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The fiction of Arundhati Roy and Githa Hariharan : another world is possible

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Antonia Navarro Tejero

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Pilar Cuder Domínguez

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Tesis Doctoral presentada por **Antonia Navarro Tejero** dentro del Programa de Doctorado *Filología Inglesa* de la Universidad de Huelva. La dirección de este trabajo ha corrido a cargo de la **Dra. Dña. María del Pilar Cuder Domínguez**.

P.D.

Antonia Navarro Tejero

La autora

Antonia Navarro Tejero

PS
[Signature]

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For Pablo Navarro Márquez

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INTRODUCTION

The efforts of several generations of Indian writers have attained a triumphant international climax since the publication of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, and the Indian novel in English has finally been accepted as a worth-while literary endeavor. However, critical studies on Indian women writers in English are inadequate, even though they are receiving a more detailed critical consideration in recent years thanks to Arundhati Roy getting the Booker Prize. Indian women writers are claiming recognition and the literary prizes they are receiving are a proof of that. Our purpose with this dissertation is to place Indian women writers in English in this optimistic scenario in order to establish their claims as significant writers, as Indian women writers' works have been devaluated due to patriarchal assumptions of the superior worth of male experience.

The origin of this prejudice, which we intend to dismantle, comes from the fact that most of these women write about the enclosed domestic space and women's perception of experience through their position in it. Consequently, it is assumed that their work will automatically rank below the works of male writers who deal with 'weightier' themes. Simultaneously, Indian women writers in English are victims of a second prejudice, this time vis-à-vis their regional counterparts. Since proficiency in English is largely determined by the intellectual

and educated class and levels of economic affluence, the general impression is that the writers, and their works, belong to a high social strata, and are judged as being cut off from the reality of the Indian existence. As an example, we can see the psychological traumas of the frustrated housewife that are depicted in the majority of these novels. These are considered superficial compared to the depiction of the repressed and oppressed lives of women of the lower classes that we find in the works of Mahasweta Devi, a regional author who writes in Bengali language, among others.

As an attempt to break this stereotype, we have chosen two novels by contemporary Indian women authors: Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992) --winner of the Commonwealth Prize for Best First Book-- and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* --winner of the Booker Prize in 1997. Githa Hariharan represents the reality for a considerable section of Indian womanhood inserted in a brahminical, high class environment, and Arundhati Roy depicts the fatal consequences of the inter-caste sexual relations in a supposedly caste-less Christian and/or communist community. The evaluation of the selected novels and their authors cannot be merely textual, as it inevitably includes the contextual.

The overall purpose of this dissertation is to study and analyze the intersections of gender, caste, and history in narratives by Indian women writers in English. Each of these novels is signaled by a major similarity: both emphasize

the need for the established norm to be subverted. Thus, our purpose is to unravel, expose and analyze the similar and different ways these two authors display in their novels the common purpose of creating new possibilities, re-defining female subjectivity in the critical juncture of caste and gender in order to find their own voice.

In part one, we will undertake an overview of the theoretical frameworks that paved the way to what we call postcolonial feminist studies today. With this in mind, we go through the European theories of the twentieth century as well as the reactions they have provoked in India. Not only did many Indian women rebel against the middle-class white feminists to start what we call the Third Wave of feminism, but also many academics settled in India are accusing postcolonial theory of being 'neo-colonialist.' Hariharan and Roy are able to reach a wider audience by the fact that they write in English –one of the many languages in India—, and it is at this point when an overview of the controversy of authenticity and the use of English language in India becomes indispensable. Much controversy has come from that, especially from the so discussed postcolonial theories accused of being eurocentric as well as neo-colonialist. We will go into a more detailed argumentation, supporting the idea that English is one of the languages of India, in fact, the one that unifies the whole nation, so it is no longer the language of the Empire.

In part two, we will focus on the thematic analysis of the two novels chosen for this research. It is important at this point to clarify that both authors are from South India –Roy grew up in Kerala and Hariharan was born in the neighboring state of Tamil Nadu—both of Malayalam descent. Moreover, their novels are set in different towns in the South of India. Along the way, we will discover the authors' main objective: the reinterpretation and re-writing of history, in which process, history and story intermingle. Telling stories, that is, creating history is in itself a way of producing new entities, new identities, and these stories call for a transformation from the point of view of these women. From this angle, plotting family and lineage is very relevant, and the female characters in these novels argue their points concerning these issues.

Githa Hariharan and Arundhati Roy are engaged --in different degrees-- with social reforms, what makes them writer-activists, as they are sensitive to gender and caste experiences. They are not demagogic or prescriptive, and offer alternatives instead of victimizing the oppressed. Concerning their use of myth, Hariharan does it in a most systematic way, remolding its rich tradition to subvert the didactic message. On the other hand, Roy uses myth in a more ironic way, directly criticizing its commercial manipulation. The authors offer an eclectic blend of fantasy, memoir and reality. Hariharan and Roy have a sense of power that lets their narratives (the narrator's own vision of histories, women's tales, explorations into the unconsciousness...) be heard. Edward Said claims that

“culture and the aesthetic forms it contains derive from historical experience” (*Culture and Imperialism*, xxii), but though they may be determined by their ideology, class or economic history, they are living in the history of their societies, shaping and shaped by that history and their social experience in different measure.

Following Said’s argument about culture, we could state that both Hariharan and Roy are shaped and are shaping the history of their society. They are shaped by the history of their society and social experience as both authors focus on gender and caste issues in their own community as well as they are shaping it as both authors re-tell the stories in a subversive way to denounce publicly society’s corruption and double morality. In this way, they transcend from the local to the universal, to finally try to discover what it means to be human.

In their respective novels, they use fiction as the melding of imagination and experience. Memory plays an important role as well, as it is used either as a way to denounce cultural behaviors that repress women and impose the division of classes or as a way of reclaiming a lost cultural identity. These novels have been chosen because neither of them suggests that the modern is good and the traditional is bad or vice versa. Antagonists live together projecting a real and clear picture of what India is, with its ambiguous nature, where progress and regress appear simultaneously. Moreover, these authors offer unconventional

women roles in their novels, and boundaries are always transgressed upon. At the same time, mythological tales are an important part as a way to build a new future, as they are not repeated but re-told in a different transformative way, intermingling them with an exquisite magical realism.

What these authors have in common is their intention to create a future by retelling a hitherto unrevealed story from the past and mythical tales that stay in the unconscious due to its didactic nature. Both authors venerate their own tradition but their re-telling of their stories is not uncritical. Both novels end up in a promising, utopian state with a series of characters that have been excluded from the main group, but who have fought for a place in it, showing –thus– subversive, empowering forces. They offer memory as a tool to recover their identity; the re-writing of History through personal stories in the family group. We can find both submissive and rebellious women, most of them at some period of their lives transgress in one way or the other. They offer alternatives to the myths, and moral codes of behavior. Moreover, they both offer formal education as opposed to marriage. They deal with the problems associated with inequality and the inability of some people in a society to attain a public audience. Both authors question truth, offering the reader their own version of History. Hariharan uses the subversion of mythology in order to create a feminine self-detached from conventionality. On the other hand, Roy uses the re-telling of History through giving voice to the subaltern in order to offer a reality detached

from factual manipulated accounts. Their purpose is the same one: both tend to dismantle universal conceptions of a single truth to liberate the individual from a moral imposed on them, though their strategy differs.

The present study has been organized in two major parts. Part one is a descriptive survey of the theories that provide us with a clear picture of the situation of gender and caste studies. The second part is divided in three main chapters. The first one analyses the process of the female subjectivity and the authors' use of the *bildungsroman*. The second one offers a fictional depiction of the various repressive forces working on women in contemporary Indian society: the repression and marginalization of women effected through traditional religious institutions, the imposed code of female sexuality in (extra) marital relationships, and the double morality of the ruling state. The last one develops the questioning of the validity and imposition of those constrains. These women protagonists go from a painful sense of alienation and a self divided between the old acquiescence and the new urge towards individuation to revolt against and reject patriarchal impositions. These women's resolutions conform a re-definition of the lives of women, fulfilling the implicit political aim of these authors, as they are not merely concern in documenting reality, but they have used their novels as a medium for the exploration of the new reality and a subtle projection of values, by posing questions, by suggesting re-assessment and re-definition.

1. The theories that paved the way to Postcolonial Studies.

The emergence of postcolonialism was a reflection of the changing values in the postcolonial world: criticism of the cultural assumptions of the 'center' -- the metropolis -- the need to see texts within their cultural contexts and an awareness of the importance of recognizing different, perhaps conflicting, readings of the same text. Postcolonial criticism often challenges whether established judgments

account classic texts from the English canon, or reflects the shifts in focus that began with the break-up of empire.

In recent decades, there has been an attempt to dismantle the presumption of universal and absolute truths. This presumption implies that every discourse conforms to an ideology; a definition of truth imposed by the ruling elite. Attempts have been made to subvert the established canon. In this way, the main force to subvert the canon has come from both postcolonial and feminist studies, through the reconstruction of canonical texts through alternative readings.

The canon is a collection of reading texts in institutional structures, which implies that the selection is done along the criteria of a determined culture. In the dichotomy of center/margin, the one that dominates the canon is the 'metropolis'. It offers the works that represent its own culture as the most valuable one. In doing so, the ideology of power projects certain values that end up being viewed as natural and as the sole representatives of reality.

At the same time, the corpus of works that are traditionally considered as valuable have not only been from the center, but also patriarchal. However, both the center and margin complement each other in the sense that one definition requires the implicit existence of the other. The discovery of 'other literatures' has given way to a surge and recognition of the literary production in this field; i.e. women writers and postcolonial ones.

The postcolonial literature and theory share many characteristics with

hybridity. By emphasizing what is marginal, different and ambiguous, they celebrate postcolonial writers and writing in a way that is unsentimental and reflects the complexity of the contemporary world.

For Lyotard, knowledge is a question of competence that goes beyond the simple determination and application of the criterion of truth. Knowledge is what makes someone capable of forming not only 'good' denotative utterances but also 'good' prescriptive and 'good' evaluative utterances. Then, the evaluative utterances are judged to be good if they conform to the relevant criteria (of justice, beauty, truth and efficiency) accepted in the social circle of the interlocutors of the knower.

Robert Young asserts that postcolonial discourse has profited from the politics of post-structuralism, as it "forces the recognition that all knowledge may be variously contaminated" (11). Arif Dirlik adds that "crucial premises of postcolonial criticism (...) were enunciated first in post-structuralist thinking and the various postmodernisms it has informed" (336). Moreover, metropolitan postcolonial theory is replete with post-structuralist methods and the writings of Michael Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Gilles Deleuze, among others. Taking into consideration all this, we will proceed to make a brief overview of the theories that served as foreground to Postcolonial Studies, Subaltern Studies and Women's Studies in India, and which will help us make a critical analysis of the novels we chose.

1.1. Post-structuralism.

It is difficult to make a clear distinction between post-structuralist theories and postmodernist practices as they share many similarities. A new kind of society began to emerge after the Second World War. The World War was responsible for this radical change, and to put it in Sarup's words "media society, the society of the spectacle, consumer society the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption, post-industrial society" (132).

This new society – post-Marxist – can be labeled as consumer society, post-industrial society or society of the spectacle, that is, postmodernist society. Post-structuralists assert that Marxist theory is now outmoded; it does not and cannot apply to the new social developments. This argument often overlaps with another one concerning modernism and postmodernism.

The theories, which have helped produce post-structuralism, include structural linguistics (Ferdinand de Saussure and Emile Benveniste), Marxism (particularly Louis Althusser's theory of ideology), psychoanalysis (Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan), and deconstruction (Jacques Derrida's theory of *différence*, and Michel Foucault's theory of discourse and power).

We will proceed to briefly expose the main characteristics of post-

structuralism.¹ Post-structuralism takes from Saussure the principle that meaning is produced within language rather than reflected by language, and that individual signs do not have intrinsic meaning but acquire meaning through the language chain and their difference within it from other signs. The problem with saussurean theory (he sees meaning in the language system as single and fixed) is that it does not account for the plurality of meaning or changes in meaning. The post-structuralist answer to the problems of the plurality of meaning and change is to question the location of social meaning in fixed signs. It speaks instead of signifiers in which the signified is never fixed once and for all, but is constantly deferred. It is in the work of Jacques Derrida that this critique of the saussurean sign is made most clearly. Derrida questions Saussure's logocentrism in which signs have an already fixed meaning recognized by the self-consciousness of the rational speaking subject. Derrida moves from the saussurean focus on speech to a concern with writing and textuality and replaces the fixed signifieds of Saussure's chains of signs with a concept of *différance* in which meaning is produced via the dual strategies of difference and deferral. For Derrida there can be no fixed signifieds (concepts), and signifiers (sound or written images), which have identity only in their difference from one another, are subject to an endless process of deferral. The effect of representation, in which meaning is apparently fixed, is but a temporary retrospective fixing. Signifiers are always located in a discursive

¹ For this purpose, we will follow Chris Weedon's work on post-structuralism.

context and the temporary fixing of meaning in a specific reading of a signifier depends on this discursive context. The meaning of the signifier 'woman' varies from ideal to victim to object of sexual desire, according to its context. Consequently, it is always open to challenge and redefinition with shifts in its discursive context. What it means at any particular moment depends on the discursive relations within which it is located, and it is open to constant rereading and reinterpretation.

