family disjunctions than successes. The root cause for the destruction of the Ayemenem House in the novel is the neglect and failure in understanding on the part of the dominant members of house of the repressed or inarticulate feelings and emotions of the youths, whether they are men, women, touchables, or untouchables. The novel is clearly built around the repressive and hierarchical structures that underpin adult-youth relationships whether it is in the domestic sphere, or the larger political sphere.

In a conversation with Seshadri-Crooks, Bhabha unravels the founding moment of his work on postcolonial studies. At the very forefront of his concerns was "the predicament of Mr. Biswas in V. S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas"* (Seshadri-Crooks 378). Bhabha acknowledges having seen "a profound and strong sense of survival, in his [Mr. Biswas's] repeated humiliations a real sense of agency, in his homelessness a real possibility of accommodation, in his servility a real intimation of sovereignty" (378). Survival, Bhabha clarifies, "means living in the ambivalent movement in between both these seemingly contradictory or incommensurate moments" (379). In spite of being critical of Naipaul's "civilizational certainties," Bhabha is appreciative of Naipaul for the latter's subtle awareness of "the partiality of life – of how to live with the bits and pieces, the debris and detritus that get thrown up against the shore of movement, migration, displacement, and forced eviction" (379). Defining the precariousness of living on the borderline as survival, Bhabha stresses, " . . . survival is

not only a sticking with something to the end; it's also, for me, an experience of how, in motion, in transition, in movement, you must continually build a habitation for your ideas, your thoughts and yourself" (373). This notion of survival within bits and pieces of life, especially at the intersection between Western and non-Western social and cultural values, becomes very instrumental when I analyze the complex identities of SA youths as represented in *God*. A perspective of how Rahel and Estha survive among the bits and pieces of their childhood and adolescence, and how their childhood affects their identities as adults, will provide an alternative way of looking at South Asia and SA youths. Before going into these issues, it is relevant to present a mapping of the paradoxical reception of Roy's book.

Gleaning "Big Things" out of "Small Things": A Paradox in the Reception of *God*

God is Roy's only full-length novel set in the south Indian state of Kerala and divided, chronologically, between the late 1960s and the early 1990s. The plot of the novel revolves around the story of a Syrian-Christian family in Ayemenem House, thus, focalizing the growing up experiences of the young twins, Rahel and Estha. Although the story of these twins intersects with multiple other stories that began "thousands of years ago" (32), the arrival of the twins' Indo-European cousin called Sophie Mol is considered to be the main event that brings these multiple hidden stories to the surface. As Roy writes, "for practical purposes, in a hopelessly practical world," it is convenient to say that the story began when Sophie Mol, their Anglo-Indian cousin, came to Ayemenem from Britain (*God* 34). Even before the "Welcome Home Atmosphere" in her biological

father's home at the Ayemenem House has subsided completely, Sophie Mol dies by drowning. With her death, the secret relation between Ammu (Rahel and Estha's mother) and Velutha (an untouchable Paravan from the community) becomes public knowledge. As a result of the caste, class, and gender-based prejudices in that society, Velutha is murdered in police custody facing an alleged charge of rape-attempt and murder. The mother, Ammu, is forced to leave home, and the twins are separated from one another.

The plot of separating the twins from their mother begins right from the time Vellya Pappen, Velutha's father, informs Ammu's mother about the secret relation between his son and Ammu. In order to prevent the news from being made public, Mammachi (Ammu's mother) and Baby Kochamma (Mammachi's sister) lock up Ammu in a room, which they think is necessary to save the family's prestige. Now, in her absence, the twins are forced to provide false testimony about the alleged rape case, Velutha is murdered, and the case gets dismissed with the help of the prejudiced Inspector named Mathew. Then, since nobody is concerned with the psychological turmoil that Estha is going through, he is returned to his father who has married another woman after his divorce from Ammu. Disturbed by the sense of guilt (about Sophie Mol's death), and separation from Ammu (who dies in a hotel) and also Estha, her "dizygotic" brother, Rahel swivels around from one school to another until she manages to graduate from high school and goes to study architecture in Delhi. She has an affair with an American research scholar called Larry McCaslin, marries him, and goes to stay with him in New York. With such damaging family tragedies in the background, Rahel's married life with Larry fails ultimately ending in divorce. After having carried the trauma

alone for more than twenty years, the twins meet with each other when they return to their family home in Ayemenem. The novel that begins with the narrative of this reunion (involving their incestuous encounter) in adulthood, goes on to recount their childhood experiences which have played significant roles in shaping their identities and ends by unraveling each "small" event in their life in a reverse chronological order.

Immediately after its publication in 1997, this Booker Prize-winning novel received a great reception in both South Asia and abroad. Reviews and criticism of the novel appeared addressing a number of issues including the caste system, corruption, gender violence, transgressions, ghost stories, globalization, power politics, pollution, and the neo-colonialization that the book touches upon in retelling the story(ies) of the twins. Aijaz Ahmad's article in the August 1997 issue of the CPI (M)-Friendly *Frontline* magazine, by far the most nuanced of such critiques, takes Roy to task for reproducing the "hostility toward the Communist movement [that] is now fairly common among radical sections of the intelligentsia, in India and abroad" (103). Ahmad, specifically, criticizes what he regards as the conservative implications of the novel's representation of sexuality "as the final realm of both Pleasure and of Truth" and "a sufficient mode for overcoming real social oppressions" (104, 107).

In her article published in *Ariel* in 1998, Brinda Bose concentrates on the acts of sexual transgressions in the novel. "Is the pursuit of erotic desire a capitalist preoccupation?" Bose asks, "Or could Roy have valourized sexuality – and preeminently female sexuality – as an acceptable politics with an agenda that can and does sustain itself in the tumult of sociocultural fluxes?" (59). Finding a midway between Deleuzian

theorization of the "desiring machines," and Aijaz Ahmad's critique of the erotic as Ammu's "apolitical" act, she stresses the subversive power of sexual transgression. Bose writes:

> In asserting her own "biological" desire for a man who inhabits a space beyond the permissible boundaries of "touchability," it appears that Ammu attempts a subversion of caste/class rules, as well as the male tendency to dominate by being, necessarily, the initiator of the sexual act. Further, Rahel and Estha's incestuous lovemaking as the culmination of a "dizygotic" closeness that transcends – and violates – all biological norms, is proof once again of the subversive powers of desire and sexuality in an arena that is rife with the politics of gender divisions and the rules that govern them. (64)

In addition to the transgressive politics existing in "an erogenous zone" (61), Bose also asserts that the novel emphasizes the need to rewrite the history, especially that of the Love Laws. Bose adds, "All histories, as we all know now, are re-told in various ways. There is no one story that endures; *who* tells the tale and *who* listens is almost as important as *who* broke the Laws in the first place" (emphasis in the original, 67). What is most fascinating about Bose's critique is that she sees the politics of the novel in the subversion of the "shame and defeat through the valourization of erotic desire" (70); however, Bose does not expend any space in analyzing its roots that lie in the characters' childhood.

In "The Ethical Subject of *The God of Small Things*," Janet Thormann reads the novel as the development of "Arjun Appadurai's understanding of the global economy's infiltration of local economies of desire, consumption, and political power, as it shows the ways in which local historical trajectories flow into complicated transnational structures" (301). Thormann argues, "The novel's 'Love Laws' are the grammar structuring the interpenetration of global and local power, the regulations governing capitalist distribution, caste, and women" (301). Slightly different than Bose's interpretation of Ammu's relation with Velutha as an act of rebellion against the caste-based Love Laws, Thormann sees Ammu's decision as a challenge to "the intolerable split between mother and desiring" where "the subject is the effect of patriarchal power imposing a forced choice on woman" (305). Thormann asserts, "Ammu's radical refusal to give up on desire stands as the novel's commitment to the good of the subjects. As she chooses to love Velutha, she rejects the paternal law governing the regulation of women and at the same time breaks the rigidity of caste stratification" (305). Specifically, Thormann highlights the way the novel resists the laws of exchange determining social arrangements within the local context of Kerala that is integrated into the global economy.

Gurleen Grewal finds the theme of "ecology of being" to be at the center of the novel, because it shows "how each life is shaped by what happens to others" (152). For Grewal, *God* attests to Roy's claim in "multiple citizenships and in the accountability of responsibility that attends them – Indian citizenship; global capitalist citizenship (or as a 'subject of Empire'); and a democratic feminist-humanitarian people's citizenship of the

world" (143). Grewal argues that even the postcolonial lens to the empire tends to privilege a certain narrative of victimization. In this sense, Roy's consistent emphasis on the local/global unaccountability of power in the fictionalized village community of Kerala in *God* is commendable. However, Grewal argues, "perhaps the problem of the human condition lies in our not seeing ourselves implicated in the very structures we are critiquing" (153). Grewal asserts that "victimization is real and terrible, but until we are willing to recognize the limits of the narrative of victimization, we shall not experience the power of love, and we will remain part of the problem we attempt to resolve" (153). Above all, Grewal is pleased to see Roy being more than just an "argumentative Indian" and going beyond "the discourse and practice of dissent" (152).

Likewise, Susan Comfort identifies Roy's work with "postcolonial environmental feminism" (118). What Comfort finds most significant about Roy's work in this regard is "its postcolonial critique of environmental degradation and injustice; that is, one that looks at forces both outside and within India – at both global capitalism and configurations of state power, ideology, and capitalism within India" (118). Pranav Jani, however, recognizes the "unmistakably progressive and leftist" paradigm of the novel, bound together with Roy's essays published after its publication. Jani argues, "If we allow the narrative to breathe and speak its mind, as it were, it becomes clear that far from being a sign of a cosmopolitan-elite anticommunism, the criticism of the CPI(M) in the universe constructed by *The God of Small Things* is actually a marker of its leftist politics" (49). Both Comfort and Jani oversee what Bhabha calls the bits and pieces of

life in safe-looking homes like the Ayemenem House where children suffer at the hands of oppressive parents and grandparents.

Jesse T. Airaudi, on the other hand, likens Roy, her work, and the censorship attempts against her book, to the life and oeuvre of Salman Rushdie. Airaudi insists that both Roy and Rushdie are reinventing politics, and the proof for this interpretation lies in their depiction of the real crisis that is engulfing the planet by using the "fantastic frame" which results in "mongrelization," or "hybridity" (4-5). Roy's use of the pickle factory metaphor very aptly applies the notion of hybridity that is juxtaposed with the hierarchical model symbolized by the History House located across the River Meenachal. Airaudi rightly points out, "The antidote to the 'Big Ideas that kill' is, in Roy's fiction, small things and ordinary lives really lived and real life can only be attained through the loss of our illusions" (11). These are but a few examples of Roy critics who try to glean "big things" out of the "small things" that the novel focuses on in its portrayal of the repressive and hypocritical world we live in.

However, the "small" world of children and adolescents and their "small" childhood experiences that leave "big holes" in their "universe," to use Roy's own words, have been almost neglected in all these critical studies. To me, the "small" things like singling a child on the basis of one's racial or cultural difference, victimizing children as a way of taking revenge on their parent(s), separating children from their peers, siblings, or parents, insisting that children tell "small" lies to buttress their own "big" ones, and most importantly, ignoring their psychological needs, are all as important as the "big" issues like political tensions, environmental issues, globalization, and so on. But these

issues, the "survival" questions in Bhabha's terms, have gotten little space in the critiques of Roy's novel. This chapter tries to fill this gap observed in the reception of Roy's book by bringing the "small" things, characters, and events related to SA youths that are either ignored or abjected, to the forefront.

The Outcast(e)s: Fitting in among Friends and Family Members

God is one of the few novels about SA youths which ventures to speak the "unspeakable," touch the "untouchable," and cross the "uncrossable" boundaries. All these aspects crossing socially constructed boundaries are tied to the questions of acceptance and abjection. With regard to South Asia, these questions also need to be connected with the position of children in the family hierarchy. Growing up in a Hindu family, I have myself experienced being an "untouchable" in my own family. My father would not allow me to touch his food, until my *bratbandha* was performed at the age of nine.[11] In the case of girl children, this provision lasts until they get married. Like the members of the so-called "untouchables," who would never enter our house, my father wouldn't let me cross the small boundary created between adults' and children's spaces

[11] *Bratabandha* is one of the significant Hindu Initiation rites performed onto sons when they get seven years or older. On this occasion, the youth is assigned to a Guru for obtaining religious lessons from the Hindu Scriptures like the *Gita* and the *Upanishadas*. From this very day, the youth is initiated into the adult world. The occasion is celebrated with festivities among friends and relatives. This rite allows the youth to participate in all religious activities in the family and community as adults.

near the kitchen of our house. During their menstrual periods, observed strictly for five days, women members in our family would be considered "untouchables" and never be allowed to cross that boundary. I always wondered why my mother never ate before my father if he was around. I never asked why and the adults never bothered to explain. Perhaps they were "small" things.