1.2. Theories of power, knowledge, and sexuality.

As a theory of social meaning and power, post-structuralist work on discourse in its social and historical context has developed in a relation of difference from Marxism. Marxist discourse is able to use the terms 'real' and 'false' because it has a concept of historical materialist science, which can offer a true explanation of capitalism, guaranteed by the Marxist principle of the ultimate determining power of the relations of production. Post-structuralist discourses reject the claim that scientific theories can give access to truth. It can only ever produce specific knowledge, with particular implications.

Louis Althusser assumes, in his influential text "Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses" (1971), that ideology is always the precondition of social existence which takes place through historically specific ideologies.

Ideology mediates between individuals and their real conditions of existence, much as language does in post-saussurean theory. It functions by interpellating individuals as subjects within specific ideologies, which exist in material apparatuses and their practices.

Psychoanalysis has been influential in the development of post-structuralist theory. Aspects of Lacan's development of Freudian psychoanalysis have influenced the model of ideology and subjectivity found in althusserian Marxism and much feminist thinking about language, sexuality and subjectivity. In his reading of Freud, Lacan stresses the linguistic structure of the unconscious as a site of repressed meanings and the imaginary structure of subjectivity acquired, like the unconscious, at the point of entry of the individual as speaking subject into the symbolic order of language, laws, social processes and institutions.

Lacan's theory of language has much in common with Jacques Derrida's critique of rationalist theories of language, consciousness and the logocentric tradition of Western metaphysics, which presuppose that the meaning of concepts is fixed prior to their articulation in language. Derrida extended and transformed Saussure's principle that meaning is produced by the difference between signs in the language chain. As for Derrida, meaning for Lacan can only occur in a specific textual location and in a relation of difference from all other textual locations. In lacanian psychoanalysis, it is the mechanisms of desire, rather than the principle of difference, that prevents the final fixing of meaning; as for Derrida, all meaning

is temporary and relative. The sustained analysis of the contributions of psychoanalysis to post-colonial investigations of power, identity, and resistance has been largely confined to commentaries on Homi Bhabha's work, where psychoanalysis serves as a template, ever in the process of skewing its overlay, for colonial identity.

It is in the work of Michel Foucault that the post-structuralist principles of the plurality and constant deferral of meaning and the precarious, discursive structure of subjectivity have been integrated into a theory of language and social power which pays detailed attention to the institutional effects of discourse and its role in the constitution and government of individual subjects. Foucault has produced detailed historical analyses of the ways in which power is exercised and individuals governed through psychiatry, the penal system, and the discursive production and control of sexuality (the discursive field which constitutes madness, punishment or sexuality).

Discourses are ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity, and power relations. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the 'nature' of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern. Neither the body nor thoughts and feelings have meaning outside their discursive articulation, but the ways in which discourse constitutes the minds and bodies of individuals is always part of a wider network of power relations.

The possibility of resistance is an effect of the processes whereby particular discourses become the instruments and effects of power: “discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it but it also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it, in like manner, silence and secrecy are a shelter for power, anchoring its prohibitions, but they also loosen its hold and provide for relatively obscure areas of tolerance” (Foucault 1981: 101).

To be effective, discourses require activation through the agency of the individuals whom they constitute and govern, in particular ways, as embodied subjects. The discursive constitution of subjectivity addresses and constitutes the individual’s mind, body and emotions. Subjectivity is most obviously the site of the consensual regulation of individuals. Discourses, as realized in institutional practices, for example, in the family and the school, constitute the meaning of the physical body, psychic energy, the emotions and desire, as well as conscious subjectivity. They define individual identities and the forms of pleasure derived from them. Acquisition of modes of subjectivity involves the accumulation of the memory, conscious or unconscious, of subject positions and the psychic and emotional structures implicit in them.

Unlike Marxism, Foucault does not begin his analyses with the presupposition that the economic mode of production will be the ultimate determining factor and that, in this sense, class relations and class power are primary. For him power is:

the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies (Foucault 1981: 92).

The analyses produced by this theory of discourse are, like their Marxist alternatives, a version of history, which seeks to explain the relations and forces of power from the discursive evidence available. It is a version centrally concerned with the social interests inherent in particular ways of governing subjects and, as such, has important political implication for the present. The process of analysis involves the production of what is a discourse on power, which is never definitive and is always shaped by the concerns of the moment in which it is produced. The knowledge inscribed in this discourse implies certain assumptions about meaning, which are part of the broader discursive battle over knowledge and power.

Foucault opens up sexuality to history and change. His method involves starting not from some general theory of meaning and power, which will

inevitably relate it to a universal signifier such as the phallus in psychoanalysis or the capital-labor relationship in Marxism, but from local centers of power/knowledge, like the sexuality of children or homosexuals. It is in making claims to truth that discourses demonstrate their inevitable conservatism, their investment in particular versions of meaning and their hostility to change. The institutional investment in science confirms that the *status quo* is massive.

1.3. Postmodernism.

The term postmodernism originated among artists and critics in New York in the 1960s and was taken up by European theorists in the 1970s.² The decline of the originality and genius view of the artistic producer has been replaced by the assumption that art can only be repetitious.

In his book *The Postmodern Condition*, Jean-Francois Lyotard attacked the legitimating grand narratives, the progressive liberation of humanity through

² Here, we will follow Madan' Sarup's work.

science, and the idea that philosophy can restore unity and learning, and develop universally valid knowledge and foundationalism. Lyotard established a difference between narrative knowledge and scientific knowledge. The nature of knowledge and the way in which it was legitimated and sold was the product of certain social changes that took place. Lyotard claims that the technological transformations are having a considerable impact on knowledge. The miniaturization and commercialization of machines are already changing the way in which learning is acquired, classified, made available and exploited. Knowledge is produced in order to be sold, as it has been the principal force of production over the last few decades.

Knowledge has become, as predicted by Lyotard, the major component in the world-wide competition for power, as it is conceivable that nation-states fight for control of information, just as they battled for control over territories in the past. With this, the gap between developed and developing countries grows even wider. Lyotard suggests that power and knowledge are simply two aspects of the same question.

As Singh puts it in his essay "Postmodernism, Postcolonialism and Post-(In)dependent India: Images and Alternatives", postmodernism is a consequence of change in the West's understanding of man and the world. In his own words, he defines it as: "Confusion is all, as postmodernism celebrates, and also wants us to do so, the carnival of confusion and uncertainty" (71). He follows up stating

that postmodernism and postcolonialism are products of certain eco-socio-political order and culture that forge condition, mood or perception called postmodernism. He claims that postmodernism as a category comes from the West, and that, as it has something to do with modernism, with post-scientific positivism or post-industrial society, then it is inconceivable to think of postmodernism in India.

He goes to the extreme of stating that postmodernism is the philosophy of neo-colonialism, and consumerism is its culture. For him, it is ironical that the first post-colonial nation, if political independence is the criterion, is the foremost neo-colonized today. Then, he claims that postmodernism is the only philosophy or discourse from the West that at least in principle proclaims that there are others. It valorizes heterogeneity of contexts and interest groups. In practice postmodernism is nothing but an empty slogan used as camouflage by the neo-capitalist culture which equipped with its means, methods and modes of consumption and media imposes a homogenizing super voice, language and culture over others proposing neo-universalism of its kind.

Singh uses a metaphor for the term, saying that postmodernism "is one of the outward teeth of the elephant called neocapitalism" (74). He explains that postmodernism acts as a handmaid of neo-capitalism, for it provides theoretical and philosophical framework to neo-capitalism and to its consumerist culture. The

neo-capitalist consumerist culture sees everything in terms of resources, productivity and commodity and profit to the detriment of the consumers.

Neo-capitalism, according to Singh, is the reigning reality of the so-called postcolonial societies. These societies remain consumers of postmodern and postcolonial discourses of neocolonial countries and their East India companies. Neo-colonialism of neo-capitalist countries fuelled and fawned by flamboyant consumerist culture survives and thrives on its ability to transform itself and hide its colonial colors.

Finally in his article, he proposes an alternative to colonialism, as he claims it cannot be ignored or rejected. 'Deshiwad' is his alternative to neo-colonialism. It stands for that consciousness that does not accept such principles, standards, models and criteria as are not approved of by our experience. It is more inclusive than nativism; it is a strategy that with its insistence on identity, specificity and authenticity resists direct or indirect invasion or encroachment by 'other' or alien homogenizing forces.

2. Postcolonial Studies: From Commonwealth to Postcoloniality.

The growth of Postcolonial Studies and its validation as a discipline has been coeval with the growing interest in multiculturalism and the phenomenon of global economic and cultural transnationalism. According to Deepika Bahri many factors have contributed to its developments, such as the changing ethnic and racial demographics of the United Kingdom and United States; the increasing numbers and influence of immigrant South Asians in general and in the academy; the developments and reception of programs devoted to the study of ethnic groups; the increasing availability of texts in English by non-Western authors; and the concomitant growth of Women's Studies and the impetus to conceive global feminisms (150-51). Bahri goes on saying that one of the most significant reasons for the exponential expansion in postcolonial discourse is the host climate generated by the development of postmodern theory and the postmodern critics' suspicion of an objective historical consciousness.

Bahri points out that the term 'postcolonial' –hyphenated or not— is used to describe the literatures and the theory of former, mostly British and French, colonies and diasporic writers and intellectuals from these spaces. Sometimes, the term also refers to Latin American cultural productions. The cognate terms 'commonwealth' and 'Third World' have all but disappeared as prefixes from the body of literature that is now largely designated 'postcolonial' but succumbs to the appellation 'new literature in English.' 'Minority,' 'resistance,' and

'multicultural' literature overlaps with the 'postcolonial,' all these terms being interchangeable (147).

Salman Rushdie described commonwealth literature as the "new and badly made umbrella" under which disparate non-Western literatures were forced to huddle without any regard for their differences. He concluded that non-Western literature was being ghettoized, contained, and relegated to the margins in what might even be considered a racially segregationist move. Thus, 'commonwealth literature' could be read in nationalistic terms as resurgence of exoticism in the guise of authenticity (1991: 70). Aijaz Ahmad rejects theories that achieve coherence through generalities and terms that deploy simplistic binary bifurcations between colonizer and colonized, and he mentions the works of Spivak, Suleri, Diana Brydon, Homi Bhabha, Abdul JanMohamed, and Kumkum Sangari (285).

Diana Brydon confronts those so willing to dismiss commonwealth literature because of its seeming stereotyping and universalizing, arguing that these critics deny the writers who use this label to the specificity they claim (1). Similarly, Trinh T. Minh-ha claims that when the term 'Third World' is used subversively, it has much power (1989: 97); something that Ella Shohat agrees with when she suggests that the term retains heuristic value as a convenient label for the imperialized formations (111).

In their introduction to *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin use the term 'postcolonial' to "cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day" (2). They reject 'commonwealth,' as it rests on the fact of a shared history and the resulting political grouping; 'Third World literature', as it is seen as pejorative; and 'new literatures in English' as it is considered euro-centric and condescending (23-4). In their critique of *The Empire Writes Back*, Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge advocate the use of 'post-colonialism' as it "foregrounds a politics of opposition and struggle, and problematizes the key relationship between centre and periphery. It has helped to destabilize the barriers around 'English literature' that protected the primacy of the canon and the self-evidence of its standards" (276). They suggest that we might talk about several postcolonialisms and that by dropping the hyphen, we could recognize one version as implicit in colonial discourse, thus emphasizing continuity rather than rupture.

Rita Raley proposes the discursive transmutation of the discipline of Postcolonial Studies into 'Literature in English', basing her argument on the fact that "Literature in English is marked by critical attention to linguistic heterogeneity and internal differences among English-speaking cultures, and it thus signifies a destabilization of the whole notion of a standard language that has historically been aligned with colonialism" (51-52), whereas --for her--

Postcolonial Studies is still a study of the English empire. Raley introduces a detailed analysis of this transition in the academy. The proposed category 'writing in English' promises to erase borders and boundaries, organizing itself around what –according to Ramraj—an otherwise “multifarious literary community” can presumably hold in common: language (xxvii). Thus, 'World Literature in English' circumvents the taxonomic problems brought on by transculturation, intellectual migrations, and the phenomenon of the cosmopolitan celebrity.

Together with Edward W. Said, Gayatri C. Spivak and Homi K. Bhabha make up what Robert Young describes as “the Holy Trinity” of postcolonial critics who have achieved the greatest eminence in their field (1995: 163). Both Spivak and Bhabha acknowledge Said’s work as their immediate inspiration –Spivak, for example, has described *Orientalism* (1978) as “the source book in our discipline” (1993: 56)-- although both challenge and revise, as well as extend, the work of their mentor in significant ways.

Orientalism forms an important background for postcolonial studies. The idea of knowledge as power is present throughout Said’s critique, as by knowing the Orient, the West came to own it. He departs from Foucault’s positions about power or institutions versus knowledge or discourse (1977: 162). One of the commonest accusations leveled against *Orientalism* is that it offers a monolithic, totalizing theory, ignoring resistance within or outside the West, apart from the

fact that the binary West/East division projects outward splits within Western society.

Bhabha's approach to colonial discourse is dissimilar to Said's, which Bhabha sees as too reliant on over-simplifying binaries such as East/West, colonizer/colonized. Bhabha mixes psychoanalysis and deconstruction, being his starting-points Foucault and Fanon.³ Bhabha's core concepts –ambivalence, mimicry, and hybridity—have become touchstones for debates in postcolonial theory, concepts we will discuss below in the analysis of the novels.

Spivak intervenes in feminist, Marxist, deconstructive, and psychoanalytic debates. Her concerns are the position of the subject and the dynamics of teaching and learning in imperialistic practices. Her essays seek to detail the ways in which imperialism has constructed narratives of history, geography, gender, and identity. Spivak addresses the problem of representation and tries to subvert dominant versions of history and forms of historiography in her collaborations with the Subaltern Studies group, as we have seen above.

Jasbir Jain asserts that books on postcolonial criticism choose fewer examples from Indian writing for several reasons: "India does not easily come within binary divisions –it counters binarism with its own multiplicity—and its dominant religion in itself becomes a distancing factor, what the European mind

³ Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* provides Bhabha with a method of constructing the conditions and effects of colonialism.

had perceived as the 'multiheaded' monster, or we are simply not aggressive enough to assert ourselves, or it could be that our postcoloniality began much earlier than it did in Africa and Australia, or still more likely we theorise differently" (2000: 21). She goes on asserting that the term 'postcolonial' marks the colonial as the dominant experience obliterating all earlier and simultaneous experiences, and when the "Empire" writes back, it is like getting even with a subordinate past (22).

According to Jain, India's encounter with the British passed through several stages, historically speaking: –interaction, military conflicts, partial acceptance, absorption of influence through education, imitation and conversion. Then came a phase of nationalist upsurge which was an expression of disillusionment with western imperialism as well as a positing of a cultural model (26). She complains about the fact that the voices which articulate Indian reality are either relegated to the sidelines or have marginal visibility or are visible for the wrong reasons as compared to those who choose to work primarily within the western constructs. An example of this is how the rich tradition of the language literatures continues to be placed outside postcolonial discussion, as migracy is making postcolonial discourse move away from the Indian realities. However, she cites Spivak's translation and comments on Mahasweta Devi's short stories as one of the few examples of the opposite.

Jain concludes saying that a reworking of the concepts of 'mimicry' and 'hybridity' is required, as they simplify and ignore all earlier hybridities and native multiplicities. She claims that though postcolonialism began as an analysis of cultural formations within conditions of inequality, and of the resistance offered there, it is increasingly being confined to its relationship to the West, seeking accommodation and an audience there (31). She accuses Indian theorists -- whether at home or abroad--of using Western frameworks, or addressing Western critique. For instance the methods of approach which Spivak adopts are derridean deconstructionism, Bhabha goes on to build on Foucault's concept of heteroglosia, and Aija Ahmad is engaged in a Marxist critiquing of Said's *Orientalism*. In her words, "the dialogue which needs to move horizontally in India becomes directed outwards" (37).

Jain places the oppositional movement of 'nativism' in this context.⁴ According to her, postcolonialism has manifested strong affiliation with Marxism, cultural criticism, deconstruction and new historicism, depending heavily on the concepts of Derrida, Foucault and Kristeva. This nativist movement is being articulated in India by writers and critics who are either bilingual or write in Indian languages, like Bhalchandra Nemade, Ashok Kelkar, and Ganesh Devy.

⁴ In 1984 critics and writers attended a seminar to identify the aesthetics of language literatures; papers published in *New Quest*, May 1984. Jain reminds us that 'nativism' as a literary statement cannot be isolated from the political conservatism of Hindu nationalism, the present ruling party, the Bhartiya Janta Party, and regional parties like the Shiv Sena.

She is not the only critic who has criticized postcolonialism. Harish Trivedi refers to postcolonialism as another form of metropolitan imposition (244). The co-founder of Kali for Women –Urvashi Butalia-- pointed out that a book is a highly mediated social activity as political and economic conditions govern the choices publishers make (which in turn governs privileging of some texts over other, as well as the accessibility of knowledge). India ranks third in the world where English language publications are concerned, but has a reading population of a little more than 2%. Indian scholars and India-baiters abroad read the rest. On the other hand, Anthony Appiah calls the term ‘postcolonialism’ “a *comprador* intelligentsia” which stands for “a relatively small, Western-style, Western trained group of writers and thinkers who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery” (348).

3. Subaltern Studies: giving a voice to the subaltern.

Claire Colebrook claims that post-structuralism was a form of ahistoricism and that new historicism marked something like a ‘return’ to history. After the supposed formalist relativism of the 1980s, literary criticism found history again, although now in a more rigorous and enlightened form. The fact that history has been rethought so thoroughly by new historicism is a consequence of certain moves made in post-structuralist thought. The rethinking of history and historiography was prompted by a broad range of concerns that motivated the

post-structuralist endeavor. Problems of the narrative or inscriptive nature of all knowledge, of legitimation and situatedness, the contingency of disciplinary boundaries, a sense of political crisis, and the absence of consensus and shared narratives all led to a questioning of history as the repository of truth. Not only does new historicism itself draw upon the work of Lacan, Derrida, Foucault and the broad range of post-structuralist thought, but also the questions raised by the problem of historicism have intensified rather than been resolved. If it is the case that the writing of history is a form of power – and a specifically Western and modern form at that – then new historicism may best be seen as a quite specific response within a larger field of questions (1).

There has been a long tradition of attempting to relate literary texts to history (a tradition dominated by the Marxist enterprise). Not only does the problem of relation presuppose that the categories of literature and history are somehow already apparent, but it also implies that there is an opposition between the two fields. While some writers are united in their attempt to think of history in terms other than that of a context or horizon in which texts would be related, there is often a sense that the literary or aesthetic will provide an ‘other’ to history. Literature is often seen as a privileged site where the determinism of history is disrupted, questioned or opened. New historicism has constantly demonstrated the malleability, contingency and contested character of the category of literature. By demonstrating the complex relationship between the production of the

categories of both literature and history, new historicism has contested the boundaries of traditional historiography and literary criticism. New historicism has responded to the more general question of knowledge and power (2).

It is necessary to include in this project the thoughts of Subaltern Studies. Dipesh Chakrabarty, in "A Small History of Subaltern Studies," makes a summary of the history of Subaltern Studies as a discipline. A series of volumes dedicated to Subaltern Studies began in 1982 under the title of *Subaltern Studies: Writings on Indian History and Society*. Ranajit Guha --the founding editor, who is a historian of India and teaches at University of Sussex (UK)-- and eight other scholars based in India, the United Kingdom and Australia constituted the editorial collective.⁵ Not only do the series offer debates specific to the writing of modern Indian history but also *Subaltern Studies* exceeds the discipline of history, participating in contemporary critiques of history and nationalism, and of orientalism and euro-centrism in the construction of social-science knowledge. There have also been discussions of *Subaltern Studies* in many history and social science journals. Selections from the series have come out in English, Bengali, and Hindi and are in the process of being brought out in Tamil, Spanish, and Japanese. A Latin American Subaltern Studies Association was established in North America in

⁵ See their "Founding Statement" (1993).

1993.⁶

Chakrabarty said that he concentrates on the discipline of history for two reasons:

(a) the relationship between the new field of postcolonial writing and historiography has not yet received the attention it deserves, and (b) to answer critics who say that *Subaltern Studies* was once “good” Marxist history in the same way that the English tradition of “history from below” was, but that it lost its way when it came into contact with Said’s Orientalism, Spivak’s deconstructionism, or Bhabha’s analysis of colonial discourse (468).

Moreover, in a wide-ranging critique of postcolonial thinkers, Arif Dirlik once suggested that the historiographic innovations of *Subaltern Studies*, while welcome, were more applications of methods pioneered by British Marxist historians, albeit modified by ‘Third World sensibilities.’

Subaltern Studies raised questions about history-writing that made the business of a radical departure from English Marxist historiographical traditions, inescapable. It started as a critique of two contending schools of history: the Cambridge School and that of the nationalist historians. Both of these approaches,

⁶ As it exists now, the collective has the following members: Shahid Amin, David Arnold, Gautam Bhadra, Dipesh Chakrabarty; Partha Chatterjee, David Hardiman, Sudipta Kaviraj, Shail Mayaram, Gyan Pandey; M. S. S. Pandian, Gyan Prakash, Susie Tharu, and Ajay Skaria. Sumit Sarkar and Gayatri Spivak were members of the collective for specific periods in the 1980s and the 1990s respectively.

declared Guha in a statement that inaugurated the series *Subaltern Studies*, were elitist, as those historians could not understand: “the contributions made by-people *on their own*, that is, *independent of the elite* to the making and development of this nationalism” (1982: 3), even as they wrote up the history of nationalism as the story of an achievement by the elite classes, whether Indian or British.

The academic subject called ‘modern Indian history’ is a relatively recent development, a result of research and discussion in various universities in India, the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, and elsewhere *after* the end of British imperial rule in August 1947. In its early phase, this area of scholarship bore all the signs of an ongoing struggle between tendencies, which were affiliated to imperialist biases in Indian history, and a nationalist desire on the part of historians in India to de-colonize the past. Marxism was understandably mobilized in aid of the nationalist project of intellectual de-colonization.

It looked for an anti-elitist approach to history-writing and in this it had much in common with the ‘history from below’ approaches pioneered in English historiography by Christopher Hill, E. P. Thompson, E. J. Hobsbawm, and others. Both *Subaltern Studies* and the ‘history from below’ school were Marxist in inspiration, both owed a certain intellectual debt to the Italian communist Antonio Gramsci in trying to move away from deterministic, Stalinist readings of Marx. According to Chakrabarty, the word ‘subaltern’ itself and the concept of ‘hegemony’ so critical to the theoretical project of *Subaltern Studies* go back to the

writings of Gramsci. Chakrabarty further states that as in the histories written by Thompson, Hobsbawm, Hill, and others, *Subaltern Studies* was also concerned about “rescuing from the condescension of posterity” the pasts of the socially subordinate groups in India, and hence the declared aim of *Subaltern Studies* was to produce historical analyses in which the subaltern groups were viewed as the subjects of their own history (471).

From its very beginning, *Subaltern Studies* positioned itself on an unorthodox territory of the left. What it inherited from Marxism was already in conversation with other and more recent currents of European thought, particularly those of structuralism. And there was a discernible sympathy with early Foucault in the way that Guha’s writings posed the knowledge-power question. Guha retired from the editorial team of *Subaltern Studies* in 1988. In the same year, an anthology entitled *Selected Subaltern Studies* published from New York launched the global career of the project. Edward Said wrote a Foreword to the volume describing Guha’s statement regarding the aims of *Subaltern Studies* as intellectually insurrectionary.

A text that can be considered as an insight into the subaltern is Foucault’s *I, Pierre Rivière* (a peasant who killed his mother, sister and brother in 1835). It is interpreted as a protest against the intolerable conditions of everyday life in the French countryside, in which poverty, disease and exploitation deprived the peasants of their humanity, and their legally guaranteed claim to autonomous,

rational subjecthood. In his making a bid to speak out, he is interpreted as a questioner of the system without the right to speak. In spite of the fact that feudalism had been legally abolished, the peasants were still perceived as monsters by other social groups.

The analysis of the discourses (over the meaning of the killings by the law) shows how the different elements available are selectively read or ignored in order to produce readings of the act and memoir as either monstrously evil or insane. Those laments, which are used to ground the legal case, are played down in the medical case and vice versa. In order to achieve a consistent argument, both are silent on the contents and argument of the memoir itself. It eludes that either classification or any serious consideration of it would undermine both the legal and medical cases. It is reduced to silence, taken as a manifestation of monstrosity or of madness. This silencing of the memoir renders it politically ineffectual. The only satisfactory way of silencing it, however, is by declaring Rivière insane, since to have him sane and monstrous would reflect on the common humanity of a society in which all were ostensibly equal. While Rivière is eventually committed, his suicide in prison is taken as a final statement that a reading of his deed and memoir in terms of insanity is inadequate.