Now, after reading *God* for this project, I have been exploring answers to such seemingly small questions along with the larger question of voice in the context of children and young adults in South Asia. Can children and young adults in South Asia voice their concerns in front of their elders? If not, what are those forces or ideologies that silence these voices? Can Western intervention help them to escape from the local or regional oppressive forces or would that pose additional threat in the development of moral agency in these children and young adults? Does silence only mean ignorance, acknowledgement of inferiority or a lack of agency? Or can silence also pose a threat upon those in power who are only used to hearing the voices of the privileged and the powerful? What happens if people continuously ignored or abjected resort to silence? Will they ultimately cross the boundaries including that of the "Love Laws"? Analyzing the identities of Estha, Rahel, Sophie Mol, Ammu, and Velutha, who are all characters that inhabit the "small" world owing to their marginalized location, I argue that when abjected subjects are pushed beyond the limits of toleration, they make transgressive moves even if doing so endangers their lives.

Julia Kristeva identifies abjection as a condition in which "an Other has settled in place and stead of what will be 'me'" (10). According to Kristeva, this Other is not at all

the other with whom one identifies and incorporates, but an Other who precedes and possesses one, and through such possession causes one to be. Kristeva argues, "If, on account of that Other, a space becomes demarcated, separating the abject from what will be a subject and its objects, it is because a repression that one might call 'primal' has been affected prior to the springing forth of the ego, of its objects and representations" (10-11). In this sense, most of the major characters in *God* are the abjects. They have long histories of being abjected in terms of their race, class, caste, gender, and marital or political affiliations, especially in their childhood or adolescence. In one way or other, these characters appear as perverts in the eyes of the society because, according to Kristeva, the abject is almost always related to perversion (15). "The abject is perverse," Kristeva writes, "because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or a law; but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them. It kills in the name of life . . ." (15). It is therefore fascinating to relate the stories of abjections behind each of these characters to the acts of "perversion" or transgression they perform later in their adulthood.

Estha is one of the "dizygotic" twins that Roy uses as focalizers for the novel that recounts the incidents responsible for the destruction of the family in Ayemenem House. After going through events like sexual abuse by the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man at Abhilash Talkies, Sophie Mol's death and the blame being laid on him, Estha is separated from his sister, mother, and Velutha. As a result, especially after the separation from his twin sister and his return to the father, Estha develops a temperament of selective mutism.

> [Estha] Stopped talking altogether, that is. The fact is that there wasn't an "exactly when." It had been a gradual winding down and closing shop. A barely noticeable quietening. As though he had simply run out of conversation and had nothing left to say. Yet Estha's silence was never awkward. Never intrusive. Never noisy. It wasn't an accusing, protesting silence as much as a sort of estivation, a dormancy, the psychological equivalent of what lungfish do to get themselves through the dry season, except that in Estha's case the dry season looked as though it would last forever. (12)

Since there is not any definable reason for Estha's quietness, it is essential to analyze the small things in his life, often ignored by the larger discourses of politics, whether it is local, national, or global. In Roy's own words, "Little events, ordinary things, smashed and reconstituted. Imbued with new meaning. Suddenly they become the bleached bones of a story" (33). In Estha's case, the event of abuse at the Abhilasha Talkies, partiality meted out by the adult members in the family between Sophie Mol and the twins, and the forced separation of the twins, account for the way he is after twenty-three years. All these major events in the child's life become masked by the smile of the abusive Orangedrink Lemondrink Man, the prestige of the Ayemenem House, and the charm of English language and white skin of Margaret Kochamma that the family of Anglophiles are envious of.

The illicit sex between Estha and his sister is clearly the culmination of the forced separation and the consequent perversion in an abject who uses perversion as a challenge

to the ideologies that seep into one's life—like what Roy calls "tea from a teabag" (33). It threatens his very survival at the different moments of ego formation. Velutha's death inside police custody is simply dismissed by the adult world. It is only Estha and Rahel who bear the burden of this death throughout their lives. Even then, "Estha occupied very little space in the world" (12). Therefore, it is necessary to look closely at the factors that lead to Estha's silence and the twins' desire for an incestuous relation, amongst other acts of transgression which become pardonable to some, while punishable to others in the novel. As Bose also attests, "*The God of Small Things* delineates a politics of desire that is vitally linked to the politics of voice" (67). Every act of transgression has a strong political motive behind it.

Sophie Mol is another significant but not adequately understood character whose brief presence – a total of two weeks – leaves a lasting effect in the world of Ayemenem. In Roy's words, "The Loss of Sophie Mol grew robust and alive. Like a fruit in season. Every season" (253). Considering the death of this young girl and its impact in the life of Rahel and Estha from the perspective of a young reader reveals not only Sophie Mol's individual desire for friendship and acceptance, her revolt against the hypocritical world of the adults, and sacrifice for acceptance from her cousins, but also the fantasy of the West about SA peoples and its impact on the emerging identities of the youths.

Born of a white mother (Margaret Kochamma) and an Indian father (Chacko), Sophie Mol grows up in England with her mother and her English boyfriend after the divorce of her biological parents. Throughout the novel, the girl's last name is replaced with Mol ("little girl" in Malayalam) which rightly showcases her hybrid identity and

youthful image (58*)*. Although the narrative remains silent about her position among other white children in her community in Britain, Sophie Mol's craving for friendship in India exposes the possible abjection she might have experienced due to her hybrid status. The circumstances that lead to Sophie Mol's death have strong connections with two things: her desire for friendship and her need tor revolt against the adult world.

Even before Sophie Mol arrives, she becomes the center of attention for the adults in India, and at the same time the target of Estha and Rahel's anger at the grown-ups in their family. Always neglected by other adults, Rahel and Estha fear that the entry of Sophie Mol might divert the attention of their mother, who has been the only source of love and inspiration from them. The following conversation between Rahel and Chacko clearly reveals the fear:

> "Chacko, do you love Sophie Mol Most in the World?"
>
> "She's my daughter," Chacko said.
>
> Rahel considered this.
>
> "Chacko? Is it *Necessary* that people HAVE to love their own children Most in the World?"
>
> "There are no rules," Chacko said, "But people usually do."
>
> "Chacko, for example," Rahel said, "just for *example*, is it possible that Ammu can love Sophie Mol more than me and Estha? Or for you to love me more than Sophie Mol for *example*?" (emphasis in the original, 112)

It is the adults in the family who instigate Rahel's and Estha's jealousy toward Sophie Mol. As a preparation for welcoming this half-white cousin, the twins are forced to

practice “correct” English expressions. “That whole week Baby Kochamma eavesdropped relentlessly on the twins’ private conversations, and whenever she caught them speaking in Malayalam, she levied a small fine which was deducted at source. From their pocket money” (36). Moreover, “She had made them practice an English car song for the way back. They had to form the words properly, and be particularly careful about their pronunciation. Prer *NUN* sea ayshun” (36). All these impositions generate a kind of aversion in the twins toward Sophie Mol long before she arrives. However, the adults fail to foresee the possibility of love and friendship that develops among these children by the time Sophie Mol dies.

What frustrates the twins most is that they are expected to perform at the airport as if Sophie Mol was a foreign delegate, a replica of the British rulers in colonial times. On the way to the airport, Rahel and Estha sit on the backseat of the Plymouth with Baby Kochamma between them. The narrator describes the tense ambience as follows: “In the way that the unfortunate sometimes dislike the co-unfortunate, Baby Kochamma disliked the twins, for she considered them doomed, fatherless waifs. Worse still, they were Half-Hindu Hybrids whom no self-respecting Syrian Christian would ever marry” (44). No one pays attention to the jealousy plaguing Baby Kochamma due to her failed affair with Father Mulligan when she was young, now surfacing in her treatment of the twins. And for the twins, they cannot even think of asking why “there would be two flasks of water. Boiled water for Margaret Kochamma and Sophie Mol, tap water for everybody else” (45). Despite this discrimination, the twins are told that they had to act like Ambassadors. “Don’t forget that you are Ambassadors of India,” Baby Kochamma tells them; “You’re

going to form First Impression of your country" (133). In front of a child like themselves, how could they behave well like grown-up Ambassadors, when they themselves as children have never been valued in their family?

Eventually, the anglophiles Baby Kochamma and uncle Chacko fail to employ the twins to leave an impression of "civilized mannerism" on Margaret Kochamma. As soon as Sophie Mol and Margaret Kochamma arrive at the airport, the twins begin to demonstrate a sense of rebellion in the "Indo-British Behavior Competition" (139). All the efforts put into the rehearsals become futile. The adults, even Ammu, grow furious at the way they act. "She [Ammu] felt somehow humiliated by this public revolt in her area of jurisdiction. She had wanted a smooth performance" (139). Ammu's angry eyes on Estha say, "*All right. Later*. . . "; However, Ambassador Rahel, "unable to cope with seesawing changes in her life, had raveled (sic) herself like a sausage into the dirty airport curtain, and wouldn't unravel" (139). When Margaret Kochamma asks, "Aren't you going to come out and say Hello?" in a kind-schoolteacher voice, "Rahel wouldn't come out of the curtain because she couldn't. She couldn't because she couldn't. Because Everything was wrong" (139-40). As they come out of the curtain later, Ammu turns back to Estha and Rahel with her eyes as "blurred jewels" (140). The twins clearly understand that they will have to bear the burden of this revolt sooner or later; however, not to the extent of being charged with the murder of their cousin (and a friend) or being separated from one another.

In spite of the fiasco at the first meeting at the airport, Sophie Mol tries her best to be closer to Rahel and Estha. She pays no heed to the boundary created between her and

her twin cousins on the basis of their skin color. This boundary cannot hold back their desire for friendship any longer. Even on the way home, the children start talking about the person they love most, only to be punctuated by Baby Kochamma's suggestion for a car song (in English) which the twins are supposed to sing in spite of their reluctance, in perfect "Prer NUN sea ayshun" in order to impress the English guests (147). Baby Kochamma's actions are motivated by her need to maintain her image as an Anglophile, and at the same time by her desire to take revenge on Ammu by preventing Sophie Mol from mixing with Rahel and Estha. I believe that, even in this adverse condition, Roy tries to show the hybridity in children and their ability to relate to each other beyond the East-West barriers among the children, which would perhaps be impossible in adult world. In other words, Roy makes it possible for the children with Western mindset to mix up with those who have SA upbringing. I think it would not be possible among adults within such a short period of their acquaintance. Children are more prone to breaking socially constructed boundaries than adults.

Sophie Mol becomes ready to face any punishment for the sake of friendship. Even without her mother's permission, she smuggles the gifts she has brought for the cousins and embarks on the journey from where she never returns to her mother. "Sophie Mol put the presents into her go-go bag, and went forth into the world. To drive a hard bargain. To negotiate a Friendship" (253). Upon being excluded from the clandestine trip to the river, Rahel and Estha find Sophie Mol in the garden in tears, perched on the highest point of Baby Kochamma's Herb Curl, "'Being Lonely,' as she put it. The next day Estha and Rahel took her with them to visit Velutha" (180). After that, they spend a

few days together in the History House across the river, all by themselves. Besides the desire for friendship, Sophie Mol also seems to have collected plenty of resentment toward adults. It can also be argued that she develops a death drive due to excessive abjection. As the narrative goes:

> Sophie Mol had convinced the twins that it was *essential* that she go along too. That the absence of children, *all* children, would heighten the adults' remorse. It would make them truly sorry, like the grown-ups in Hamelin after the Pied Piper took away all their children. They would search everywhere and just when they were sure that all three of them were dead, they would return home in triumph. Valued, loved, and needed more than ever. Her clinching argument was that if she were left behind she might be tortured and forced to reveal their hiding place. (276)

Sophie Mol's understanding of the adults and their weaknesses deserves serious attention. She is much wiser than any of the adults involved. How children break boundaries of race, class, caste, and gender for the sake of friendship remains unfathomable to the adults, like Baby Kochamma, who becomes ready to use all her dubious means to break their relationships for the sake of perpetuating her power in the family. In order to fill in the gap created in her psyche by Father Mulligan's rejection of her love, Baby Kochamma has been projecting her self-hatred onto Ammu and her children. Thus, Baby Kochamma, herself an abject character since her adolescence, can neither tolerate Ammu's transgressive love for a Hindu man nor the friendship among the cousins now.

In *Looking Glasses and Neverlands*, Coats reminds us that "adolescence is a time of cultivating group identity" (138). "Socially abject figures," Coats observes, "cannot seem to manage either the material conditions and habits or the identifications necessary to sustain a position in a social group" (138). As a result, the experience of being abjected defines the character's way of being in the world (139). Like most child and adolescent characters in Western youth literatures, major characters in *God* go through different phases of being abjected by friends and family members. Most events involving violence and transgression in the narrative have their roots in the experiences of being socially or psychologically abjected during childhood or adolescence. Roy implies that abjection has existed as an indispensable part of the history of Love Laws which began "thousands of years ago" (33).