The reading which the notes produce relies on a broad analysis of the historical context, the state of the peasantry and of the institutions of the law, medicine and politics, which stresses the unevenness in the social and economic

shifts which mark the transition from feudalism to the bourgeois era. While it is but a version of this history, it is one with much explanatory power, showing the implications of the contest between discourses and interests over meaning for individual groups and classes and the effects of silencing on a class which had been led to believe that it now had a right to be heard.

Similarly, in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" --by the means of an extended discussion of sati-- Spivak presents as emblem of the subaltern in the case of a political activist who sought to communicate her personal predicament through her suicide, but whose communication was foiled by the codes of patriarchy and colonialism in which her actions were inevitably inscribed. Bhuvanewari Bhaduri was a member of one of the many groups involved in the armed struggle for Indian independence. She hanged herself in 1926 at the onset of menstruation so that her death would not be diagnosed as the outcome of illegitimate passion. But her death was remembered as 'a case of illicit love.' Since her actions are not only inscribed, but read in terms of the dominant codes of British imperialism and Indian patriarchy, Spivak concludes that the subaltern cannot speak. Her conclusion is preceded by a critique of Foucault and Deleuze, through which she discusses the dangers of re-inscribing imperial assumptions in colonial studies, and of Antonio Gramsci's and Ranajit Guha's treatments of subalternity, in which her main focus is Guha's analysis of the social structure of postcolonial societies.

In Spivak's provocative but complicated discussion of the subaltern as female, she seems to be arguing that the subaltern's voice/consciousness cannot be retrieved, and that analysis should indicate this impossibility by charting the positions from which the subaltern speaks, but 'cannot be heard or read' (1988: 308). In a subsequent interview, saying that she had been misunderstood, Spivak claimed in an interview with Howard Winant that the purpose had been to counter the impulse to solve the problem of political subjectivity by romanticizing the subaltern. Instead of treating the subaltern as an unproblematic unified subject, she would apply to the subaltern "all the complications of 'subject production' which are applied to us" (1990: 90). Spivak critiques Western poststructuralist theory as represented by Foucault and Deleuze and its tendency to reinstitute the notion of a Western sovereign subject in the act of deconstructing it. She goes on to posit the irretrievable heterogeneity of the subaltern subject, effaced by the orientalizing construction of sovereign subjectivity defined by power and desire. Foucault and Deleuze, she argues, inadvertently impose a Western Subject on the place of the subaltern. Spivak suggests that the term 'subaltern' refers to the margins (one can just as well say the silent, silenced center) of the circuit marked out by this epistemic violence [of imperialist/colonialist law and education], men and women among the illiterate peasantry, the tribals, the lowest strata of the urban subproletariat on the other side of the international division of labor form socialized capital.

In "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak's aim is, in her words, "to learn to speak to (rather than listen to or speak for) the historically muted subject of the non-elite" (271). Spivak suggests using the term 'subaltern' for everything that is different from organized resistance, justifying this usage by building on Guha's introduction to his *Subaltern Studies* where he is making an analysis of how a colonial society is structured, and what space can be spoken of as the subaltern space. Spivak's essay "Deconstructing Historiography" served as the introduction to this selection. This essay of Spivak's and a review essay by Rosalind O'Hanlon published about the same time made two important criticisms of *Subaltern Studies*, which had a serious impact on the later intellectual trajectory of the project. Both Spivak and O'Hanlon pointed to the absence of gender questions in *Subaltern Studies*. They also made a more fundamental criticism of the theoretical orientation of the project. They pointed out, in effect, that *Subaltern Studies* historiography operated with an idea of the subject to make the subaltern the maker of his own destiny, which had not wrestled at all with critique of the very idea of the subject itself that had been mounted by poststructuralist thinkers.

Subaltern Studies scholars have since tried to take these criticisms on board. The charges about the absence of gender issues and the lack of engagement with feminist scholarship in *Subaltern Studies* have been met to some degree by some seminal essays by Ranajit Guha and Partha Chatterjee, and by contributions made by Susie Tharu on contemporary feminist theory in India. Partha Chatterjee's 1986

book *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* creatively applied Saidian and postcolonial perspectives to the study of non-Western nationalisms, using India as an example. Kamala Visweswaran distinguishes between the figure of 'woman' as subaltern and the question of subaltern women when considering the gendering of subalternity. She claims that there are two problems that mark the theorization of gender by the Subaltern Studies group: either gender is subsumed under the categories of caste and class or gender is seen to mark a social group apart from other subalterns (90).

According to Said's reading of Michel Foucault, *Orientalism* characteristically implies that the dominant power successfully maximized itself at the expense of the subject peoples, who were rendered almost entirely passive and silent by conquest. Unsurprisingly, then, Said's text focuses almost exclusively on the discourse and agency of the colonizer. Spivak remedies this imbalance by a consistent attention throughout her career to the less privileged sectors of the colonized peoples and to their successors in the neocolonial era. To describe these social formations, she adapts the term 'subaltern' from Gramsci (to whom *Orientalism* is also heavily indebted conceptually), in whose writing it signifies subordinate or marginalized social groups in European (more specifically, Italian) society.⁷

⁷ Gramsci himself invented the term 'subaltern' to replace 'proletariat' in order to evade prison censors.

Spivak's principal concern is the degree to which the (post)colonial subaltern, in particular, enjoys agency, an issue which she characteristically explores in terms of whether subalterns can speak for themselves, or whether they are condemned only to be known, represented, and spoken for in a distorted fashion by others, particularly by those who exploit them but also by 'concerned' outsiders like aid-workers or seemingly 'disinterested' scholars, such as anthropologists. The conclusion reached by "Can the Subaltern Speak?" is that there is no space from which subalterns can speak and thus make their interests and experience known to others on their own terms (1988: 103).

In order to illustrate this argument, Spivak concentrates much of her attention on the mechanics of what she calls the 'itinerary of silencing' which, paradoxically, accompanies the production of the (post)colonial subaltern as a seemingly freely speaking subject/agent in the discourses of the dominant order. Indeed, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" begins with an analysis of the silencing of the contemporary subaltern by western 'radical' intellectuals who ostensibly seek to champion those who are most oppressed by neocolonialism. Spivak's critique is partly methodological, partly political, in nature. First of all, she accuses figures like Deleuze and Foucault of assuming that they are transparent *vis-a-vis* the objects of their attention. In other words such 'radicals' too easily suppose that they are outside of the general system of exploitation of the 'Third World' in which western modes of cultural analysis and representation (including 'high'

theory itself) and institutions of knowledge (such as the universities in which such theory is characteristically developed) are in fact deeply implicated. Secondly, while critics like Foucault and Deleuze announce the death of the (western, liberal, bourgeois, sovereign, male) subject of traditional humanism in the postmodern episteme, they retain what Spivak sees as a 'utopian' conception of the centered subject/agent in respect to marginalized groups, such as prisoners, women, or the Third World subaltern, who purportedly can speak for themselves despite all their various disadvantages. However, in ascribing a voice to the subaltern, according to Spivak, such intellectuals are in fact themselves representing (in the sense of speaking on behalf of or standing in for) the subaltern. This is not simply a problem in western radicalism. In "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography" (1989), Spivak discerns a similarly 'utopian' vision of the resistant historical subaltern in the counter-hegemonic work of the Subaltern historians of India with whom she and Said collaborated in the 1980s.

In methodological terms, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" demonstrates one of the ways in which Spivak diverges most markedly from Said's *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1983). The latter had provided a trenchant critique of Derrida (inspired by Foucault's account of his French colleague in *Madness and Civilization*) for allegedly failing to sufficiently articulate either critical or 'primary' cultural texts with 'worldly' (by which Said means real, political, historical) issues and engagements. By contrast, Spivak —

who translated Derrida's *Of Grammatology* in 1976— attempts to demonstrate the usefulness of deconstruction to postcolonial studies at precisely this strategic level.

Gail Hershatter states that one could generalize Spivak's observation and propose by saying that it makes more visible the workings of other markers of identity, such as race, ethnicity, religion, or nationality, and not just 'across the class spectrum,' but in their mutual interactions, illuminating, in turn, the process of class formation itself. This inclusive definition of subaltern is emphatically not meant to suggest that all oppressions (or resistances) are equal, and that everyone is a subaltern in the same way. According to Hershatter, her hope is not to render oppression uniform and thus somehow less onerous, but rather to trace the ways that oppressions can be stacked, doubled, intertwined (112).

Fernando Coronil proposes that we view the subaltern neither as a sovereign- subject that actively occupies a bounded place nor as a vassal-subject that results from the dispersed effects of multiple external determinations, but as an agent of identity construction that participates, under determinate conditions within a field of power relations, in the organization of its multiple positionality and subjectivity. In his view, subalternity is a relational and a relative concept; there are times and places where subjects appear on the social stage as subaltern actors, just as there are times or places in which they play dominant roles. Moreover, at any given time or place, an actor may be subaltern in relation to

another, yet dominant in relation to a third. Dominance and subalternity are not inherent, but relational characterizations. Subalternity defines not the being of a subject, but a subjected state of being. Yet because enduring subjection has the effect of fixing subjects into limiting positions, a relational conception of the subaltern requires a double vision that recognizes at one level a common ground among diverse forms of subjection and, at another, the intractable identity of subjects formed within uniquely constraining social worlds. While the first optic opens up a space for establishing links among subordinated subjects (including the analyst who takes a subaltern perspective), the second acknowledges the differentiating and ultimately unshareable effects of specific modalities of subjection. This relational and situational view of the subaltern may help anticolonial intellectuals avoid the we/they polarity underlying Spivak's analysis and listen to subaltern voices that speak from variously subordinated positions (44-5).

Summing up, the Subaltern Studies discipline has two main objectives: (a) to challenge the elitism of Indian historiography in its nationalist and imperialist variants that saw the world of the peasantry and working class as simply exotic to the political and economic projects of the colonial period and irrelevant to the directions of Indian history; (b) to challenge this exoticisation via a historiography of the political (not pre-political) nature of popular struggles. Those two objectives were related through a critique of the terms of nationalist and imperialist

historiographies and an attempt to use the documentation provided by the same historiography to understand better the precise modes of mobilisation and the goals of popular struggles. The principal theoretical literature that influenced attempts at linking (a) and (b) above drew on Marx and Gramsci. Marx, not merely because of the Communist influences in West Bengal, where many of the original historians of the subaltern originated, but because his writings provided an indispensable vantage point.

Chakrabarty's definition of historicism is so wide and indiscriminate that it brings history itself into question. This, no doubt, is where his dabbling in Foucault and Heidegger has led him — after all, history itself is simply a record of different ways of 'being in the world' of capitalism, and all relations of power are rendered opaque by power itself. In his *Provincializing Europe*, Chakrabarty seems to be suggesting that the older *Subaltern Studies'* emphasis on struggles for social justice, however inchoate, were a bad dream from which a mature version has woken up. To defuse the charge that he has replaced struggle with a kind of existentialist conservatism, Chakrabarty strives mightily to argue that the real roots of oppression in modern Bengal (or India, or the Third World by extension) lie in a rampant Eurocentrism and historicism, not in income inequalities, mass poverty, patriarchy, the exploitation of labour, or the manifold oppressions of the state. The struggle is displaced on to the level of discourse.

This combination of nativism and orientalism marks a definitive impasse for Subaltern Studies. Chakrabarty asserts that Historicism is what allowed European domination of the world, thereby correcting one's naïve assumption that it was the heavy artillery of imperialism. It does so by making modernity or capitalism look not simply global but global over time, by originating in one place and spreading to others. Historicism posits historical time as the measure of the cultural distance assumed to exist between the West and the non-West; in the colonies it legitimated the idea of civilization. It is in light of the above that we must assess Chakrabarty's claims about provincializing Europe, which he explains to be a way of exploring how European thought —both indispensable and inadequate to think about the thorny problems of colonial and postcolonial modernity— may be renewed from and for the margins.

In chapter three of his *Provincializing Europe*, Chakrabarty more or less tears up the idea that 'subaltern' refers to any particular social group or groups. We must assume that anyone who worlds the earth, experiences time, and so on, in ways that challenge the imperious code of historicism as subaltern. Social location itself is virtual; it is the tyranny of homogeneous, empty time that is the target of theoretical underlaboring. The practice of subaltern history is to take history, the code, to its limits in order to make its 'unworking' visible (96). Chakrabarty makes much of the fact that Indian historians are expected to know the works of their European counterparts, i.e. European history is part of the archive of Indian

history, but that the reverse is not true. The point is well taken but the issue is how effectively does he (or for that matter, Guha) use the European archive *to write history*. The Europe that he invokes is, by his own admission, hyperreal, and Europe's modernity is presented as some mythical Protestant ideal filtered through Locke and Hume. Huge chunks of counterhegemonic thought in Europe, and political economy, leave alone the critique of political economy, are simply ignored. What emerges is a caricature, one that is likely to be greeted with derision by European historians. Behind this, Chakrabarty maintains, lies an Indian tradition, unbroken before the colonial encounter, but which sustains itself now only in quotidian practice and in literature and art.