The story of Sophie Mol's death becomes the locus for most of the events that occur in the lives of Estha, Rahel, Ammu, and Velutha. Estha and Rahel do not hate her because she is half-white. It is the adults who are responsible for the ways in which they have projected their anger against family members following Sophie Mol's arrival. Thus, *God* powerfully portrays the stories of the abjection of women in patriarchal families, of natives in colonial India, of untouchables in Hindu culture, of those who have gone native among the white people's colony, of the have-nots in the society ruled by the haves, of the powerless under the rule of the powerful, of children and young adults in hierarchical family structures. The children's efforts to fit in among family members and friends are always discouraged. At least in the story, what Rahel and Estha are now is the result of what has happened during their childhood and adolescence twenty three years ago. What

happens to Rahel and Estha then (in their youth) directly correlates with what happened to the mother and her untouchable friend Velutha when they are young. Likewise, the youth of Ammu has been influenced by the youthful longings and deprivations that Ammachi and her sister Baby Kochamma went through at the time they were young. Thus Sophie Mol's death, and all the events that occur in its aftermath, have a long history of violence perpetrated upon the outcaste(s) in the backdrop of the Love Laws. And in most of these cases, the abjected characters act more rationally than those who abject them.

The "Love Laws": Dealing with Love, Sex, Marriage, and Divorce

The child's observation of, and participation in, the discourses of love, sex, marriage, and separation, are indispensable parts of growing up. Roy puts all of these themes, especially that of love, at the center of this novel. The stories of love and hatred, failed or successful relationships, make the family not only a source of joy, but also the site of horror. The power-play among family members, especially in the closed family structure of this typical SA community, results in traumatic childhoods and adolescences that plague everyone's adult lives. The chain of reactions gets carried over through "small" discriminatory family practices to more socially-visible cases of abuse, torture, and death. For example, Roy's novel pushes the stories of erotic relations and other extra-marital affairs much beyond the boundaries of social laws. Therefore, it would be an injustice to interpret the forbidden relations between Rahel and Estha and between the "touchable" Ammu and the "untouchable" Velutha only at the level of the gratification of

carnal desires. The transgressive sex between the two pairs, in their early thirties, the "viable die-able age" as Roy puts it, is, in fact, their own ways of revolting against the dominant and adult society's unjust Love Laws (5).

Most marriages in the novel fail in one way or the other. SA cultures are often critiqued by the Western writers for their practice of arranged marriages and the subjugation of women in the names of cultural practices like the veil (mostly in Muslim culture) and *sati* (in Hindu culture, especially in colonial period). Western cultural and literary discourses portray arranged marriage as a significant cause for child abuse, a violation of the right of choice, and domestic violence, including the forced or "sanctioned self-immolation" of women subjects in the mythic widow burning practice known as *sati* (Spivak 273). Instead of favoring one system of marriage over another, Roy's novel critiques all different kinds of marriages that privilege one of the spouses over another. The ties between Chacko and Margaret Kochamma, Ammu and her husband, and Rahel and Larry McCaslin are examples of failed love marriages. The marriages of Mammachi and Papachi, and that of Comrade Pillai and Kalyani endure longer, but they are also not without problems. Mammachi is utterly abused by her husband until he dies. Comrade Pillai treats his wife as if she is a second class citizen. We do not know much about the relation between Margaret Kochamma and Joe, her English husband, after her divorce from Chacko, except the fact that Joe dies in an accident. No matter why and how they fail, these abusive relations are in some way backed up by the Love Laws that leave indelible scars in the lives of the younger generations.

Likewise, most love affairs, pre-marital or extra-marital, remain as hidden or suppressed sides of the characters' identities. Baby Kochamma's infatuation with Father Mulligan is rejected in spite of her efforts to win his favor until she loses her hope. "At first Baby Kochamma tried to seduce Father Mulligan with weekly exhibitions of staged charity" (24). Since this effort that lasts for almost a whole year does not yield any favourable outcome, the distraught youth invests all her hope in faith. She defies her father's wishes and becomes a Roman Catholic to get closer to him. She leaves home and enters a convent in Madras as a trainee novice all for finding a legitimate occasion to be with Father Mulligan. "She pictured them together, in dark sepulchral rooms with heavy velvet drapes, discussing theology. That was all she wanted. All she ever dared to hope for. Just to be near him. Close enough to smell his beard. To see the coarse (sic) of his cassock. To love him just by looking at him" (25). However, her endeavor becomes futile because the senior sisters monopolize the priests and bishops with biblical doubts more sophisticated than hers. Finally, she "develops a stubborn allergic rash on her scalp from the constant chafing of her wimple" (25). When her father, Reverend Ipe, goes to Madras to withdraw his daughter (Baby Kochamma) from the convent, her failed affair gives her a reputation and makes her unlikely to find a husband. "He decided that since she couldn't have a husband there was no harm in her having an education. So he made arrangements for her to attend a course of study at the University of Rochester in America" (26). This failed affair becomes one of the most prominent disorienting factors in the lives of other youths in the family, whether they belong to Baby's own generation or that of her niece, Ammu.

Ammu's marriage with the Hindu man, Rahel and Estha's father, is neither the case of a love marriage nor an arranged one, for that matter. She meets him in Calcutta when she grows desperate and in search of an escape from the family, only two years after she finishes schooling in Delhi.

> There was very little for a young girl to do in Ayemenem other than to wait for marriage proposals while she helped her mother with the housework. She met him when she working as an assistant manager of a tea estate in Calcutta. Since her father did not have enough money to raise a suitable dowry, no proposals came Ammu's way. Two years went by. Her eighteenth birthday came and went. Unnoticed, or at least unremarked upon by her parents. Ammu grew desperate. All day she dreamed of escaping from Ayemenem and the clutches of her ill-tempered father and bitter, long suffering mother. (38)

In this desperate condition, Ammu meets the Hindu man in his mid-twenties working in a tea estate as an assistant manager. Ammu accepts this man, the son of a rich father, who proposes her only five days after they first met. "Ammu didn't pretend to be in love with him. She just weighed the odds and accepted. She thought anything, anyone at all, would be better than returning to Ayemenem" (39). Ammu is never accepted by her family, who blame her for choosing the inter-religious love marriage, though the nature of her marriage is hybrid in nature. It has been her own decision, but not a case of "love" as Western readers would perceive it.

Ammu's return to Ayemenem with the twins, after she gets divorced from this drunkard husband is not a choice either. First of all, she wants to escape from the abusive manager, her husband's boss in the tea estate, and then her own husband's "drunken violence followed by postdrunken badgering" at home (41, 42). So "Ammu left her husband and returned, unwelcomed, to her parents in Ayemenem" (42). There, Ammu's mere presence is considered a disgrace. Besides others, Baby Kochamma's resentment of Ammu is not only based on her jealousy built up of her own failed affair with Father Mulligan, but also on the revenge motive linked to family prestige although Baby Kochamma had herself made a failed attempt at this disgraceful love marriage.

> She subscribed wholeheartedly to the commonly held view that a married daughter had no position in her parents' home. As for a *divorced* daughter – according to Baby Kochamma, she had no position anywhere at all. And as for a *divorced* daughter from a *love* marriage, well, words could not describe Baby Kochamma's outrage. As for a *divorced* daughter from an *intercommunity love* marriage – Baby Kochamma chose to remain quaveringly silent on the subject. (Emphasis in the original, 45)

Thus, in spite of the alienation from her own mother and her unmarried grand aunt, this young and single mother with twin children, Ammu, remains at this unwelcome home by sacrificing her own biological, as well as emotional needs, all for the sake of the children. "Because of you!" Once Ammu has screamed at her children: "If it wasn't for you I wouldn't be here! None of this would have happened! I wouldn't be here! I would have been free! I should have dumped you in an orphanage the day you were born! *You're* the

millstones round my neck!" (emphasis in the original, 240). All of these tensions built up in Ammu's psyche boost her courage to have sex with Velutha in spite of being aware of its consequence. Ammu's relation with Velutha, however, is much longer, deeper and liberating than that of the twins. Had the affair been driven only by desire, Ammu could have chosen to run away with Velutha even when she was young and desperately needed an escape. What happens between them later in life, in their "viable die-able" age, is more motivated by her desire to "touch the untouchable." As Bose puts it, "Ammu of the earlier generation catapults across caste/class divisions to pursue an erotic desire for the Untouchable carpenter, the God of Small Things, Velutha" (59). They have grown up together in Ayemenem, one as the daughter of a relatively well-to-do family of Syrian Christians, and the other as the son of the untouchable Paravan living on his own labor and the charity of the rich people. In spite of the social barrier between them, even as children, they would exchange small gifts with each other. In normal conditions, a love affair or marriage between the two is completely unthinkable.

However, once the abjection of Ammu and Velutha becomes unbearable to them, they begin to meet at night in a haunted house across the river. "To love by night the man her children loved by day," Ammu would use the boat that Estha sat on and Rahel found" (192-93). Initially, Velutha is very ambivalent about the blossoming affair. "He tried to hate her. *She's one of them,* he told himself. *Just another one of them.* He couldn't" (emphasis in the original, 204). However, through these secret meetings, the love culminates into a sexual encounter.

> Without admitting it to each other or themselves, they linked their fates, their futures (their Love, their Madness, their Hope, their Infinite Joy), to his. They checked on him every night (with growing panic as time went by) to see if he had survived the day. They fretted over his frailty. His smallness. The adequacy of his camouflage. His seemingly self-destructive pride. They grew to love his eclectic taste. His shambling dignity. . . . Each time they parted, they extracted only one small promise from each other:
>
> *Tomorrow?*
>
> *Tomorrow.*
>
> They knew that things could change in a day. They were right about that. (Emphasis in the original, 320-21)

As both Ammu and Velutha foresee, everything changes as soon as the matter gets disclosed by Velutha's father, who does so out of a sense of insecurity. He cannot estimate that his revelation will be the cause of his son's murder.

Velutha's father reports to Mammachi what he has seen, the unthinkable and the impossible happen for a single reason. It is not simply because he is a SA father who wants his son to accept the marriage he will arrange for him, as some Western audiences might interpret it. It is primarily because he has internalized casteism and thinks that it is a crime to cross the boundary. Out of interpellation, he has developed an illusion that by taking responsibility for his son's act of defiling the prestige of the masters, his voice will be heard and both he and his son will be forgiven. He even offers to kill his own son for

the crime he has committed. “Mammachi couldn’t hear what he was saying,” but she knows her power over the Untouchable Paravan (242). “Suddenly the blind old woman in her rickrack dressing gown and with her thin gray hair plaited into a rat’s tail stepped forward and pushed Vellya Pappen with all her strength. . . . Part of the taboo of being an Untouchable was expecting not to be touched.” (243). For this moment, the untouchable becomes touchable.

On the other hand, Baby Kochamma’s first reaction to this news about such a disgrace in the family is: “*How could she stand the smell? Haven’t you noticed? They have a particular smell, these Paravans?*” (emphasis in the original, 243). The spirit of abjection can be clearly observed in her reaction in biological form. It is her desire to exploit this opportunity to take revenge on both Velutha and Ammu that leads to Velutha’s death at the police custody and Ammu’s separation from her twins forever. Ultimately, Ammu ends up facing a solitary death in a hotel room. Ahmad comments, “If Ammu were to live on, she would have to face the fact that the erotic is very rarely a sufficient mode for overcoming real social oppressions; one has to make some other, more complex choices in which the erotic may be an element but hardly the only one” (106-07). I do agree with Ahmad in the sense that Ammu’s choice of rebelling against the caste discrimination would have been successful at least if she could save their lives. Her transgression does not succeed to end the discriminatory Love Laws. Even in the case of the twins, this transgression does not alter their condition in life, or change their society.

The most disorienting act of sexual transgression in the novel is that of the relationship between Rahel and Estha. From the very time they become aware of their

own twinned status, they consider themselves as one soul with two bodies. This is a significant reason why they cannot develop their separate individual identities. The social forces around them constantly forbid them from developing smooth friendships outside the family. They carry with them the guilt of Sophie Mol's death, Velutha's murder in police custody, Ammu's exile, and family disjunction, wherever they go. As a result, neither of them can develop stable relations with people. Rahel's failed marriage with Larry and Estha's failure in his studies, as well as other personal relations, are influenced by these traumatic childhood experiences.

Ultimately, on their return to Ayemenem, Rahel and Estha become involved in an erotic relationship that breaks the Love Laws made thousands of years ago. This incestuous relationship between the siblings has been a matter of critique among many Indian readers. Ahmad, for instance, argues "this phallocentric utopia is of course all the more pleasurable if partners in it transgress such boundaries as those of class and caste" (104). There is a suggestion in this allegation, according to Bose, that "Roy was looking for the most saleable formula of sexuality for her novel, which would then (v)indicate a capitalist politics" (61). However, Bose adds, "Roy's novel focuses on the lines that one cannot, or should not, cross – and yet those are the very lines that do get crossed. If only once in a while – and then that makes for the politics of those extra-ordinary stories" (61). Above all, Roy's politics exists in an erogenous zone; the erotic, however is not totally divorced from the world of "actual" politik (Bose 61). These critics focus only the political aspect, or the lack of it, in Roy's choice of making the erotic a form of rebellion. To me, however, how most of these personal choices in love and sexuality can be seen by

drawing upon psychoanalytical perspectives becomes important. These transgressions have immediate connections with the childhood experiences of the characters. In short, a disoriented childhood becomes the cause of dysfunctional adulthood which has larger social and cultural consequences.

Self vs. Other: Grappling with Body Image and Self-esteem

It is very strategic that Roy develops her main young characters, Rahel and Estha, together. As twins, they were born with the difference of only eighteen minutes. "They were 'Dizygotic' doctors called them. Born from separate but simultaneously fertilized eggs. Estha – Esthappen – was the older by eighteen minutes" (4). Roy writes, ". . . even when they were thin-armed children, flat-chested, wormridden and Elvis Presley-puffed, there was none of the usual 'Who is who?' and 'Which is which?' from oversmiling relatives or the Syrian Orthodox bishops who frequently visited the Ayemenem House for donations" (4). The author describes this phase as "amorphous years when memory had only just begun, when life was full of Beginnings and no Ends, and Everything was Forever, Esthappen and Rahel thought of themselves together as Me, and separately, individually, as We or Us" (4). Rahel claims that she even remembers the taste of the tomato sandwiches that Estha ate on the Madras Mali to Madras. More intimately, she remembers the things that "the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man did to Estha in Abhilash Talkies" though she had not been there (5). Thus, there are no boundaries between them until about seven years of age. They could never imagine being separate individuals in spite of the fact that "the confusion lay in a deeper, secret place" (4). Growing up in a

family where “small” things are never taken seriously, the twins are never told that they have separate identities. Nikolajeva uses the term “collective character” to describe this kind of characterization where “the two characters' consciousnesses are presented to the reader as enhancing and complementing each other” (14). Nikolajeva writes, “. . . while a collective character is a simple sum of its constituents, an intersubjective character is constructed through an intricate interplay of subject positions in the text” (149).

The twins have a few vague memories of their life before the divorce of their parents. The only thing they remember about their father is “his anger” (Roy, *God* 80). Once he gave “them puffs from his cigarette and got annoyed because they had sucked it and wet the filter with spit” (80). The other memory they have is of being torn between the two in their fights around the time of their divorce. “They remembered being pushed around a room once, from Ammu to Baba to Ammu to Baba like billiard balls. Ammu pushing Estha away. *Here, you keep one of them. I can’t look after them both*” (emphasis in the original, 80-81). However, Ammu wants them to forget the memories as if they were only the imagination of the children. “Later, when Estha asked Ammu about that, she hugged him and said he mustn’t imagine things” (81). Thus, they have never had a sweet memory of childhood to be nostalgic about, as is often the case in novels written for the young in the West. Likewise, they have never had a strong father-figure to rely on or to struggle away from as is seen in the Freudian model of self-formation.

Rahel and Estha are confused about the inter-connectedness of their identities ever since the time they become aware of their status as twins. Unlike the common practice of giving the father’s surname to children in their culture, “Ammu was

considering reverting to her maiden name, though she said that choosing between her husband's name and her father's name didn't give a woman much of a choice" (36-37). For the time being, "Estha's full name was Esthappen Yako. Rahel's was Rahel" (36). Exposed to Indian movies and Western popular culture early in their childhood, Estha and Rahel form their fantasy images along with the images of the celebrities. Estha loves to wear his beige and pointy shoes and his Elvis puff, and considers his favorite Elvis song to be "Party," whereas Rahel loves to have her hair sit on top of her head like a fountain, held together by a "Love-in-Tokyo" which is made of "two beads on a rubber band, nothing to do with Love or Tokyo" (37). When they go to the Airport, to carry out the "Welcome Home Our Sophie Mol Performance," they are supposed to act like Ambassadors of India: "Two-egg Ambassador Elvis. Their Excellencies Ambassador E(lvis). Pelvis, and Ambassador S(tick). Insect" (133). This is the only time when Rahel has a high self-esteem and thinks of herself as "an Airport Fairy with appalling taste" (133).

But, since Estha has already been the victim of sexual abuse at Abhilash Talkies, he is already psychologically distraught and disoriented. He suffers from a "bottomless-bottomfull felling" because he is pre-occupied with the anxiety that the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man knows where to find him (134). He could appear any time in the factory in Ayemenem or on the banks of the Meenachal (134). Perhaps the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man would never follow Estha, but the traumatic history remains at the core of Estha's psyche forever. As Cathy Caruth argues, "[f]or history to be a history of trauma means that it is referential precisely to the extent that it is not fully perceived as it

occurs; or to put it somewhat differently, that a history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence" (187). Estha's history of trauma, in this sense, is the history of abuse which was not accessible to himself as well as to his mother at the time of its occurrence. And now it keeps troubling him because it is neither liberating nor deniable.

Moreover, both Rahel and Estha fear that with the arrival of Sophie Mol, they could lose the love of their mother. They have already observed that no other member of the family, except Ammu, has ever accepted them as normal children. In the eyes of Mammachi, for instance, "what her grandchildren suffered from was far worse than Inbreeding. She meant having parents who were divorced. As though these were the only choices available to people: Inbreeding or Divorce" (59). Rahel is often confused by such remarks. "Rahel wasn't sure what she suffered from, but occasionally she practiced sad faces, and sighing in the mirror" (59). She couldn't understand why Ammu said things like, "You cannot trust anybody. Mother, father, brother, husband, bestfriend. Nobody. With children, . . . it remained to be seen" (79). Once Ammu also says that it is entirely possible, that "Estha could grow up to be a Male Chauvinist Pig" (79). Their identities are so enmeshed that they themselves cannot clearly define the differences between them.

However, in the secret world of the History House, across the river, Rahel, Estha and Sophie Mol become the fairies in the romantic world of Western children's literature. Unfortunately, as Sophie disappears in the "graygreen" water of the Meenachal, with "a river accepting the offering," Rahel and Estha become completely confused (277). Their search for Sophie Mol continues throughout the night until four in the morning when they

become completely exhausted. The narrator describes them at this stage of their life as "Hansel and Gretel in a ghastly fairy tale in which their dreams would be captured and re-dreamed" (277-78). They become "a pair of damp dwarfs, numb with fear, waiting for the world end" (278). Since the lived reality confuses them, they resort to fantasy for attaining a stable sense of identity.

Immediately after the traumatic experience of Sophie Mol's death and the fiasco at the Kottayam Police Station, Estha and Rahel are forcibly snatched from each other's life. Estha is returned to his father while Rahel remains in the Ayemenem House to face the stares of Chacko, Mammachi, and Baby Kochamma. When Ammu dies and her body is cremated, Mammachi wants Rahel to write to Estha about the death of their mother. This is not because they acknowledge what she had done for them but because they think it is necessary for Estha as a son to know about the mother's death since he is "the Keeper of Records" (156). For Rahel, writing a letter to Estha becomes an impossible thing to do. "Rahel never wrote to him. There are things that you can't do – like writing letters to a part of yourself. To your feet or hair. Or heart" (156). Despite such an attachment, they remain apart for twenty-three years bearing the burdens of guilt and separation alone. Rahel grows up without anybody to arrange a marriage for her, "Without anybody who would pay her a dowry and therefore without an obligatory husband looming on her horizon" (18). All of this grief and trauma accumulated together adversely affects her married life with Larry McCaslin. The marriage breaks down in a short time, and then Rahel struggles alone, first working as a waitress in an Indian restaurant and then in a gas station in New York. When Baby Kochamma writes to say

that Estha has been re-Returned, Rahel gives up her job at the gas station and leaves America gladly "[t]o return to Ayemenem. To Estha in the rain" (20). To me, in spite of their distinct physical circumstances, the twins have similar unconscious desire for unity that motivates their return to Ayemenem.

Now, after they have become as old as Ammu was when she died – a viable die-able age – Rahel thinks of "Estha and Rahel as *Them,* because separately, the two of them are no longer what *They* were or ever thought *They'd* be" (emphasis in the original, 5). As the narrative goes, "Edges, Borders, Boundaries, Brinks and Limits have appeared like a team of trolls on their separate horizons. Short creatures with long shadows, patrolling the Blurry End" (5). Due to the repeated experiences of abuse, separation, alienation, and loneliness, both the twins lose their voices. Even before he is Re-returned to Ayemenem "in a train with a tin trunk and his beige and pointy shoes rolled into a khaki holdall," Estha had gone quiet. "Stopped talking altogether that is. The fact that there wasn't an 'exactly when.' It had been a gradual winding down and closing shop" (12). Then, Estha starts his walking initially in the neighborhood, but gradually goes farther and farther afield, past all the familiar places like Sophie Mol's yellow church, Old K.N.M. Pillai's printing press, and so on (14, 15). This silence gradually becomes a threat to the people who are involved in his life in some way. Concerned with Estha's threatening silence, Comrade Pillai greets Estha, "Estha Mon! . . . Good morning! Your daily constitutional?" even though "his part in the whole thing had by no means been a small one" (15). Baby Kochamma becomes extremely suspicious of the twins. Roy writes, "She deemed them Capable of Anything. Anything at all. *They might even steal*

their present back she thought, and realized with a pang how quickly she had reverted to thinking of them as though they were a single unit once again" (emphasis in the original, 29). Besides themselves, the identities of Rahel and Estha, separate as well as collective, equally confuse most other characters involved in their life. It appears as if Rahel and Estha cannot face the world alone. The twins are together when they witness Sophie Mol die and they are together when they have to provide false testimony against Velutha for saving Ammu (302). In the years that follow, they replay this scene in their heads. "As children. As teenagers. As adults. Had they been deceived into doing what they did? Had they been tricked into condemnation?" (302).

Finally, Rahel and Estha indulge in an illicit relation that challenges the world that has done so much damage to them. To some extent this act of subversion, done consciously or unconsciously, becomes justifiable. Since they do not feel that they are separate bodies, what is wrong in sleeping together, no matter what age they are? Roy maintains a very contradictory opinion about their activities. "They had never been shy of each other's bodies," Roy writes, "but they had never been old enough (together) to know what shyness was" (88). Roy does not impose her opinion but leaves it to her readers to decide whether their unity is justified. It is up to the reader to connect this action with what the twins have done as children. Rahel even searches "her brother's nakedness for signs of herself. In the shape of his knees. The arch of his instep" (88). It could be either a search for connection, for a sign that the two separate people share, or an indication that they have a deep-rooted confusion between self and other. What is the problem in trying to find what she lacks in the body of her brother, who in some way complements her

subjectivity? It is also possible that she is in search of the image of their mother in the forbidden act of sex almost like the one the mother had committed. In other words, she is unconsciously emulating her mother's act of transgression. Coates invokes Lacan to explain this kind of complex psychological state as a desire to caste one's "object petit a" – the "object with a little otherness" (81). As Coats explains, "Such an object 'represents that part of himself that the individual loses at birth, and which may serve to symbolize the most profound lost object'" (81). Above all, Rahel's choice for such transgressive sex deserves a detailed analysis, which I want to pursue in my future projects.

The "Ills and Burdens": Moral Agency in "Immoral" Sex

Roy's novel also portrays the British colonial tradition of penalizing the juveniles still perpetuated in SA communities. Satadru Sen writes, "It was generally agreed that reform required a triple segregation: the separation of child criminals from their families, from adult convicts and from each other" (90). Following the colonizers' style of segregating the juveniles, Rahel and Estha are separated from their mother (the alleged adult convict), from other members of the family and from each other. Selvadurai, as discussed in chapter three, uses the term "ills and burdens" to represent the youths who appear as "juveniles" in the eyes of the school administrators. The principal of Arjie's school, known as "Black Tie" also segregates such students from their classmates the old British style. "Once you became an 'ills and burdens,'" the narrator says, "you remained one for a long time. Every morning you had to report to the principal's office and stay there, usually for the whole day" (218-19). Like Arjie in *Funny Boy*, Rahel, Estha, Ammu

and Velutha in *God* are all such "ills and burdens" who resort to forbidden sex as a way to fight social injustices.

The underlying message in the Roy's novel is that in one way or the other, everyone in the society is "the future ills and burdens" of the country because they all "crossed into forbidden territory," especially of the Love Laws (31). "Perhaps Ammu, Estha and she [Rahel] were the worst transgressors," Roy writes, "But it wasn't just them. It was the others too. They all broke the rules. . . . They all tampered with the laws that lay down who should be loved and how. And how much" (31). Even those who do not cross the boundaries of Love Laws cross other kinds of social boundaries. The only difference is that some of them are allowed to do so, while others are punished. Comrade K.N.M. Pillai interprets Marxism in his favor and exploits his cadres. Inspector Mathew breaks the legal norms and takes the life of an innocent Paravan within police "protection." The Inspector tortures Velutha on charges of rape and abduction as if he is the true guardian of innocent people in the community. But when Ammu presents herself at the police station to defend Velutha the Inspector molests and humiliates her right there.

> "If I were you, he said, "I'd go home quietly." Then tapped her breasts with his baton. Gently. Tap tap. As though he was choosing mangoes from a basket. Pointing out the ones that he wanted packed and delivered. Inspector Thomas Mathew seemed to know whom he could pick on and whom he couldn't. Police have that instinct. (9-10)

Likewise, Chacko abuses the workers in the Pickle factory by bribing them with gifts. He uses the backdoor of his house for carrying out his sex adventures with women workers. Even though Mammachi is aware of his misconduct, she just ignores it as if it was a male privilege. The white manager in the Calcutta tea estate, where Ammu's husband worked, impregnates the wives of several workers and also makes a failed attempt to seduce Ammu. The Orangedrink Lemondrink Man sexually abuses the seven-year-old child (Estha) in his store at the Abhilash Talkies. Almost every adult is a transgressor, but not all of them have moral purpose behind the act of transgression.