Guha starts with a tripartite division of historical development into three stages: slavery, feudalism, and capitalism, with historiographies that capture the peculiar aporias of each historical moment. In his *Dominance without Hegemony*, Guha's statement that "an uncoercive state is a liberal absurdity" (23) is perhaps a caution against getting carried away by a stark Europe-Other contrast but that insight is not developed in his comparative historiography. Eurocentric historians have tended to posit the rational rights-bearing individual, ostensibly a uniquely European phenomenon, as the heroic subject of their history.

According to Dirlik, postcolonial theory, the result of the arrival of the Third World intellectual in the First World academy as one of its more trenchant critics notes, has "rearranged the global situation, objectively quite pessimistic,

into a celebration of the end of colonialism”, and the necessary tasks for the near future as “the abolition of its ideological and cultural legacy” (343). He continues saying that an exclusive focus on Eurocentrism as a cultural, ideological or discursive factor blurs the power relationship that dynamized it and endowed it with hegemonic persuasiveness. Postcolonial theory fails to explain why Eurocentrism, in contrast to local and regional ethnocentrism, was able to define modern global history and “define itself as the universal aspiration and end of history” (346-7).

4. Third Wave Feminism.

4.1. An overview of postcolonial feminist criticism.

“We want to express to all women –especially to white middle-class women– the experiences which divide us as feminists; we want to examine incidents of intolerance, prejudice and denial of differences within the feminist movement. We intend to explore the causes and sources of, and solutions to these divisions. We want to create a definition that expands what ‘feminist’ means to us.”

-- Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga’s soliciting letter in April 1979.

Postcolonial feminist criticism includes an analysis of how women are represented in colonial and postcolonial literature, which challenges assumptions and stereotypes about women in both literature and society. Though both colonialism and patriarchy have been closely entwined historically, an end to

formal empire has not meant an end to the oppression of women in the former colonies. Postcolonial feminists point out the ways in which women continue to be stereotyped and marginalized, ironically sometimes by postcolonial authors who might claim to be challenging a culture of oppression. Third World critics could claim postmodernism, with its de-centering strategies, as an ally. Sara Suleri's disarticulation of the Third World woman and denaturalization of the category of woman is a gesture in keeping with postmodern disavowal of essentialist productions of meaning (1989: 20).

Alexander and Mohanty claim in their introduction to *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* that postmodernist theory, in its haste to dissociate itself from all forms of essentialism, has generated a series of epistemological confusions regarding the interconnections between location, identity, and the construction of knowledge. Thus, for instance, localized questions of experience, identity, culture, and history, which enable us to understand specific processes of domination and subordination, are often dismissed by postmodern theories as reiterations of cultural 'essence' or unified, stable identity (xvii). For them, postmodernist discourse attempts to move beyond essentialism by pluralizing and dissolving the stability and analytic utility of the categories of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Both critics go deep on the discussion about international feminism and the formulation of a global sisterhood took root in the academy in the 1990s. For them, this concept invokes a

difference-as-pluralism model in which women in the Third World bear the disproportionate burden of difference. Thus, international feminism embraces an approach of the articulation of many voices to specify an inclusive feminism, in which calls for 'global sisterhood' are often premised in a center/periphery model where women of color or Third World women constitute the periphery (xviii).⁸ The only plausible methodological strategy they propose is to make visible and intelligible (to the West) the organizational practices and writings of Third-World women through a discrete case-study approach, as international has come to be collapsed into the culture and values of capitalism (xix).

However, the term 'postcolonial women' turns out to be as problematic as other words related to colonialism. According to Sara Suleri, this term "inevitably leads to the simplicities that underlie unthinking celebrations of oppression, elevating the racially female voice into a metaphor for 'the good.' Such metaphoricity cannot exactly be called essentialist, but it certainly functions as an impediment to a reading that attempts to look beyond obvious questions of good and evil" (1992: 758-59). For W. D. Ashcroft, postcolonial feminists suffer not just a double colonization,⁹ but a triple, being the feminine and the postcolonial –in

⁸ We will base the meaning of the term Third World women, following Mohanty: "It is Third World women's oppositional political relation to sexist, racist, and imperialistic structures that constitutes our political commonality" (1991: 7). Chela Sandoval's definition at the 1987 annual National Women's Studies Association is also very relevant for its context in the United States (*Genders*, 1991).

⁹ See K. Holst Petersen and A. Rutherford, eds. *A Double Colonization: Colonial and Post-Colonial Women's Writing* (1986).

patriarchal, eurocentric, phallogocentric culture—in the region of otherness and non-being (23). Trinh T. Minh-ha (1986) explains that we could replace the word 'racist' for 'sexist' —or vice-versa--, which implies that the established image of Third World women in the context of (pseudo-) feminism merges with that of the native in the context of (neo-) colonialism (17).

Until the 1980s, most Asian and Black theory, criticism and creative writing were excluded by the traditional academic criticism in the West. Since the 1990s many writers are setting an agenda for feminist literary criticism, such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Chandra Mohanty, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Gayatri Spivak, etc., that includes differences. It rejects both prevailing and feminist approaches that assumed wither singularity, commonality and universality among all people or among all women. These writers refuse the presumption that women share a common identity based on a shared experience of oppression. Since white middle class women are considered the norm for what constitutes 'woman', because they are not marked by other distinctions, these critics argue that the concerns of white middle class women are not necessarily like those of all women and that differences in the positioning of women are likely to produce very different problems and responses even in relation to the same issues. The large and dynamic theories of Third World feminist criticism make a fundamental revision of literary studies by using many disciplines, by iconoclastically attacking Western ethnocentricity, and by restoring plural subjectivities to literary history. In doing

so, the personal and experimental necessarily connect with larger political issues as Third World feminism maps the socioeconomic with the literary.

According to Humm, Third World feminist criticism focuses on three major issues: on the politics of universalism; on cultural controls and misrepresentations; and on the homogeneity of the canon (252-3). What Third World feminist criticism gives us is a new definition of 'difference', claiming that postcolonial criticism should not simply re-present Third World women but set up contradictions and possibilities drawn from many disciplines. They challenge the West academy by exposing how the Other is feminized and ethnicized by the West, denied a subjectivity and an imagination. They are concerned to engage with, but also deconstruct, difference by destabilizing assumptions about what is core (the norm) and what lies at the periphery (designated as other) in a postcolonial (post-imperialist) world marked by migration. Third World feminist criticism is necessarily eclectic because Third World writing so often responds to different social, regional, and national groups whose aesthetic interests are very diverse.

The groundwork for this criticism has developed over several years in many collections by ethnic women authors and third world writings. Carole Boyce Davies and Anne Adams Graves edited *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature* in 1986, in which they created an African feminist criticism. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa edited *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* in 1981, about which they claimed in its second edition that they

bridged the gap between American women of color and third world women. In India, the first collection of critical essays on women poets is *Studies in Contemporary Indo-English Verse I* (1984) edited by A. N. Dwivedi.

The challenge of Third World feminisms to white, Western feminisms has been the link between feminist and political liberation movements. It is evident that women around the world have very different histories with respect to the particular inheritance of post-fifteenth-century Euro-American hegemony: the inheritance of slavery, enforced migration, plantation and indentured labor, colonialism, imperial conquest, and genocide. Thus, Third World feminists have argued for the rewriting of history based in the *specific* locations and histories of struggle of people of color and postcolonial peoples, and on the day-to-day strategies of survival utilized by such people (Mohanty 1991: 10).

Black feminist criticism has attacked both the misogyny of early Black studies and the misrepresentations of white feminist critics. Afro-American feminist criticism began in 1974 with the publication of a special issue of *Black World*, containing essays by June Jordan and Mary Helen Washington, and the publication of Alice Walker's *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1983) in *Ms* magazine. Here, since the term 'feminism' itself is sometimes refused by women suspicious of white imperialism, Alice Walker uses the term 'womanist'.¹⁰ This

¹⁰ She coined the term 'womanist', meaning a black feminist or feminist of color.

interest was brought by the burgeoning visibility of black women writers in the 1960s and 1970s. In *Toward a Black Feminist Criticism*, Barbara Smith reconstructs the Afro-American literary tradition to include women writers, as they had been absent till then.

bell hooks adds in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, that poor and working class women did not become the role models for bourgeois white women because they were not seen by them as exercising forms of power valued in this society. Their exercise of strength was not synonymous with economic power, as their power was in no way linked to domination or control over others (87). She points out in her preface to the book that:

Much feminist theory emerges from privileged women who live at the center, whose perspectives on reality rarely include knowledge and awareness of the lives of women and men who live in the margin. As a consequence, feminist theory lacks wholeness, lacks the broad analysis that could encompass a variety of human experiences. (...) Throughout the work my thoughts have been shaped by the conviction that feminism must become a mass based political movement if it is to have a revolutionary, transformative impact on society (x).

Smith (1983) and hooks (1984) agree in the idea that the involvement of Third World women, both within and outside the United States, has accounted for

the broadening definitions of feminism to incorporate race and class analysis, since racism and economic exploitation are primary forces in the oppression of most women in the world. Another important work is the letter from Audre Lorde to Mary Daly, in which we can see how women are challenging white feminists to be accountable for their racism. Barbara Christian claims in "The Race for Theory" that feminist theorists seldom take into account the complexity of life –that women are of many races and ethnic backgrounds with different histories and cultures and that as a rule women belong to different classes that have different concerns. She points out that "constructs like the *center* and the *periphery* reveal that tendency to want to make the world less complex by organizing it according to one principle, to fix it through an idea which is really an ideal. Many of us are particularly sensitive to monolithism since one major element of ideologies of dominance, such as sexism and racism, is to dehumanize people by stereotyping them, by denying them their variousness and complexity" (341). She complains as well about the lack of study on black women authors, stating that "when theory is not rooted in practice, it becomes prescriptive, exclusive, elitist" (340).

Feminist writing and criticism from Chicanas have been very fertile from the 1930s. Gloria Anzaldúa, among many others, is a clear exponent. Many contributors in *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981) make clear their disillusionment with white feminism and with any literary hierarchy of favored genres. *Boderlands/La Frontera: the New Mestiza* (1987) is an exploration of Chicano history

and myths. Both works emphasize the crossing of territories. In *Making Face, Making Soul* (1990), she aims to teach white critics to read in non-stereotypical ways by again aligning the personal with the theoretical. Very significantly, Anzaldúa states that “We are Third World women writers, so similar yet so different, similar in the issues we confront, different in approach and style. (...) In our common struggle and in our writing we reclaim our tongues” (1981: 163).

Gloria Anzaldúa introduces the concept of *la mestiza* in her essay “La Conciencia de la Mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness” published in *Making Face, Making Soul*:

At the confluence of two or more genetic streams, with chromosomes constantly ‘crossing over,’ this mixture of races, rather than resulting in an inferior being, provides hybrid progeny, a mutable, more malleable species with a rich gene pool. From this racial, ideological, cultural and biological cross-pollination, an ‘alien’ consciousness is presently in the making –a new *mestiza* consciousness, *una conciencia de mujer*. It is a consciousness of the Boderlands (377).

She goes on saying that the ambivalence from the clash of voices results in mental and emotional states of perplexity, and that the internal strife results in insecurity and indecisiveness. Consequently, *la mestiza* is a product of the transfer

of the cultural and spiritual values of one group to another. She, then, faces the dilemma of the mixed breed.

4.2. Theory of gender in India.

Feminist criticism in India has two strands. The first, concerned with the formulation and exploration of a female tradition in which authors explore women's invisible experiences and find new forms and styles appropriate to that exploration. Secondly, it uses the tools of literary criticism to examine gendered subalterns in texts. In literary criticism, subaltern describes a cultural identity silenced by colonialism which critics are concerned to 'liberate.' So, Indian feminist criticism is radically committed to an affirmative political criticism. Gandhi and Shah view the Women's Movement in India in the form of three waves. Briefly, the first began with the mass mobilization of women during the national movement. During a decade after independence, women engaged less in political activity. The second wave, from the late sixties onwards, saw a resurgence of political activity by women due to the fact that growing unemployment and rising prices led to mass uprisings. There was a growth of middle-class women's organizations in urban areas as well as organizations of working women fighting for their right to independent livelihood and basic resources like credit, training and access to technology. According to these

authors, this second wave saw mass participation of women in popular upsurges against the government, and power structures in general, but the third wave, which emerged in the late seventies, had a specific feminist focus. The debate in the autonomous women's groups –without party affiliations or formal hierarchical structures—was about how feminist politics could best be conducted. The critique from women in the Left parties was that these groups were urban and middle-class and therefore could not represent Indian women since the role of feminists was to raise questions within mass organizations. On the other hand, women within the autonomous groups pointed out that it was necessary for them to stay independent while allying on a broad platform because Left parties and trade unions were as patriarchal as any other. Since the eighties, most autonomous groups are funded non-governmental organizations. However, there has been a large scale co-option of feminist rhetoric by the state, which means that there has been a shift from 'struggle' to 'development' in the agenda of women's organizations. At the same time, these women who participate in these groups have become politicized and in many cases victimized by their employers –many of them have lost their jobs-- as they attend Conferences that are against the government when actually they are working for the government. In the nineties, a number of national level political parties have been created, such as the AIDWA (All India Democratic Women's Association), All India Women's Conference, National Federation of Indian Women, Mahila Dakshata Samiti.