All of the immoral transgressions become possible simply because of the power they hold. Ammu, Velutha, Rahel, and Estha, however, face life-threatening consequences because they are outcasts. Velutha's status as a poor untouchable, Ammu's choice of inter-community love marriage, and Estha and Rahel's half-Christian-half-Hindu status are "sufficient" reasons for their suffering. The laws that justify the violence upon all of them are directly or indirectly supported by age-old ideologies of casteism, patriarchy, and aetonormativity respectively. The efforts of these victims of unjust social practices to defy the Love Laws are far from only whims or bodily desires. Bose argues:

> . . . the transgressions are the result of conscious decision by the emotionally overcharged characters. The very circumstances of their choice(s) affirm the political judgement that surely it could not simply be bodily need; the sublimely erotic experience is also the pursuit of a utopia in which ideas and ideals, greater than what a momentary sexual pleasure offers, coalesce. (59-60)

Bose's argument also attests to what Trites argues about the use of sexuality in young adult novels. "Whether a novelist writing for adolescents depicts sexuality as a matter of pleasure or displeasure. . . the depiction itself is usually a locus of power for the adolescent," Trites adds, "Characters who have explored their sexuality usually learn something from the experience which is why sex is a rite of passage in so many adolescent novels" (102). As Trites emphasizes, the portrayal of adolescent sexuality, the social taboo against it, and the impact of the forbidden sex, remain the loci of power in this novel, too.

Moral agency is an issue clearly visible in both transgressive sex acts, that is, between Velutha and Ammu as well as Rahel and Estha portrayed in Roy's novel. If we only look at the act of Velutha, for example, it becomes clear that he is fully aware about what he is doing.

> He tried to be rational. *What's the worst thing that can happen?*
>
> *I could lose everything. My job. My family. My livelihood. Everything*.
>
> She [Ammu] could hear the wild hammering of his heart.
>
> She held him till it calmed down. Somewhat. (316)

Both Velutha and Ammu are fully aware that the forbidden act that they are involved in is needed only if the hypocritical society is to be taught a lesson. It may not be the express purpose of their relationship but their eagerness to take ownership of their action is enough to suggest that their relation was much more than the expression of their bodily desire. Velutha could have run away from being caught if he wanted. When one of the factory workers tells him with a smirk that Mammachi wants to see him, he goes straight

to the Ayemenem House. “Though, on the one hand, he was taken by surprise, on the other he knew, had known, with an ancient instinct, that one day History’s twisted chickens would come home to roost” (268). “If I find you on my property I’ll have you castrated like the pariah dog that you are!” Mammachi threatens, “I’ll have you killed” (269). In spite of the threats and humiliations, Velutha doesn’t lose his balance. “He knew what he had to do” (270).

Likewise, on hearing that Velutha has been arrested on charge of a rape attempt, Ammu goes to the police station with her twins to tells the Station House Officer that “there had been a terrible mistake and that she wanted to make a statement” (9). Instead of listening to her story, Inspector Mathew takes over the case and further humiliates her in front of her children. Ammu does not accept the defeat; rather she survives through all these bits and pieces of her life. No doubt, Velutha is killed in the police station and Ammu dies alone in a hotel room after a while. But the rebellious spirit they represent survives until the last moment of their life in spite of the constant tortures, alienation, and humiliations.

Conclusion

As introduced in the first chapter, growing up in the “disOrienting” ambience of South Asia or SA communities abroad becomes a challenge for these youths because their self-worth is constantly tested by Western and aetonormative standards by the members of the family who are either semi-Westernized or patriarchal in their approach to children. In chapter two, I demonstrated that Western narratives on SA youths

primarily employ big narratives like the Enlightenment, democracy, human rights, globalization, etc. to authenticate the superiority of one race, nation, and religion over another. They use abuse, burqa, caste, poverty, and exile as determinants of SA youths' transition from childhood to adulthood. In addition to portraying South Asia as the inferior Other of the West, they employ a Euro-American model of growing up and represent these youths as victims. SA diaspora authors, as analyzed in chapter three, also borrow the Western model of young adult literature by adding a few items to the list of adolescent experiences that are rooted in Third World discourses of identity politics and a quest for origin as unique features of growing up as SAs mostly in the hybrid worlds or the diaspora. However, diasporic authors seem to be more invested in creating a counter-discourse to Western cultural and literary discourses because of its relevance to their own material conditions of living. As Alexandra W. Schultheis argues, "The stable identity of the writer [diasporic] necessitates continuation of an "other-ing" relationship to the colonial center because, as is all too obvious, one can never go home again" (*Regenerative Fictions* 49). The coming of age narratives produced by the authors based in home countries (in South Asia), however, include multiple factors of national, regional, and international dimensions that influence their experiences of growing up, instead of simply responding to Orientalism or stereotypes found in most Western literature. This does not, however, mean that home authors are completely free from the tradition of seeing West and non-West in binary terms.

The analysis of the discourse of *God* in this chapter shows that SA youths' lives cannot be adequately represented only by using Western models, one of the major errors

committed by Western authors in general, nor can it be limited to the West/non-West dynamics. Rather, more semblances of truth can be revealed from the "little" narratives that portray the coming of age experiences of these children and young adults in their home countries among "the bits and pieces of life" (Bhabha 379). The "little" world of children and young adults in the discourses of postcolonial youth literature facilitates our understanding of the adult world. Roy's straight forward answer to the question "Why did Sophie Mol die?" that "Sophie Mol died because she couldn't breathe" sums up the complex context of growing up in South Asia between SA cultural realities and Western influences whether it is a matter of direct colonial rule or indirect neocolonial hegemony (9). For understanding this, we need to pay attention to the little narratives that emerge from the Third Space between the binaries like West and non-West, adult and children, the touchables and the untouchables, history and fantasy, and so on. Finally, focusing on "little" narratives like those portrayed in *God* rather than "metanarratives" is particularly relevant to our times because it is, what Lyotard calls the ethic of "the postmodern condition" (158). The ethic, according to Lyotard, lies in negating "metanarratives" primarily developed by the Western capitalists, and promoting little narratives, so that we can "make ourselves at home in our alienated being" (xix).

Arundhati Roy's novel epitomizes multiple issues pertaining to growing up in South Asia in addition to the common ("universal") growing up experiences found in Western narratives for younger audiences. SA children and young adults are disoriented, at the same time "disOriented" by both local and global forces, in their struggles for fitting in, defining themselves, making choices in life, and so on. As portrayed in the

discourse of *God,* such disorienting and "disOrienting" childhoods of SA youth have led to more family disjunction and individual failures than successes. Roy's novel is just a single example of the novels about the youths from South Asia which goes beyond the socially constructed boundaries and cultural stereotypes to reach at the lived realities. Adichie could not have been more right than when she said the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete.

CHAPTER V

BORDER-CROSSING IN COLLEGE CLASSROOM: INTERNATIONALIZING LITERATURE COURSES FOR GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

"The borders of our diverse identities, subjectivities, experiences, and communities connect us to each other more than they separate us," Henry Giroux reminds us, "especially as such borders are continually changing and mutating within the fast forward dynamics of globalization" (7). Giroux defines border as a "symbolic space" where the local and the global, the economic sphere and the cultural politics, the private and the public self, and education and the pressing social demands of the larger society connect with each other (6). According to Giroux, the central role of pedagogy should be to broaden not only the range of our commitments to others but also to develop more constructive, inclusive, and democratic communities. In the United States, multiculturalism was introduced in the sixties with similar commitments to others, as an attempt to "to uncover occluded and submerged identities and to liberate the repressed" by "redraw[ing] the boundaries and affirm[ing] the authorities of internal colonies" (Figueira 28). However, the multiculturalism approach has been critically received ever since the eighties. Considering the theoretical strength and the critical reception of multiculturalism, I prefer the pedagogy of border crossing to teach global multicultural literatures for children and young adults. I would like to emphasize Giroux's notion of the border as a site of struggle and teachers' role as border-crossers. In this chapter, I will

first make a brief analysis of the practice of multiculturalism in the U.S. academia and then move on to other theoretical perspectives that inform my pedagogy of border-crossing through literature. Finally, deriving the insights from my own teaching internship, I will present some examples of strategies, activities, and assignments for the application of border-crossing pedagogy where I use international youth literatures to teach a college-level course. Novels on South Asian youths analyzed in this study could alone make an excellent course on international youth literature but in what follows, I will present an example of a more global multicultural course that I taught at Illinois State University.

Multiculturalism in the United States: A Critical Overview

"The United States is a multicultural nation," said one of my students, "and multiculturalism means the combination of different cultures in a society." This was one of many identical responses I got from my students when I asked them what they knew about "multiculturalism." I made this inquiry in the introductory lecture to a foundational course on children's literature that I taught for my internship at Illinois State University in the fall semester of the year 2009. There was little surprise that most students were familiar with the term "multiculturalism," but, I was surprised that only a few had knowledge about the nuances and politics involved. At the end of the semester, when they were asked to share one of their assumptions this course was able to change, another student said, "I thought Americans had always been considerate and tolerant of other nations, but this course made me realize that I was wrong." This response was not an

exception. Many of my students were surprised that, in spite of having been introduced to "diversity" and "multiculturalism" as early as junior high schools, the courses on language arts and literature had filled their minds with filtered knowledge and limited stories about themselves and other people, nations, and cultures. In fact, they suggested multiculturalism in the United Stated has only served a cosmetic purpose.

This realization of my students also resonates in Figueira's critique of multiculturalism in the United States. According to Figueira, "multiculturalism was an attempt to recover lost knowledge and produce a new understanding of U.S. history" (19). It was assumed that multiculturalism would revision the image of America as a melting pot into America as a tossed salad. It also claimed that it would open the canon to subalterns, exiles, and others. "In reality, multiculturalism only offers the illusion of victory over racism," Figueira argues, "Multiculturalism does not liberate anyone. In fact, the case can be made that it provides a smokescreen for societal and institutional unwillingness to change the academic situation of minorities" (24). Although my students did not have fully developed arguments like this, and a single course would not be enough to bring a complete refinement in their understanding of race relations, I felt that they had begun to be more critical about U.S. multiculturalism after having read the texts (required for the course) containing counter perspectives to American canons with which they were familiar.

My assumptions about American college students and America as a multicultural nation did not remain unchanged either. In the beginning of the semester, I was intrigued by the enthusiasm they showed in learning about other cultures. As the semester

progressed, however, I was astonished to hear from a majority of them that they liked those international texts but they would think twice before using these books in a school curriculum. I could clearly sense that their hesitation was far from personal. The students were reflecting the educational ideologies that had shaped their identities. Stanley Fish would perhaps describe this attitude as “boutique multiculturalism.” Fish observes:

> Boutique multiculturalists admire or appreciate or enjoy or sympathize with or (at the very least) "recognize the legitimacy of" the traditions of cultures other than their own; but boutique multiculturalists will always stop short of approving other cultures at a point where some value at their center generates an act that offends against the canons of civilized decency as they have been either declared or assumed. (378)

Fish does not see a substantial difference between strong multiculturalists, who vehemently advocate for multiculturalism, and “boutique multiculturalists,” who have a superficial or cosmetic relationship to the objects of their affection. Fish does not see a possibility in any one of them to be “a multiculturalist in any interesting and coherent sense” (384). Fish contends, the only difference is that boutique multiculturalism honors diversity only in its most superficial aspects because its deeper loyalty is to a universal potential for rational choice, whereas strong multiculturalism honors diversity in general but cannot honor a particular instance of diversity insofar as it refuses to be generous in its turn. I like the philosophical depth of Fish’s argument but I do not see a big problem in being a multiculturalist, whether strong or boutique, compared to those who blatantly advocate for the dominance of one culture upon another. I think providing a space for

multicultural texts, which both strong and boutique multiculturalists willingly do, is at least a commendable step toward celebrating differences. But do we need to go beyond this attitude?

Although my students also demonstrated basically a "cosmetic relationship" to international texts, the exposure to those various cultures and values gradually destabilized our previous knowledge and presumptions about multiculturalism, as well as our own identity structures. Besides other multiple sub-structures of our identities, I was a South Asian instructor and they were American college students, mostly Elementary Education majors. More than simply expressing our personal preferences, we were showcasing the ideologies we had grown up with. However, in course of time, we began to see the fluid and transient nature of our identity structures and socially constructed character of our roles. Gradually, we started to question not only the ideologies involved in the textbooks we were reading, but also the scope and validity of multiculturalism as a pedagogical approach. I tried to play the role of an intermediary between students and cultures that were othered by the mainstream texts (American canons), some of which were also included in the course for the purpose of comparison. At the end, I came to a point that in spite of the pluralistic ideals attached to the notion of multiculturalism, it has not been able to escape from the Western hegemonic tendency of privileging one culture above another. This is demonstrated by its questionable praxis in the U.S. academia as revealed in several of my student's responses.