The growing number of women in higher education, and the establishment of writing workshops enabled women researching a female tradition to emphasize both the quantity and variety of women's writing. Zakia Pathak's "A Pedagogy for PostColonial Feminists" (1992) addresses the links between the contradictions of a textual practice, the multiplicity of subject positions and political events in India. Lola Chatterjee's edition *Woman/Image/Text: Feminist Readings of Literary Texts* (1986) also uses revisionary readings for political and religious effect. Pathak argues that disparate societies might use similar motifs as ways of manipulating cultures. She draws on the theories of the Subaltern School and on postmodernism.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty, in her introduction to *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, points out that the political struggle of women in India is the fight against racist, colonialist states and for national independence. Kumari Jayawardena, in writing about feminist movements in Asia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, defines feminism as "embracing movements for equality within the current system and significant struggles that have attempted to change the system" (1986: 2). Mohanty goes on to assert that these movements arose in the context of (a) the formulation and consolidation of national identities which mobilized anti-imperialist movements during independence struggles, and (b) the remaking of pre-capitalist religious and feudal structures in attempts to 'modernize' third world societies (9).

Mohanty (1985) argues that Western criticism, both non-feminist and feminist, artificially constructs two entities: the colonizer and the colonized. Its political implications would be that it allows the colonized only a language permitted, or indeed constructed, by the colonizer. She attacks the principles at work in Western feminist criticism about the Third World, being the first one the assumption that Third World women are an identical group regardless of place or ethnicity, and the uncritical use of particular methodologies involved in the first assumption. The third principle is the politics, which both these frames of analysis create. This involves the self-representation of Western women in literature or other disciplines as modern women with some degree of control over their bodies and sexualities and Western feminists 're-presentation' of women in the Third World as domestic or uneducated victims (337).

In Mohanty's "Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism", she asserts that the directions for feminist analysis in the 1990s was made possible by the challenges posed by 'race' and postcolonial studies to the second wave of white Western feminisms (3). She goes on asserting that even when it is difficult to generalize about 'third world feminisms,' we can foreground Third World women as an analytical and political category to explore the links among the histories and struggles of Third World women against racism, sexism, colonialism, imperialism, and monopoly capital. She suggests here the concept of an 'imagined community' of third world oppositional struggles. She

insists on the figurative meaning of this concept, which suggests potential alliances and collaborations across divisive boundaries, and a significant, deep commitment to sisterhood. She comes to this conclusion --the idea of an imagined community-- because it leads us away from essentialist notions of third world feminist struggles, suggesting political rather than biological or cultural bases for alliance. She says:

Thus, it is not color or sex which constructs the ground for these struggles. Rather, it is the *way* we think about race, class, and gender --the political links we choose to make among and between struggles. (...) Imagined communities of women with divergent histories and social locations, woven together by the *political* threads of opposition to forms of domination that are not only pervasive but also systemic (4).

Vasudha Narayanan argues that both terms 'feminism' and 'rights' are alien to the Hindu discourse, as they both concepts carry a special Western flavor (26). Madhu Kishwar, the editor of the journal about Indian women and society *Manushi*, rejects the term 'feminism', arguing that the particular socio-historic context in which the movement arose in the West is specific to that culture, as the agendas in the Indian circumstances and culture is different from those in the

West.¹¹ There is another fact in the Indian scene that makes it different from that of the feminist movement in the West: many of the catalyzing agents to either improve the status of women or to include in socio-political and religious movements have been Indian men.¹² Even the term 'Hindu' is proposed as complex, as it covers many communities.¹³ So, she proposes considering questions of gender in the contexts of caste, class, and age hierarchies.

Malashri Lal's *The Law of the Threshold: Women Writers in Indian English* suggests a methodology for Women's Studies in India, filling the gap feminist theory could not satisfy due to the inability of western modes to explain the Indian situations in life and literature. She claims that the term 'feminism' –with its western connotations—is a largely suspect term in India (25). She goes on differentiating the popular notion of feminism and the prevalent idea of 'woman' in India. The first is linked with aggressive gender positioning and is thought to be man-rejecting and anti-family, while the assumed idea of a gentle and in need of protection woman still persists. For a woman to become feminist, she must take the initiative and therefore is considered unpleasant by society. On the other hand, if she is recipient of action done in her favor by male promoters of female dignity,

¹¹ Madhu Kishwar, in her essay "Why I Am Not a Feminist" (1990), discusses several examples to support her idea that the term 'feminism' is inadequate in the subcontinent. She states: "We need to understand the aspirations and nature of women's stirrings and protests in different epochs in the context of the dilemmas of their age, rather than impose our own aspirations on the past" (5).

¹² For a deeper analysis of this issue, see Nancy A. Falk's "*Shakti* Ascending: Hindu Women, Politics, and Religious Leadership during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries" (1995).

¹³ Legally, in India, the term includes Buddhism, Jainism, and the Sikh traditions.

she is then seen as part of progressive society.¹⁴ Since 'feminism' is an imported word for which there is no equivalent in the Indian languages, it places a few Indian women in a category seen to be foreign.¹⁵ However, the matter is one of nomenclature rather than belief, since the concepts of feminism (read: demand for economic freedom, employment, legal fairness, etc.) when presented as 'women's concerns' are understood easily through rich vernacular languages.¹⁶

According to Jain (1991), differences of cultural behavior and family structures have shaped the feminine perspective in the Indian subcontinent differently from the developments in Western cultures. She claims that the changes, which took place with the feminist movement, were the natural aftermath of a political upheaval –women joined the workforce, were educated, became economically independent, supported families—because it submerged in the freedom struggle. Thus, women did not question the accepted social structures, as all this led to a reinforcing of traditional attitudes (67). The feminist movement in India has a strong political background. It was not until the late sixties when the movement saw its most activist phase as it brought a more realistic change, paying attention to economic and external issues such as dowry deaths, the problems of divorce, inheritance and abortion laws, and the practice of 'sati.'

¹⁴ Lal poses the example of Rabindranath Tagore's *Ghare-Baire* (1916), translated as *The Home and the World*.

¹⁵ In Hindi, *Narithwa* appears as a non-aggressive term meaning women's concerns.

¹⁶ See Paromita Vohra's film *Unlimited Girls*, which explores Indian people's ideas about feminism.

Susie Tharu and K. Lalita have edited the two-volumes anthology *Women Writing in India: 600 B. C. to the Present*, in which their aim is to recover women's writing as they had been marginalized, misrepresented and misjudged. They place the story of Muddupalani's life and writing as an allegory of the enterprise of women's writing and the scope of feminist criticism in India.¹⁷ In their introduction, they make an overview of feminist theory and criticism. They claim that not all literature written by women is restricted to allegories of gender oppression, and that ideologies –familial, of nation, of empire, etc.—are not experienced and/or contested in the same way from different subject positions. Given the specific practices and discourses through which individualism took historical shape in India, the working classes, the nonwhite races, Dalits and Muslims had to be defined as Other in order that the Self might gain identity. This anthology has been very influential, having attracted the criticism of many academics. One of them is Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (1993), who focuses on the editors' statement that the recovery of women's writing, feminist literary criticism, and writing by women itself, are political rather than aesthetic activities.

At the beginning of the last decades of the nineteenth century, culture and politics united in a productive partnership in India, when the nationalist project disturbed the advance of empire. As Tharu and Lalita put it, the changes that took

¹⁷ Muddupalani was an eighteenth-century Telugu poet, whose work *Radhika Santwanam* was reprinted by Bangalore Nagaratnamma in 1910 in the middle of much controversy about the supposed illicit and immoral nature of the work.

place in these decades set up the scenarios that underlay national life until the late sixties, and further, the cultural conjunctures of the eighties and early nineties need to be understood in the light of those earlier configurations (44). Nineteenth century concerns included the fight against social practices such as dowry, child marriage, *pardah*, and the prohibition of widow remarriage as well as an education that would enable women to perform their roles as wives, mothers, and school teachers in an enlightened and socially useful mode. The question of women's suffrage, which was raised in 1917, and in the early twenties the provincial legislatures vote in favor of enfranchising women on the same basis as men, were important successes. Women's organizations demanded equal rights, such as the All India Women's Conference on women's education, which was organized by the Women's India Association in 1927 and which reconstituted itself onto a permanent national body. Many women were skeptical that the granting of universal adult suffrage would result in equality for women. Muthulakshmi Reddi –who resigned from the Legislative Assembly as a nationalist in 1930 when Gandhi was arrested—felt that women were being forced into a situation in which their interests were being subsumed in the designs of the Congress party. In 1942, Jawaharlal Nehru –while preparing for an attack from Japan—called women to fight as equals outside the homes, which –according to Tharu and Lalita-- reveals how invisible the subjugation of women had been rendered in the ideology of liberal nationalism (88). The writer who had earlier

refused to accept the housing offered by a colonial authority, in the fifties and sixties slips back into the family. During this period, a substantial number of poets and novelists were writing in English along with several literary movements that were taking place in vernacular languages such as the Nayi Kahani movement in Hindi, Navya in Kannada, the Digambara Kavulu in Telugu, the Adhunika Kavitha in Malayalam, and the Navkavya and Navkatha movements in Marathi. The canon of most Indian literatures was being consolidated in those years, while many women's writings were forgotten.

By the late sixties, the economy began to collapse, and away from the metropolitan cities, promises of social and economic justice remained unredeemed. Urban unemployment remained high and the prices of essential commodities rose along with food shortages. The beginnings of the most recent phase of the women's movement can be traced to the early seventies. An example are the Progressive Organization of Women in Hyderabad, which ran popular campaigns against the harassment of women students in 1973, and the anti-price-rise agitations of 1972 and 1973 organized and led by women.

The 1975-1977 period of Emergency marked the beginning of the women's movement in India along with the publication of *Towards Equality: Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India* in 1974.¹⁸ By the late seventies, issues

¹⁸ The government was headed by Indira Gandhi at the time, and it carried out a compulsory sterilization plan.

related to women were being raised in a range of forums, and women's groups had emerged all over the country. The feminist journal *Manushi* started in 1979, providing an important voice for the emerging movement. The rape laws were changed, and issues related to family violence, the law, the household, health care, education, curricula, the media, and women's working conditions were set up. Gender was intrinsic to these rearticulations of social life in which women writers played an important part. According to Tharu and Niranjana, the main task for feminist theory during the 1970s and 1980s was to establish 'gender' as a category that had been rendered invisible in universalisms of various kinds. They demanded changes that would make the law more sensitive to the cultural and economic contexts of women's lives (through eve-teasing campaigns, dowry deaths investigations, demonstration of inequalities in women's access to health care systems, etc.) In the late 1980s and the early 1990s, a new set of political questions appeared, such as engagement with issues of caste and religious affiliation/community and with new problems emerging from the liberalization of the economy. They relate gender analysis with class analysis, stating that the humanist subject and the social worlds legitimized bourgeois and patriarchal interests (235).

4.3. Women's formal education and English language in India.

English education in India was introduced in the nineteenth century, serving as an ideological force. In terms of social reform and control. Thomas Babington Macaulay's education minute of 1835 is regarded as a crucial document in this history, basing his arguments on the superiority of English in an absolute sense.¹⁹ The establishment of these colleges led to the creation of an English-educated, and predominantly Hindu, elite, who would be critical of both their own religious orthodoxies, such as the caste system and child brides, and of British rule. A British-style education linked Indian writers to literary traditions of the West, as well as their native culture. Thus, writing in English made contact with an audience in Europe as well as in India.

English literature was taking shape in Britain in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as well, currently with the project of imperialism. Notions of the secular text and its interpretation were being simultaneously developed in

¹⁹ Macaulay said: "The dialects commonly spoken among the natives of this part of India contain neither literary nor scientific information, and are, moreover, so rude that, until they are enriched with some quarter, it will not be possible to translate any valuable work into them ... I am quite ready to take Oriental learning at the valuation of the Orientalists themselves. I have never found one among them who would deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia ... We must at present do our best to form a class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect" (729).