John F. Welsh also attests to the view that multiculturalism emerged in the United States from the "enlightened antiracism" in antidiscrimination and affirmative action

policies of the federal government in the 1960s, but this is a "vague and broad social movement that has failed to overcome the gaps and divides among the racial-ethnic blocs in the country" (Welsh 177). Welsh argues that the accomplishment of America is "not the multicultural society, but the multicultural individual" (182). Welsh adds:

> Individuals have not just one source of identity but many. Americans, historically, had multiple sources of self, many criteria that served as the foundation of who they were and what they became. Singleness or simplicity contradicts the reality experienced by individuals in American society. Multiculturalism is the fear of heterogeneity at the level of individuals. (182-83)

Thus, Welsh suggests that multiculturalism welcomes diversity, difference, and otherness; however, internal to the ethno-racial bloc, diversity enforces sameness, conformity, and loyalty. What is compelling about Welsh's argument is that it provides clear hints to why more attacks on multiculturalism come from the minoritarian blocs than from the mainstream.

Likewise, dialectical social theory suggests that, since multiculturalism arose at a particular historical juncture in American society, it will likely be superseded and replaced by another paradigm or perspective (Welsh 3). I do not think multiculturalism is an inherently flawed concept in itself, no matter what historical forces gave birth to it. However, its problem is not being able to evolve contextually. Psychologist J. Scott Jordan and cultural scientist Marcello Ghin argue that a "self-sustaining system" is characterized by "contextual emergence" (64). I think this theory explains the reason

behind the partial success of multiculturalism in the context of the U.S. in the 1980s and later.

Multiculturalism certainly cannot sustain itself just by beating its old drum of traditional binaries such as white/black, high/low, majority/minority, domestic/foreign, north/south, adult/child and so on, where only the later categories are considered as multicultural elements. As Spivak argues, to attain true multicultural learning – which encompasses the world – what is desirable is a transnational program of study, one that "negotiate[s] between national-ism (uni- or multicultural) and globality" (792). To me, rather than denying multiculturalism on the basis of its practice in the United States, we should expand it more globally. Along with this critical reception of multiculturalism, I perceive that pedagogy of border-crossing can incorporate an internationalized version of multiculturalism for teaching literature in the age of globalization.

Globalization and the Need for Internationalizing Curricula

In his 1998 article titled “Beyond Nation-State Paradigms: Globalization, Sociology, and the Challenge of Transnational Studies,” William I. Robinson argues that “new interdisciplinary transnational studies” should be predicated on a paradigmatic shift in the focus of social inquiry from the nation-state as the basic unit of analysis to the global system as the appropriate unit. He writes, “I call for a break with the ‘nation-state framework of analysis’ that continues to guide much macrosocial inquiry despite recognition among scholars that globalization involves fundamental change in our paradigmatic reference points” (562). According to Robinson, “much macrosocial inquiry

has run up against certain cognitive and explanatory limitations in the face of globalization since nation-state conceptualizations are incapable of ex-plaining (sic) phenomena that are transnational in character" (562). The way out of this impasse, Robinson suggests, is to shift our focus from the nation-state as the basic unit of analysis to the global system for addressing the issues of global nature. Arguing against the boundaries of nation-states and disciplines, Robinson proposes "a holistic approach" to teaching (590). I believe that a combination of the pedagogies of border-crossing and international multicultural studies can embody this holistic approach to do away with stereotyping and stigmatization still prevalent in the United States education system.

In this context, I argue, transcending the nation-state framework of analysis should begin right from elementary schools if our youths are to be prepared for identifying themselves as the citizens of the world. My contention is that existing multicultural focus in American school education, for instance, has been unable to move outside the narrow categories surrounding the domestic groupings like white, black, Latina/o, native American, and so on. Only by breaking these limited analytical categories surrounding the hyphenated and non-hyphenated Americans and opening up new avenues for learners to the understanding of international cultures, can they be prepared for the more complex world they are likely to encounter in the near future.

The trend in school children's demographics in the United States since the beginning of this millennium clearly suggests the need for further diversification of school curricula. According to Donna M. Gollnick and Phillip C. Chinn, in 2002, the students of color comprised more than one third of the school population (4). If the

present trend in demographic change continues, they predict that this group will represent nearly half of the elementary and secondary population by 2020 (4). Due to the rapid change in school demographics, educators today are faced with an overwhelming challenge to prepare students from diverse cultural backgrounds to live in a rapidly changing society in which some groups have greater societal benefits than others. Gollnick and Chinn write:

> It is not only ethnic and racial diversity that is challenging schools. During the past 35 years, new waves of immigrants have come from parts of the world unfamiliar to many Americans. With them have come their religions, which seem even stranger to many Americans than these new people. . . .The United States has not only become multicultural nation, but it has also become a multireligious society. (5)

In order to cope with this challenge in the multicultural world, emphasis has been given to multicultural education, so that students' cultural backgrounds are used to develop effective classroom instructions and school environments. However, the problem of intolerance and xenophobia still continues in our school environment (6). The responses from my students, as discussed above, are some testimonies of this reality.

A major cause of this problem lies in the literature used in American school curricula which, according to Gollnick and Chinn, are very much localized and schools are skeptical in including texts about cultures from, and about, the outside world (8). The students are just prepared to understand their nation, their people, and their own problems, but have little exposure outside the community or country at large. Such

curricula pose more serious problems to the thousands of children and youth coming from other parts of the world every year. An even more serious problem of understanding lies among the children of immigrant parents with diverse cultural, national, and religious backgrounds bound to work together. Besides the difficulties posed by the barriers of communication, the difference in conceptual framework, and focus on nationalized curricula are responsible for increased difficulty in assimilation.

It will be wrong to say that the root of this problem lies only in the American education system; the conceptual framework already built in among the immigrants is equally responsible. To me, another equally responsible factor is the influence of the omnipresent media which contribute to the creation and promotion of the dream and image of a particular race or nation, and then the global flow of such dreams and images. The current flow of people to North America from around the world is a strong example of the effect of the much publicized image of the United States as a country of opportunities, and the still powerful narrative of the American Dream.

Chen explains how the triumph of capitalism and the end of socialism has ideologically become the dominant narrative in the West by relating this issue with the case of the "Club 51" movement in Taiwan[12]. Chen writes, "To understand the roots of

[12] In the middle of 1996, during a period of cross straits tension, "An Open Letter to the Social Elite of Taiwan" was distributed. The letter was signed by Chou Wei-lin, for a group named Club 51. Next to the signature was an emblem in seal style, comprising a map of Taiwan in the center with the English-language slogans "Statehood for Taiwan – Save Taiwan – Say Yes to America." The Club was unknown at that time. But in early

American hegemony, we need to look elsewhere, and further back" (124). I find Chen's example of "Club 51," and the way the impact of the flow of US academic texts to East Asian countries impacts their imaginary, extremely compelling. Chen also argues:

> "America" has not only been with us, but has been inside our cultural subjectivity and has been part of us, if we wish to honestly understand the cultural composite of the self or selves; that the United States has not merely defined our identities but has become the reference point of our cultural imaginary. And it is precisely by occupying this position of being the "reference point" or system of reference that "America" constitutes our subjectivity, and precisely because it's an imaginary referent point, it has become part of us. (127)

Chen's argument is that "Club 51" is the manifestation of (dis)identificantion of the Taiwanese people with China, and the embodiment of the cultural imaginary constructed by the West, particularly by the United States in recent years. If we look at the international youth literature written by Asian diaspora, for instance, we can find numerous examples of the influence of the "American dream" on the Asian psyche. The

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1996, when the controversy over relations between Taiwan and the People's Republic of China broke out again, Club 51 was found protesting in front of the American Institute – the equivalent of the US embassy on the island – demanding to let Taiwan join the United States of America as the 51st state, so as to "Guarantee Taiwan's Security, Stability, Prosperity, Liberty and Democracy."

novels discussed below are also the examples of the texts I used for the course mentioned above.

International Issues in Youth Literature

In her autobiographical novel *A Step from Heaven,* An Na makes a very powerful critique of the image of America as a heavenly place that is deeply established in the South Korean psyche. Before their migration to the U.S., Young Ju, the protagonist of the novel, becomes very curious about the place they are preparing move to. Her parents, under the spell of the "American dream," mention Mi Gook or America as "heaven" (Na 21). They might have been using the term to convince the child that their destination is the best place in the world, or the place that can be reached by flying in the sky like going to heaven in Young Ju's grandmother's terms. However, this expression clearly reflects the image of America in the South Korean psyche, the very image that America has been selling through media all over the world. Four year old Young Ju cannot figure out what her grandmother means when she says, "Mi Gook [America] is only for young people to have a new start . . . Not for old people who are used-up dry fish bones," nevertheless, Young Ju begins to weave the dream of landing on this dreamland right away (21). Here is the image of the girl dreaming about her flight to America.

> But then my eyes find the sky. Think about flying up, up, up. Now I know where we are going. I want to run around, wag my tail like Mi Shi [the dog]. God is in the sky. Mi Gook must be in heaven and I have always wanted to go to heaven. It is just like the Good Book says. All people who

> love God will go to heaven someday. I love you, God, I whisper. In heaven you have to wear your Sunday dress every day so you can look pretty for God. (13)

This is what the Americanized education system and the interpellating effect of media images have taught to millions of people in the Third World. Not only children, but also the adults find it appealing to immigrate to America. Much greater are the dreams of the people in the countries like Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh in South Asia, and many African and Latin American countries where domestic political instability have rendered thousands of people homeless every year. Hence, Young Ju's story is also the story of many immigrants or prospective immigrants who weave dreams of happier days in the new land.

The fantasized image of America, however, begins to crumble down as soon as they start their struggle for survival in their new home, regardless of partial economic success. For instance, as soon as Young Ju's family arrives in America, she hears one of her uncles say, "Mi Gook is almost as good as heaven. Let us say it is a step from heaven" (26). It does not take long for Young Ju to realize that it is more of a hell than heaven or "a step from heaven," for those who have to undertake the course of losing the battle for acceptance. How can this place be heaven where nobody understands her? When the dreams get shattered and the family breaks apart, Young Ju realizes that the American dream is just a dream that can never be materialized. At the end of the novel, Young Ju's mother finds nothing to assure her daughter about her future. She just says,

"And remember, Young Ju. You come from a family of dreamers" (150). Thus dream continues forever amidst their daily experiences of alienation.

Similar is the experience of Gene Luen Yang, another second generation Asian-American artist/ illustrator who portrays the struggles of Asian-American children at American schools in his graphic novels. In Yang's *American Born Chinese*, Jin Wang dreams of an old Herbalist's wife who had once told him, "It's easy to become anything you wish . . . so long as you're willing to forfeit your soul" (29). Disturbed by this dream, he finds himself in an American mask as he wakes up one morning. He goes to the bathroom and looks at himself in the new form. Here, Jin wants to be Americanized with an American name called Danny as he says, "A new face deserved a new name" and transforms himself (198). Thus, Yang portrays the complex life of the immigrants whose identity formation is continuously negotiated through the experiences of being trapped between the two worlds, the root culture and the target culture that is based more on fantasy than material reality. Jin's identity is a perfect example of such an immigrant self which is trapped between the Chinese roots and American "habitus" in Pierre Bourdeu's terms. I believe that unless the dreams imbedded in American hegemony is deconstructed, millions of Jins will continue to suffer.

An important point to note here is that Yang's implicit appeal to transcend the insularity of stereotypes is not enough to resolve the problem. There has to be further emphasis on the study of U.S. imperialism with a multicultural approach, both at home (in the United States) and abroad, which will help unravel the root causes of tension in U.S. homes and schools. To refer back to the Club 51 movement, Chen argues, "US

power is still under-analyzed, at least in Asia. This has something to do with the way post-colonial studies – where one would expect to find critical probing of it – have over-privileged 'English' experiences" (119). Chen writes,

> . . . the study of US imperialism as internal, internalized, and interior cultural forces within Asia is a neglected area of study. It needs to be brought to the forefront of critical debate and even recognition. Without such analysis, the complexity of contemporary cultural subjectivity of "Asian," in different locales, cannot be properly explained. (112)

Chen makes a very convincing point that to understand the roots of the problems in U.S. schools, we "need to look elsewhere, and further back" (124). Historically, as Chen says, "'America' as a cultural imaginary has since the mid-nineteenth century never been outside 'Asia,' just as 'Asia' has never been outside 'America'" (124). Clearly, the identities of each country or continent are built up by the gaze of the other. Therefore the problems of the immigrants in America have roots in the way its fantasized image is reinforced in countries outside the United States.

To refer back to *American Born Chinese,* Jin Wang, Wei Chen and Suzy Nakamura, are three Asian-American youths who never feel that they belong to America in spite of their birth in this country. Jin is a Chinese descendant and Suzy, a Japanese, but both of them become the victims of discrimination and stigmatization in the same way. One day Suzy tells Jin about how bad she felt when one of her classmates hurt her feelings. She says, "Today, when Timmy called me a . . . *chink,* I realized . . . deep down inside . . . I kind of feel like that all the time" (emphasis added, 187). It is not only other

fellow students who misunderstand these children; their teachers also come up with expressions that hurt the feelings of these immigrant children. I think such a situation prevalent in American schools illustrates that American education system has been unable to cope with the changes and problems brought forth by globalization.

Implementation: Balancing Personal Dreams and Institutional Expectations

According to Roger I. Simon and Don Dippo, "A curriculum and its supporting pedagogy are versions of our dreams for ourselves, our children, and our communities" (122). Such dreams, as Simon and Dippo argue, are never neutral. They are always someone's dreams, and to the degree that they are implicated in organizing the future for others, they always have "a moral and political dimension" (62). These dreams or visions need to be "democratically struggled for and never omnipotently imposed" (62). My goal for teaching international literature is, therefore, to enrich my students' level of tolerance for differences in such democratic struggles. I believe that exposure to various cultures will provide them with multiple different perspectives to their own identities so that they can rise above narrow patriotism and other discriminatory practices.

Having grown up and worked for some NGOs and academic institutions in a Third World country for more than a decade, I have personally experienced, observed and studied about the problems and possibilities of Third World countries, peoples and cultures. More specifically, I have closely observed the realities about South Asian countries, where a huge number of children and adolescents become victims of poverty, warfare, abuse, climate change, and many other problems every year. In spite of the

involvement of thousands of organizations, mostly sponsored by Western countries, the voices of these children and adolescents are far from heard. Their stories, if ever written, published or translated, are either misrepresented, or represented with some kind of "othering," or "epistemic violence" in Spivak's terms. Spivak contends that such practice of constituting the colonial subject as Other is "the asymmetrical obliteration of the trace of that Other in its precarious Subject-ivity" ("A Critique of Postcolonial Reason" 2197). In other words, longstanding stereotypes, Eurocentric worldviews and Western capitalist agendas have consigned the realities and possibilities about that "Other" (here, Third world people and their cultures) to further invisibility or misrecognition. Arundhati Roy's novel *God*, discussed in detail in chapter four makes a strong case for the need of a nuanced analysis of specific cultures without using blanket terms. Hence, my emphasis on more international coverage in the literature courses I teach is directed toward providing the students with more realistic representations of children and their experiences as portrayed in the novel.

Now, why do American students need such alternative perspectives while they are presumably comfortable with what they already have? Why unsettle their identity structures with worldviews derived from the world which they have often heard of being relatively "weak" and at times "antagonistic"? Besides other intellectual benefits of learning about others, the current phenomenon of globalization is the first thing that justifies my claim. As Edwards and Usher write, "Globalizing processes have brought different cultures into contact and collision with each other through information technology, travel, migration and the media" which no one can escape (24). Therefore, I

assert that young people, both in Western and non-Western nations, benefit from a critical understanding of these processes if they want to be successful citizens of this rapidly globalizing world. To be more specific, it is essential that they read and realize how their activities can, knowingly or unknowingly, affect, and are affected by, the lives of millions of children and youths who will be ultimately sharing the same environment, same resources and same opportunities left in the world. In the case of Third World children, they already learn about Western cultures through the international texts due to the unavailability of adequate materials about their own countries or due to the neo-colonial dissemination of Western texts. For Western children, however, introducing some texts on international children's literature and getting them to think about the problems and potentials of Third World children, which I think is still lacking, would help them develop consciousness about global citizenship. Thus, my dream is to lay a foundation for students to understand, not only literature for children and young adults, but also the ideas of global citizenship which leads to global peace and harmony.

This ambitious goal can be materialized only when people make attempts to move outside their narrow boundaries of race, class, culture, religion and nationality, and pay attention to other contradicting or complementary voices. I am also aware that this is not an easy task as it involves the need to question the students' own identity structures. Multiculturalism in the U.S. also tried to incorporate this goal, but only with partial success. I want to take up this challenge and move a little further because I also believe in future- oriented teaching like that of Simon and Dippo who consider "engaging young

people in the process of questioning their future identities and possibilities" as the motto of teaching (122).

I am also aware that, as an instructor, my dream should not deviate too much from the institutional expectations. I have to find a point of negotiation between my dreams as an instructor and the expectations of my institution. Roger I. Simon also considers this kind of negotiation as a political decision. Simon writes:

> In the real world of teachers' work, one always proceeds from a "point of practice," from a specific time and place and within particular themes. Such themes are often broadly specified by institutional arrangements that have predetermined who is going to teach what, to whom, for example, junior division, language, grade nine science, senior level history, adult ESL. (57-58)

Border-crossing as a pedagogical approach balances among the institutional expectation, students' anticipations and the teacher's personal goals because the notion of border-crossing assumes the need to cross the borders among institutions, teachers, students and the community.

Classroom Practice, Problems, and Possibilities

In the pedagogy of border-crossing, students examine a given text primarily in terms of the characters' subject positions and the factors contributing to the formation of those positions. Maria Jose Botelho and Masha Kabakow Rudman propose a critical multicultural analytical model for this purpose. They suggest, "Critical multicultural

analysis is reading power and exposing how power is exercised, circulated, negotiated, and reconstructed" (117). Arguing that children's books are windows into society and the complexities of the power relations of class, race, and gender, Botelho and Rudman also present a selfhood continuum of domination, collusion, resistance and agency as historical and socio-political possibilities for characters (118-19). The main objective of character analysis, in this model, is to get students to think critically about their own identity structures using these tools. Like character analysis, every assignment is designed in such a way that, while approaching them, students will have to relate the issues to their own lives. Through repeated exercises on questioning, appreciating or critiquing characters' subject positions and their actions, the students will begin to see the socially constructed nature of their own identities.

Before actually entering into the syllabus, the instructor conducts an identity mapping survey. This can be done in many different ways. Here, I present a sample strategy I adopted while teaching a foundational course in children's literature at Illinois State University. My main purpose of the course was to see how significantly an internationalized literature course would contribute to the promotion of global citizenship.

I started my introductory lecture for this class with a couple of seemingly random questions about some countries, cultures and peoples in South Asia. The responses I received from them helped me prepare a list of assumptions on which I wanted to build my argument. Based on the survey, I formulated three assumptions about American college students, the role of literature courses in their identity formation, and a vision of

education for the age of globalization. First, courses on literature and language arts, taught especially at the formative stages, play a significant role in determining the identity structures of the students. Second, American college students have limited, sometimes even skewed, knowledge about themselves and the world around them. Third, as global interconnectedness becomes more intense, courses need to be more multicultural to sustain peace and harmony.

Based on the assumptions from seemingly random questions, I was able to elicit the students' levels of interest and knowledge about international issues. I had an impression about American students that even though their nation is directly or indirectly involved in most events of global significance, most of them are either ignorant or oblivious about these facts. Their answers helped me to gauge the levels of their awareness about the global interconnectedness of these sample issues. For instance, they knew about the broader facts and concepts like global warming as an environmental issue, Buddhism as a religion, Everest as the highest peak in the world, etc. which they had learned from popular media. They were also familiar with some stereotypes about peoples with specific religious, cultural, and national backgrounds. But their responses indicated that they never had to bother thinking critically about the authenticity, causes and consequences of such representations.

This finding helped me to determine the focus for the course. I decided to engage them with multiple points of view presented by the texts. As the course progressed, they began to question, and "deterritorialize," and "reterritorialize" their own identity structures. Gradually, some changes were observed in the ways they looked at the

characters they identified with, as well as those they often "othered." With the help of different assignments and activities, I was able to unravel some common character traits about American college students and the changes in their perspectives after interacting with the texts. The following is the list of some of my findings:

a. American students tend to judge international and cross-cultural issues using their own conceptual categories. This tendency is likely to limit their understanding of the texts about the cultures from other parts of the world. Besides learning from their opinions presented on other occasions, I observed this in an activity I designed for teaching *Peak* in which they had to relate their character analysis with the major conflicts in the novel. In this activity, the students easily identified the first four of the following conflicts:

    Parent vs. child – Peak vs. his father (Josh)

    Human vs. nature – Peak's struggle against the geographical realities of Everest

    Human vs. society – Peak breaks the laws of society by climbing the skyscraper

    Family vs. business – Peak's father's decision to take him to Everest

    Expedition West vs. non-West – Peak vs. Sun jo

    When I added the fifth one, the conversation took a different mode. Most of the students felt that the novel was more about the universal themes of growing up, and human's struggle against nature. They did not notice the underlying political and cultural ideologies. Particularly those who had travelled abroad were more open to

talk about the underlying cultural politics. Most others saw that Peak's story was like any other "bildungsroman" where the protagonist returns home with self-knowledge after having gone through adventures in formidable lands. However, two of the students, who had openly expressed their dedication to promoting multiculturalism, came up with an interesting point that Peak, the young protagonist, learned more from the face to face encounter with a new culture and the cultural "other," rather than with the formidable nature in Everest. After a long discussion, the students came to realize that Orientalist cultural politics (though I did not introduce this term directly) could be another interesting perspective in analyzing intercultural texts like *Peak,* where there is a lopsided power balance between Western and non-Western characters.

b. Many behavior and learning-related problems in American schools go unnoticed or unsolved because of the difficulty on the part of the teachers to understand students' diverse home cultures as opposed to school culture. We discussed this issue in detail while talking about *American Born Chinese*, *Angel Child Dragon Child, Born Confused,* and *A Step from Heaven*. For instance in *A Step from Heaven,* when we were analyzing how Young Ju's friendship with Amanda (her American classmate) complicates her life, some of them said that Young Ju simply failed to acknowledge Amanda's offer for friendship. This brought in the issue of how the conflict between Young Ju's home culture and that of her school and community influences the way she looks at herself and the people around her. The students realized how such conflicts make children hide their thoughts, tell lies and even fight with one another. We also talked about its snowball effect seen in their self-images. The students were

able to observe this in Young Ju's identity as seen in the end of the novel. I believe that, besides providing tools for interpreting themes of immigration in children's literature, such discussions could make them aware about the complex nature of their own identities.

c. In spite of American government's emphasis on promoting cross-cultural tolerance, xenophobia is still prevalent in American societies. The situation is much worse at school levels where children are unable to think from others' perspectives. I was able to learn this fact from most of the students' responses to the writing assignments in which they were expected to relate the specific problem to their own life. This reality surfaced more vividly in all the group presentations on the stories from *First Crossing*. From these presentations, I got to know that in spite of having lived their whole lives in the U.S., the students had their own stories of getting singled out, picked on or bullied for being Jewish, African-American, Korean-American, Mexican-American, mixed-blood, adopted, and so on. One African-American student also shared her experience about how her teacher would always want her to be the spokesperson for the whole race. Another Korean-American student said that people expected her to act or speak like Koreans, even though she had never been to Korea. Another student shared the story of her grandmother's experience of crossing the border from Mexico and living her painful days as an illegal immigrant. Like them, all the other students were also eager to share the stories they had about border-crossing experiences of their parents, grandparents or that of other people they knew. Overall, the introduction to multicultural literatures provided them with the

opportunities to share their own stories about the often hidden aspects of their identities. They could see that everyone was a border-crosser in one way or another, though they had used that term mostly in relation with illegal immigrants before.

d. Unlike the youths from the Third world, American youths value freedom of choice more than other things like financial security, family unity, and social harmony. In addition to the opinions observed in responses to other assignments, this tendency was reflected more clearly in the writing assignment given after the discussion on *The Giver*. In this assignment, they were required to express their opinions for or against curbing children's freedom in the name of securing their future. Above ninety percent of the students expressed their opinions in favor of freedom, with only two out of twenty nine students saying that they would prefer a balanced approach. This is where I saw that the students who are mostly white, middle class Americans value freedom of choice more than other things. I am still not sure whether it is typical or a shared trait among the students in Western nations. I assume that if my students were from the Third World or from marginalized communities from the West, either having themselves faced economic hardships or encountered children living in extreme poverty, a majority would have argued for the need of economic security. They might also give more importance to family and community, since childhood in many Asian and African cultures is closely tied with the family and community. My assumption is based on my reading of the family patterns in Asian, African, and Latin American immigrants as well as the adoptees and their parent's reluctance in parting with each other even in times of economic hardships or political instability.

e. Internationalized multiculturalism provides students with categories to think against the grain. Once they find the writer's ideological stance questionable, they begin to identify the flaws in the stories and even propose alternative endings. While teaching Cormier's *Tunes for Bears to Dance to,* I tried to engage them in recreating an alternative ending to the story. In this activity, they found an opportunity to ensure victory for the character they liked and teach lessons to those who failed to acknowledge the difference in others. When the students were coming up with fascinating endings for the story, I found it to be a truly multicultural moment. Everyone had a brilliant idea about rewarding the innocent adolescent protagonist and teaching a lesson to the antagonist characterized by all negatives. I could clearly see that the students were giving vent to the repressed, as well as highlighted aspects of their identities through the acts of transference.

At the end, I conducted a closing survey to assess my students' progress in reterritorializing their identity structures. Their responses to the questionnaires clearly suggested the changes in their attitudes to peoples and cultures from other parts of the world. Rather than evaluating their success or failure on the basis of the students' progress, I saw the students' performances as mirrors that reflect the changes in their attitude to the identity structures of themselves and others. This also became a mirror to reflect the changes in myself as a border-crosser. Here I present some of the changes I felt in myself after going through the process. What follows is an extract from the reflection I wrote immediately after the semester was over.