Europe and its colonies in this period, being in both locations consolidated in the common project of Orientalism.²⁰

According to Gauri Viswanathan, British India's history of cultural confrontation "conferred a sense of urgency to voluntary cultural assimilation as the most effective form of political action" (2). There was an imperial mission of educating and civilizing colonial subjects in the literature and thought of England, a mission that in the long run served to strengthen Western cultural hegemony. Viswanathan argues that the secular practice of education in India was part of a series of experiments that took place there due to the heterogeneity of the colonial population and its quite different relation to institutional structures as understood and practiced in England. These experiments could not be tried out in England because of well-defined church-state relations and firmly entrenched orthodoxies prevailing there (7).

Thus, taking into consideration the background of the disciplinary formation of English as a branch of knowledge, and the early history of colonialist interventions in Indian education, language and literature, Sunder (1992: 7) sees possible to treat English in India as another post-colonial 'mimic' activity (in line with Homi Bhabha's theorization of colonial mimicry).²¹ In India, the hegemony of English language and literature is seen by some critics as a form of continuing

²⁰ See Edward Said's *The World, the Text and the Critic* (46-47) for Ernest Renan's –a western philologist– argument of the inferiority of Semitic languages.

²¹ See also her article "After 'Orientalism': Colonialism and English Literary Studies in India" (1986).

cultural imperialism. Sunder argues that the widespread use, prestige, and expansion of English in India in recent decades are attributable to the post-war hegemony of the United States rather than to the British Empire (1992: 14).²²

Shashi Deshpande reflects on how the English language can alienate a text from a culture. She bases her argument on the idea that the reason why English is hostile in India is not because it is the language of the ex-colonizers, but because it has become the language of the privileged, elite people in India. She admits that when she writes in English she is aware that her work will reach out to only a few English-speaking readers, most of whom will be thinking the way she does.

Deshpande poses two problems, taking on the example of women's issues. When an author writes in English with the purpose to change social traditions, the language keeps out the women whose involvement is wanted, as English has no place in those women's daily lives. Another problem is the fact that writing in English also means using a language which most, or at least many, of one's characters do not speak. In spite of all this, she concludes affirming that for many of the Indian authors English is no more than the medium through which they express themselves, and through which they can reach an international audience. She also claims that there is no single entity called Indian literature, since there are many different literatures, each with its own language, identity, History and with

²² She argues that the chief importance of English in India is similar to any other non-English-speaking nation: its global currency as an important communication link.

its own regional parameters, (67) and that English is but a part of the amalgamation of Indian literature.

Anita Desai comments that novels have been written, for the most part, in English because it was introduced to India in the late nineteenth century. On the other hand, many Indian women have written poetry and short stories in Hindi, Punjabi, Bengali, Urdu, Tamil, Malayalam and Kannada. She argues that the reason why women wrote fewer novels is the fact that women had less access to education than men. However, they were the chief upholders of oral tradition and story telling. So, even when their words were not printed, myths, legends, lullabies and fables were rich and abundant. Her argument is based on the idea that once literacy began to filter through society, those stories were transformed into poetry and drama. It was not until the prose was discovered, in the late nineteenth century by Bengali writers who were exposed to European culture first, that the novel took form in India.

The question of female education in India was supported by both progressive and orthodox reformers. In the nineteenth century, Indian reformers thought that social evils could be eliminated through education. However, the concept of education was limited to producing good homemakers and perpetuating orthodox ideology, as women were believed to hold traditional values on society. Girls' schools were started by Christian missionaries and British residents, especially in Bengal where the British had made their first inroads in the

mid-nineteenth century.

Toru Dutt (1856-77) published her first book of verse translations from French poetry at the age of twenty under the title *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*. In the 1880s, Indian women started to graduate from universities, although the vast majority of girls did not attend school, as education for women was mainly confined to the larger cities and towns, which served the needs of the bourgeoisie. Kumari Jayawardena points out that the policies of promoting women's education and the type of education provided were not intended to promote women's emancipation or independence, but to reinforce patriarchy and the class system (89). Jayawardena gives examples of all the pioneer women into different professions, explaining how they battled against conservatism as well as women militants such as Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922), Swarnakumari Devi (1885-1932), Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949), Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, Bhikaiji Cama (1861-1936), Ushatai Dange, Parvatibai Bhore, and so many other women who participated in the political struggles of India.

However, Jayawardena argues that the movement gave the illusion of change while women were kept within the structural confines of family and society. Revolutionary alternatives or radical social changes affecting women's life did not become an essential part of the demands of the nationalist movement at any stage of the struggle for independence, and a revolutionary feminist consciousness did not arise within the movement for national liberation. Thus,

while Indian women were to participate in all stages of the movement for national independence, they did so in a way that was acceptable to, and was dictated by, the male leaders and which conformed to the prevalent ideology on the position of women. Taking all this into account, we cannot deny women's prominent roles in anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist and democratic movements of protest for social and political change (107-8).

4.4. Indian women authors in English.

Indian literature written in English is smaller in volume compared to the output in several regional languages as well as it spans a smaller range of time as it commenced with the spread of the English language and education in India. In the last two decades, there has been an astonishing flowering of Indian women writing in English, which needs a systematic and balanced account. The literature of this period has been published both abroad and in India.

Kamala Das originated a vigorous and poignant feminine confessional poetry, with a common note in the poetry of several women poets like Gauri

Deshpande, Suniti Namjoshi, Chitra Narendran. In this confessional poetry, a common theme is exploring the man-woman relationship. The saga of a single woman-spinster or separated has also been poured out in women's poetry.²³

Tara Patel reveals in *Single Woman* that in the harsh reality of the world, the quest for companionship without strings is a difficult one. Anna Sujata Matha in *Attic of Night* sings of the trauma of separation and the travails of a separated woman. She argues for a sense of community, justice and companionship. Poetry seems to be her act of transcendence of agony for survival – although the image projected is strong and determined.

If on the one hand, we hear the voice of the New Woman's definition of her self and a quest for her own identity, on the other, we also hear the conventional male voice and see the conventional image, often even a negative portrayal of woman in men's poetry. An example is the six volumes of Nissim Ezekiel's poems, which identify women as mother, wife, whore, sex object or seductress.

Naik and Narayan make an interesting overview of women novelists in chapter four of their book, reviewing novels according to the following classification: the domestic novel, magic realism, campus novel, regional fiction, diasporic writing, and children's fiction. Alongside poetry and novels, many collections of short stories by Indian women have appeared such as *Truth Tales*

²³ Toru Dutt was the first woman poet in English, whose work is full of archetypes of Indian womanhood like Sita and Savitri (the suffering, sacrificing role). She reinforced the conventional myth in a patriotic manner.

(1986), *Truth Tales 2: The Slate of Life* (1990), *Other Words: New Writing by Indian Women* (1992) to name just a few.²⁴

As for women novelists, Anita Desai in her psychological novels creates the image of a suffering woman preoccupied with her inner world, her sulking frustration and the storm within – the existential predicament of a woman in a male dominated society. Through such characters, she makes a plea for a better way of living for women. She switches from a woman-centered to a male-centered narrative. Her novels have Indians as central characters. But in her later novels, it changes, revealing all the characteristics of diasporic fiction since she moved to the USA, a concern with the fate of immigrants, and a growing distance from the Indian reality, which is viewed from the outside.

The image of the New Woman and her quest and struggle for an identity of her own is emerging in the Indian English novel. Such a struggle needs some support structures outside the family to enable women to survive. Raji Narasimhan uses this image as the nucleus as well as Veena Paintal. However, Rama Mehta's *Inside the Haveli* (1977) becomes a symbol of tradition through the debate of female education.

A number of women novelists have made their debut in the nineties. The first novels are quite effective in revealing the true state of Indian society when it

²⁴ For a deep insight to this collection and a suggested approach to Indian women's writing in English, see Mongia's "Indian Women Writers: Confession and Self-Making" (2001).

comes to the treatment of women. All these writers were born after Indian independence, and English does not have any colonial associations for them. Their work is marked by an impressive feel for the language, and a completely authentic presentation of contemporary India, with all its regional variations. They generally write about the urban middle class, the stratum of society they know best (Naik and Narayan, 92).

Many authors have used magic realism as a technique in their novels. Suniti Namjoshi stands out for its use of fantasy and surrealism. Anuradha Marwah-Roy's *Idol Love* (1999) presents a chilling picture of an Indian dystopia in the twenty-first century, and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* (1997) is a clear example of magic realism. Some other novels deal with various aspects of college life such as Meena Alexander's *Nampally House* (1991), and Rani Dharker's *The Virgin Syndrome* (1997). As for regional fiction, in the last decade, three women writers have put the southern state of Kerala on the fictional map: Arundhati Roy, Anita Nair, Kamala Das, and Susan Viswanathan. The life of various regions of India or communities is also well represented in fiction by women writers.

There are many women writers, both novelists and poets, based in the USA and Britain. Some are late immigrants, while others --like Jhumpa Lahiri-- belong to the second generation of Indians abroad. Most expatriate writers have a weak grasp of actual conditions in contemporary India, and tend to recreate it through

the lens of nostalgia, writing about 'imaginary homelands.' Alongside this, there is a considerable amount of work, which is aimed at the Western audience and engages primarily with Western theory written both by the expatriate and the stay at home writer. This is of varying degree, equality and authenticity, it is conflictual, experimental and also at times selectively exotic. Expatriate representation has often been questioned on several counts and a lot can be said both in favor and against. Distancing lends objectivity, but it can also lead to the ossification of cultural constructs; and even if memory is sharp and clear, the expatriate is not assailed by the raw winds of Indian reality. Another factor we cannot forget is the market forces which are becoming dominant.²⁵

The image of women in South Asian novels has undergone a change in the last four decades. Women writers have moved away from traditional enduring, self-sacrificing women toward conflicted female characters searching for identity. In contrast with the previous novels, female characters in the 1980s and 1990s assert themselves and defy marriage and family structures. The ideal of the traditional, suffering woman persisted in culture permeated by religious images of virtuous goddesses devoted to their husbands. The Hindu goddess Sita and

²⁵ To name just a few relevant works of diasporic women writing: Bharati Mukherjee's *Yasmine* (1989), Indira Ganesan's *The Journey* (1990), and *Inheritance* (1997), Sunetra Gupta's *Memories of Rain* (1992), Meera Syal's *Anita and Me* (1996) and *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (1999), Meena Alexander's *Manhattan Music* (1997), Divakaruni's *Sister of My Heart* (1999) and *The Vine of Desire* (2002), Kirin Narayan's *Love, Stars and All That* (1994), Anita Rau Badami's *Tamarind Mem* (1996), Amena Meer's *Bombay Talkie* (1995), Kiran Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1998), or Shreelata Rao-Seshadri's *Matrimonials Are Deadly* (1995).

Savitri served as powerful cultural ideals for women. In contrast, recent writers' stories realize both the diversity of women and the diversity within each woman, rather than limiting the lives of women to one ideal.

In mythical terms, the dominant feminine prototype is the chaste, patient, self-denying, long suffering wife --Sita-- supported by other figures like Savitri, Draupadi or Gandhari.²⁶ *The Laws of Manu* does not give a woman an existence apart from that of her husband or his family. Silence/speech is a useful dichotomy to interpret women's response to patriarchal hegemony. Silence is a symbol of oppression, a characteristic of the subaltern condition. On the contrary, speech signifies self-expression and liberation. Then, the novels we are about to analyze furnish examples of a whole range of attitudes towards the imposition of tradition, call it history or mythology.

²⁶ This dominant stereotype is not archetypically an Indian ideal alone. To quote Virginia Wolf: "She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg, if there was a draft she sat in it -- in short, she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others" (1957: 79).

5. Des-mystifying Indian writing in English: from the local to what it means to be human.

The Thousand Faces of Night as well as *The God of Small Things* critique the Western structures of knowledge and power –and its thoughts on philosophy and history-- as well as they question patriarchal power structure. The theme of the tension provoked between the newness of what is being made and an older way which is being covered over or masked appears in both novels. The questioning and recalculation of the male-dominated society by Indian women authors has assumed great significance. However, in spite of writing in English language –it is claimed that it is the language that subjugated Indians— they resort to subversive techniques to prevent distortions. An example of this is how many Indian women authors appropriate literary genres such as the *bildungsroman*, or novel of formation, and revise the structures of the form by inserting their oral literary tradition.

Generally speaking, the female *bildungsroman* tends to favor plot ending that define women according to their romantic lives, thereby supporting a domestic ideology that advocates marriage as the only proper ideal for women. So by the end of the novel, the heroines marry, which signifies her integration into the existing social order. Hariharan and Roy resist this ideology in two ways: first, by transforming romance plot conventions within specific stories, and by

subordinating romance plot elements to quest plots of non-romantic development. They both clearly take up the project of writing beyond the *bildungsroman* marriage plot, structuring their overall narratives to emphasize the female characters' aim to develop as an individual rather than as a wife. Devi as well as Rahel remain childless, coming to terms with their mothers' story to understand their present lives. So, these authors' revisionist program comes to the conclusion that these authors cannot achieve a break with their cultural inheritance, but subvert the sexism implicit in it, among other maladies, by resorting to an adroit manipulation of their narrational strategy.