Looking back at the whole semester of teaching, I felt that I had grown a lot as an instructor. However, I would only say that I had been a partial "border-crosser." All the different activities ranging from reading the prescribed texts again; designing writing assignments and class activities; selecting visual aids and other materials; coordinating discussion; preparing notes and presenting them in classroom; answering students' queries; listening to their opinions on various issues to reading, and evaluating papers contributed to this realization. Although I had also used some of these activities in my previous years of teaching, I had never imagined that considering my teaching as a part of my research would make such a big difference. I was not only an instructor entrusted by an institution to teach a course, or just a student-teacher implementing my learning in a classroom situation. I was in fact a research subject myself. The whole project was an experiment and I was only a single component of this process that included the institution, the advisors, the course, the materials, assignments, and last but not the least, the students themselves. Here, I include only a few of several things I learned about myself as an individual, my teaching skills, and the materials I used in this course.

a. My course goals of introducing international children's literature, multiculturalism, and globalization with a single course were overly ambitious. If I chose only one, it would be easier to do justice to the particular theme. However, as the three issues are closely related, it was not as difficult as teaching any other mutually exclusive issues.
b. Multiculturalism was my passion but not my expertise. I had to learn a lot more to be a real multiculturalist in a classroom. Multiculturalist teaching entails many

other things besides incorporating texts from different cultures in a syllabus. I had to learn to speak, listen, walk, see things, and even dream multiculturally. In other words, multiculturalism in its true sense is a way of life, a way to understand ourselves and the world around us.

c. Although I tried to find references from different countries, cultures, and religions, it was a great challenge to communicate about the cultures of others. Whenever I had to give examples, I had to resort to my own culture. This made some of my students feel that I was teaching mainly about South Asian cultures, more specifically those from Nepal. I tried my best to be a border-crosser but it was not an easy task.

d. Most of the time, I prepared hand-outs and used the projector for presentation. I did this with a view to saving time. Of course, I could do more when I did not have to write things on the board, but I realized that students would learn more while both of us were writing down some points together. Here I feel I had not been able to perceive things from their vantage point. In other words, I could not cross the border between the conceptual territories of teachers and students.

e. I had an impression that American students would be eager to participate in class discussions. But the first few activities taught me that they needed to be asked individually to be involved in active learning. They did not open themselves up unless they felt that they had to. Therefore I had to change my strategy mid-session.

f. Although I tried my best not to impose my individual perspective to certain texts or issues, I realized that I was not always successful. Some students expected this because they would expect an authoritative voice from me. They even doubted if I was well prepared when I did not present a strong authoritative voice. My realization was that trying to find a point of negotiation was essential for multicultural teaching but it also involved the risk of losing some of our audiences.

g. Although I started with a promise that I was not going to impose one worldview at the cost another, I realized that I was more critical of some Western worldviews than non-Western ones. At times, I was more emotionally invested in the transnational texts than in American canon.

h. I had assumed that American students were either less informed or oblivious about non-Western issues, cultures, and literatures. I had anticipated it to be a problem. But this semester made me realize how vast America itself is and how difficult it is for its people to know about the world outside it. Their interest in learning about other cultures, no matter for what purpose, made teaching less difficult.

i. Finally, I came to realize the hybrid nature of our subjectivities in the classroom. More than being passive learners, students often became wonderful teachers to me while I was learning from the interactions with them. Our identities as border-crossers continuously shifted along the discussions. We were both emerging with changed identity structures while the texts functioned as bridges.

Conclusion

Globalization is our inescapable reality. Whether we like it or not, the socially and politically constructed borders of race, class, gender, age, and nationality are being continuously ruptured. In this context, development of inter-subjectivity through continuous encounters with "others" is not only essential but inevitable. Therefore, by identifying the contingent nature of our subjectivities, the fragile nature of our socially constructed borders, and the rejected components of our identities, we can begin to think for the world as a community. "Bridging to an institutional/ systemic identity structure is facilitated by literary texts that represent characters in fulfilling relationship – with parents, lovers, children, friends, coworkers, and so on" (Bracher 198). This is where lies the importance of internationalized courses to ensure border-crossing through literature.

The pedagogy of border-crossing is by nature a multicultural approach. It derives a lot from multiculturalism that the United States has already adopted. However, it is more critical, and oppositional in nature, which Simon and Dippo consider as "teaching against the grain" (122). It goes beyond the national paradigms as Spivak advocates for, and at the same time, promotes "interindividual" identities as emphasized in Edwards and Usher's pedagogy of identity. As Bracher underscores, border-crossing pedagogy directs us "toward the culmination of our own identity development in a generativity in which our personal sense of self is a function of our helping others to develop their own generativity and interindividual identity structure to the fullest" (207). International multicultural literatures for children and young adults stimulate young minds toward that goal.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: DISORIENTED CHILDHOOD

This dissertation presents a trajectory of identity formation of South Asian children and young adults as portrayed in the discourses of the postcolonial novels on South Asia written from three strategic locations, namely home authors (from South Asia), diaspora authors (from Europe and America), and Western authors (from Europe and America). In spite of the fact that South Asia refers to a geopolitical space surrounding the Indian sub-continent, "South Asian" as a cultural category was fundamentally a European invention constructed to homogenize the peoples and cultures from this region. Often represented as the Other of the West in Western cultural and literary discourses, South Asian identity is often identified with the negative categories that figure in the binaries like rich/poor, civilized/savage, north/south, rational/emotional, and so on. SA children and young adults are further marginalized in adult literatures that promote aetonormativity and Western universality. Therefore this study has concentrated on literature depicting the life and experiences of growing up South Asian primarily targeted for younger audiences. Even if the target audiences of some of the novels are not children and young adults, their portrayals of childhood experiences make significant contributions in the study of SA identity in this research. Among various definitive experiences of childhood and adolescence, I focus on fitting in among family and friends,

grappling with the body image and self-esteem, dealing with issues like love, sex, marriage, and divorce, and rebelling against social evils for attaining moral agency.

In the first chapter, I introduced the notion of South Asia, the sociopolitical situation of the region from the time of British colonial rule to present contexts of neo-colonialism, the increasing Euro-American interest in knowing the peoples and cultures of the region, SA literatures in English, the trajectory of growing up as SA at home (in the region) and abroad, and the general trends in representing SA identities in mainstream literatures. In the second part of the first chapter, I prepared a framework for analysis made up of the theories ranging from psychology, sociology, psychoanalysis, postcolonialism, feminism, and children's and young adult literatures. Based on these interdisciplinary perspectives, I developed an argument that SA youths are Orientalized, re-Orientalized, or disOriented, colonized or neo-colonized, infantilized or criminalized as juveniles, adultified or parentified, and exoticized, eroticized or romanticized by various discourses like colonialism, globalization, nationalism and so on.

The second chapter was dedicated to the analysis of postcolonial Western writers' representations of SA youths in their novels aimed at younger audiences. I found that these authors almost unanimously use a Western mold to shape the identities of their non-Western characters whether they are located in South Asia or in the West. Their Western protagonists struggle to fit in, fight social vices, and develop moral agency especially in rescuing the SA women and children from the abusive males. The characters like Shabanu (*Shabanu*), Laxmi (*Sold*), and Peak (*Peak*) go through extended periods of suppression, as commonly found in American young adult novels, and after their

encounters with Western or Westernized South Asian people, they gain moral agency. The narratives consistently persuade the adolescents to fall back upon adult and Western liberalist ideologies as a compensation for their sense of loss. For instance, Peak realizes that social institutions like family and society are much more significant in one's life than individual ambitions (Smith 246). In the same way, even after making an escape from the oppressive patriarchal family norms, Shabanu cherishes the arrival of her father who is sure to punish her by forcing her into arranged marriage with the man forty years older than her (Staples 234). The story of Laxmi, who is sold for prostitution in Indian brothels by her stepfather, presents a bleak picture of the life of poor youths in Nepal and India where she does not have control even over her body, not to mention the lack of control over her life. However, McCormick's portrayal of the rescue scene where the lead role is given to a Western man from a Christian Missionary organization can be interpreted as a deliberate authorial choice in order to show the superiority of the West over the non-West. These texts show SA males as all corrupt, barbaric, and ineffectual as juveniles. The writers seem to be borrowing from the older imperialist ideology of infantilizing the natives, although this view somehow contradicts the notion that SA males are sexual predators, a portrayal that is often observed in many of the novels analyzed in this chapter. Above all, postcolonial Western youth novels reinforce the backwardness of SA by highlighting the notions of abuse, burqa, caste, poverty and displacement are almost synonymous to SA identity. Their dominant message seems to be that it is by embodying enlightened and liberal Western values that one can fight these social vices.

In the third chapter, I have explored the growing up experiences of SA youths in the novels written by postcolonial SA diaspora authors like Rushdie, Desai, Hidier, and Selvadurai as counter-narratives to the above mentioned Western discourses. These authors have their own takes with regard to nationalism, globalization and postcolonial interventions, but all of them portray the lives of the young protagonists against the backdrop of the political turmoil in the countries of their origin. They also show the growing up experiences and identity politics of these SA youths in their new homes abroad. In the novels analyzed in this chapter, Rushdie and Hidier are more celebratory of the youths' hybrid identities and their diasporic experieinces, whereas Desai is very critical of Western modernity and globalization. Her characters are influenced negatively by Westernization and diaspora consciousness, whether they live in South Asia or abroad. On the other hand, Selvadurai's novel, set solely in South Asia (Sri Lanka), is primarily critical of the patriarchal, heteronormative, and nationalist discourses that adversely influence the emerging identity of a homosexual young adult especially in times of Sri Lankan civil war. It is silent about the post-immigration experience of the youths as the novel ends at the verge of the young protagonist's immigration to Canada.

Like the protagonists in postcolonial Western young adult novels, adolescent heroes in postcolonial diasporic novels also go through the phase of rebellious adolescence as social outcasts and transgressors. In touch with the youths from both root and host cultures, diaspora youths are often confused about their identities and sense of belonging. In the discourses of these novels, navigation between the two cultures does not only empower the youths with possibilities for finding multiple spaces for locating

their identities, but it also engenders the feelings of belonging to nowhere. In spite of the immediate challenges of fitting in, diaspora youths' identities are influenced by more distant factors connected with national, regional, and global politics. Unlike in Western young adult novels, where the protagonists are expected to find support from adults (parents or parent figures), most young adults in postcolonial diasporic novels break free from filiative hierarchy and develop more hybrid identities. Oftentimes, they even claim the power to lead their parents and other adults in their communities especially when the adults fail to adapt to their new homes due to their obsessive attachment with the root cultures. Without submitting to the power of social institutions, these young adult heroes demonstrate the power to present multiple alternatives to fill in the gaps created by the failure of social institutions like family, nation, and empire with their new-found hybrid and inclusive identity structures.

Unlike the second and third chapters, where I analyzed the novels by multiple authors, the fourth chapter was focused on a single novel by Arundhati Roy. In spite of being targeted explicitly for adult audiences, the novel is extremely useful to demonstrate South Asia's diverse cultural, national, religious, and ethnic specificities and how this reality impacts the youths in their coming of age throes. Since children and young adults from different socio-economic and political spaces in the region have similar as well as different experiences of growing up, the analysis shows that it is risky to homogenize the identities of the SA youths. After all, it is too reductive to say that growing up South Asian means experiencing victimization in the name of abuse, burqa, caste, poverty, and

displacement, or that all youths in all the regions of SA go through the exact same growing up process, despite the commonalities that we see in many SA communities.

I therefore argue that Roy's novel epitomizes multiple issues pertaining to growing up in South Asia in addition to the common ("universal") growing up experiences found in Western discourses as discussed in earlier chapters. Disoriented and at the same time "disOriented" by both local and global forces, SA youths are not only poor, savage or docile, as seen by Western eyes, but they also claim the power to fight social evils in their own ways. Estha's selective mutism and Ammu's and Velutha's transgressive sex are but two different strategies of resistance. Roy's novel is just a single example of the novels about the youths from South Asia in which the author goes beyond the socially constructed boundaries and cultural stereotypes to reach the lived realities of SA youths. The novel powerfully portrays the impact of the disoriented and dysfunctional childhood and adolescence in adult lives and also of their children in the long run. As portrayed in the discourse of the novel, such disorienting and "disOrienting" childhood/ adolescence has led to more family disjunction and individual failures than successes. Detailed mapping of these complex processes of casting and recasting "alien" veils on youths shows that even while growing up in the countries of their origin, SA youths are confused by multiple conflicting ideologies like Western liberalism, nationalism, regionalism, and religious fundamentalism.

The fifth chapter presents a pedagogical approach to teaching international youth literatures for developing global citizenship. Beginning with an overview of the practice of multiculturalism in the United States, I assert that nation or region-based syllabi not

only misinform or at least inadequately inform the students about their own race, class, gender, culture, and nation, but also fail to provide a broader spectrum for the formation of inter-subjective identity. With the insights from my internship teaching in Illinois State University, I argue that a pedagogy of border-crossing promotes the cross-cultural understanding needed for the complex world of global connection which is our inescapable reality. Our children and youths learn about the stereotypes of specific cultures from popular media anyway, but internationalized literature courses can at least make them realize that these stereotypes are incomplete and often patently false.

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