Another technique used by these authors includes a constant circling from present to past, being of much importance the idea of 'memory' as a means of reconstituting identity. Thus, testimony is of great importance as these authors usually portray characters who have been denied access to history. The critical tone, then, is often confessional and frequently set in a first-person narrative. When the past is discussed, it is seen through a clear political lens. The use of multiple forms of narratives is also an important technique. These authors mix myths, historical stories, poetry, etc. with the narrative. This hybridity is an allegory of the authors' constant need to question the established norms, as well as the use of untranslated vernacular vocabulary. In short, the features of these novels are: the focus on place and displacement, the creation of a positive

feminine model, the rewriting of myth, the re-reading of history, the use of untranslated words, the refusal to create a traditional high sentimental plot.

Many writers such as Salman Rushdie, Vikram Chandra, Amitav Ghosh, and Shashi Tharoor have been part of this kind of historical reviewing, perhaps aimed at enhancing an Indian cultural identity, and projecting Indian cultural and historical heritage to enable an assertion of the Indian self. Contemporary critiquing of the past is interrogating not only the several myths floated, but also the authenticity of stories produced through the male/ruler patronage.

Hariharan and Roy focus on the idea of the simultaneity of oppressions as fundamental to the experience of social and political marginality and the grounding of feminist politics in the histories of racism and imperialism. The hegemonic state –in their case, the family as a microcosm—plays a crucial role in circumscribing their daily lives and survival struggles. Thus, memory acquires great significance and writing becomes the creation of oppositional agency. Finally, both authors show the differences, conflicts, and contradictions internal to the characters and the system that oppresses them, highlighting the complex interrelationships between family members as well as different versions of the same story.

Mohanty suggests that some recent (western) feminist texts see the third world woman as a singular monolithic subject. She talks about the difference between 'woman' (a cultural and ideological composite Other constructed

through diverse representational discourse) and 'women' (real, material subjects of their collective history.) This connection between women as historical subjects and the representation of woman produced by hegemonic discourses is an arbitrary relation set up in particular cultural and historical contexts. Some feminist writing colonizes the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the so called Third World, thereby producing/representing a composite, singular 'Third-World Woman'—an image which appears arbitrarily constructed but nevertheless carries with it the authorizing signature of western humanist discourse (1985: 197). She goes on asserting that a homogeneous notion of the oppression of women as a group is assumed, which in turn, produces the image of an 'average Third-World Woman.' This average Third-World Woman leads an essentially truncated life based in her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and being 'third world' (read: ignorant, poor uneducated, tradition-bound, religious, domesticated, family-oriented victimized, etc.). This is in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of western women as educated, modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the 'freedom' to make their own decisions (199-200).

The control that patriarchy and caste/class division wield on human being should be theorized and interpreted within a specific framework. The female characters that appear in these novels are not characterized and defined simply in terms of their victim status. The ambivalence resulted from the clash of voices in

these characters' mental and emotional states and their perplexities and dilemmas is a conscious rupture with all oppressive traditions of all cultures and religions. They reinterpret history and, using new symbols, they shape new myths, and adopt new perspectives. Feminist scholarship has always recognized the centrality of rewriting and re-remembering history. This is a process which is significant not merely as a corrective to the gaps, erasures, and misunderstandings of hegemonic masculinist history, but because the very practice of remembering and rewriting leads to the formation of politicized consciousness and self-identity. Writing often becomes the context through which new political identities are forged. It becomes a space for struggle and contestation about reality itself (Mohanty 1997: 34).

This section focuses on life story-oriented written narratives, which offer a clear, albeit important, context in which to examine the development of political consciousness. According to Mohanty, writing is itself an activity that is marked by class and ethnic position. She states that in spite of the fact that the growing demand among publishers for culturally diverse life (hi)stories indicates a recognition of plural realities and experiences as well as a diversification of inherited eurocentric canons, often this demand takes the form of the search for more 'exotic' and 'different' stories in which individual women write as truth-tellers, and authenticate 'their own oppression,' in the tradition of Euro-American women's autobiography (1991: 34).

As we have explained above, History has been traditionally written by the elite; usually male and white. Counter-hegemonic histories are being written not only by female authors, but also by those who remain in post-colonized countries, such as India. The canon is then subverted and new versions of History can be found when re-visioning power structures such as the Family, Religion and the State. Thus, the personal –the telling of stories—transcends to the political to construct a new version of History which, being neither fixed nor unambiguous, no longer portrays a stereotyped image of the exotic India, thereby demystifying colonial discourses about it.

It is well known that women cannot be assumed only on the basis of gender, since they must be forged in concrete historical and political praxis. The contrary would be to assume that men and women are already constituted as sexual-political subjects prior to their entry into the arena of social relations. However, in a patriarchal society, only if we subscribe to this assumption is it possible to undertake analyses which look at the effects of kinship structures, (neo-) colonialism, and the organization of religion and/or mythology. This analytical strategy will allow us to discuss how women are produced through these very relations as well as how they are being implicated in forming these relations.

These novels –as many other works of the so-called Third World-- focus on the significance of memory and testimony. Questions of self-identity are crucial in

the *bildungsroman*, as the two female protagonists (Rahel in *GST* and Devi in *TFN*)²⁷ experiment a quest towards their identity, searching for answers to their families' past. These main characters return from the US to their native land in India, feeling the ambivalence that results from the clash of voices, provoking mental and emotional states of perplexity. Only when they recover their mother's history and their own, their internal strife comes from insecurity and indecisiveness to understanding and liberation. The return to the mother that the protagonists experiment goes parallel to the return to their native country to find their roots, a culture that is now hybridized. Both female characters use memory as a tool to liberate themselves and find identity. India becomes a metaphor for a renovated land, a space in-between. These are stories told from the perspective of a returned woman (from the US) to her native land (India) where she confronts either memories of a past or a set of forgotten traditional values. Both of the female protagonists focus their testimony on the figure of their mother, through which they are able to denounce oppressions in the family grounds.

Testimonies and life stories –being either made by real women or by female protagonists in fiction—are significant modes of remembering and recording experience of struggles. In order to record the history from below, we will analyze as well the functioning of power structures –the family, religion and the state—as they affect the characters of the novels chosen for this discussion. The issues

²⁷ Hereinafter *The God of Small Things* is abbreviated to *GST*, and *The Thousand Faces of Night* to *TFN*.

central to our analysis will be the significance and the difficulty of rewriting counter-hegemonic histories. Through a deep insight on how the family is a microcosm of the state –how it oppresses its people when it holds a patriarchal/absolutist ideology—we will analyze how the telling of mythology and History supports the system to keep the *status quo*. Both authors, thus, subvert them to propose an alternative version. Then, in both novels, the abjects (from the margin, the Others) become the focus. The narratives do not have an orientalist/western discourse of liberalism and independence, maintaining the exotic flavor as a political instrument of neo-imperialism. On the contrary, local manifestations of power become universal in these women's effort to give voice to the traditionally represented communities (women, Dalits, and children, mainly). Binomies disappear, then, to put an end to hierarchic oppositions, as they justify subordination. These are novels, in general, about the desire to de-colonize the past through the re-telling of private stories; a history of oppositions (dominant/subaltern) that are being transgressed.

In the chapters that follow we will attempt to briefly explore the contours of civil and political society as they have historically emerged in India after independence from a feminist perspective. We realize that such a discussion calls for a much more expert scholarship on political theory and Indian history than we can presume to command as students of literature. Therefore, we will limit our focus to a close textual analysis of two recent narrative fictions, which taken

together, it appears to us, sketch out with skill and complexity the power structures' impact on the subaltern and the strategies offered to subvert the norms. In attempting to delineate some aspects of the political functioning of the family or the 'domestic' realm in contemporary India, in what follows we will study two novels in which the family –and the world of the subaltern—confronts the gendered limits of the so-called social/narrative contract.

We may proceed to diagnose its textual workings in literary texts rich in the metaphorical tropes not only of certain sharply binarized gendered worlds, but also of such blurry markers of the postcolonial experience as identity fragmentation. The two works that we discuss in the following chapters sketch out the working of the families. It should be made clear at this point that the 'family' and the 'household' are two distinct kinds of entities within feminist political theory. The household is a comparatively simple unit, connoting co-residence and commensality. It may contain individuals who are not related to each other by ties of blood. The significance of the household as a crucial unit within which production, distribution and consumption are organized has acquired recognition in recent years. The family, on the other hand, is a complex and diffused unit comprising in most cases of a basic reproductive unit of husband, wife and children, supplemented in more prosperous units by full-time servants and other retainers. The relatives may also be co-residents, but convention views the family as consisting of a 'breadwinner' (husband), a 'homemaker' (wife), and their

'dependent' children. The fact that the majority of actually existing families does not conform to this conventionalized view reveals that the family is an ideological construction.

5.1. The authors and their novels.

5.1.1. Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night*.

Githa Hariharan was born in 1954 in Coimbatore (India) and grew up in Bombay and Manila. She continued her studies in the U.S., where she worked for public television. Returning to India in 1979, she has worked in Bombay, Madras and New Delhi, initially as an editor in a publishing house, and later as a freelancer. Her first novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992), won the Commonwealth Writers Prize for best first novel. Since then, she has published a story collection, *The Art of Dying* (1993), and two other novels, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* (1994), and *When Dreams Travel* (1999). She has also edited a volume of stories translated from South Indian languages, *A Southern Harvest* (1993); and co-edited with Shama Futehally *Sorry, Best Friend!* (1997), a collection of secular stories for children. Her essays and fiction have been included in several collections and anthologies, being one of them Salman Rushdie's *Mirrorwork: 50 Years of Indian Writing 1947-1997*. Her new novel, *In Times of Siege*, in which she

talks about fundamentalism in an open university in New Delhi, was published in February 2003.

In February, 1999 the Supreme Court reinterpreted a provision of the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1956 that said the father is always the natural guardian of a child, unless he is dead or declared unfit by a court of law thanks to the petition that Hariharan and her husband had filed. Now, the mother can also be the legal guardian of the child, as long as both husband and wife agree to that arrangement.

In *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992), Githa Hariharan combines myths of the Hindu society with a modern context in the three parts in which the novel is divided.²⁸ The first part consists of three chapters, the first one being narrated in third person and in which we know about the life of the protagonist -- Devi -- in a North-American university campus and her experiences of displaced. Hariharan uses this strategy of distance to suggest that this will be an experience that will fall into oblivion because the life forthcoming is antagonistic to the one lived in exile. In the second chapter Devi talks in first narrative person about how once back home in India, after two years of graduate studies in the States, agrees to an

²⁸ After Devi's return from the US, the novel is set in South India, more concretely Madras (in the state of Tamil Nadu) and, during her marriage, in Bangalore (in the state of Karnataka). Tamil Nadu lies on the southeast coast of the Indian Peninsula, with an area of 130.058 square kilometers. The state is bordered by Andhra Pradesh to the north and Karnataka and Kerala to the West. Karnataka has an area of 191.791 square kilometers, and is bordered by Andhra Pradesh to the east, Tamil Nadu to the southeast, Kerala to the southwest and Maharashtra and Goa to the north. Tamil Nadu limits with the bay of Bengal and Karnataka with the Arabian sea. Tamil is the language spoken in Tamil Nadu, and Kannada is spoken in Karnataka.

arranged marriage due to the insistence of her mother. In the last chapter of this first part, we find a flashback to Devi's childhood at her grandmother's home.

The second part is divided into two chapters. In the first one, Devi narrates her experiences as a wife. When she sees herself frustrated due to her lack of freedom, Devi looks for refuge in her father-in-law, who projects messages of the virtuous wife through his philosophy books. Later, when he emigrates to New York, she takes refuge in the stories of her housekeeper, Mayamma. This situation makes her return the glance towards the women who surround her, and it is then when she starts developing rebellious thoughts against the masculine oppression. In the first chapter of the third and last part, the third person narrator tells the reader how Devi's mother --Sita-- completely left her musical career due to the opposition of her in-laws, deciding to dedicate herself to be an excellent wife and daughter-in-law. In the second chapter, the reader is told of Mayamma's cruel story. With all these knowledge and experiences, and after knowing her mother-in-law's story, who leaves the home of her husband to follow a religious life by herself, Devi begins to re-interpret the myths she has grown with and build one of her own to follow. These ideas of rebellion cause her supposed sterility, which symbolizes her inner desire to transgress the imposed role. Gopal --a neighbor who is a musician-- turns out to be the first passage in her transgression, as she leaves her husband for him. However, in the third chapter, it is narrated how Devi soon begins to see her role in Gopal's life as little more than her tiny reflection in

the mirror-studded buttons of his *kurta*. She realizes that she has spent her whole adult life putting on masks for the three men in her life –of an exotica for Dan, of a host for Mahesh, and as a muse for Gopal. She decides not to be a shadowy follower of these men anymore and she comes back to her mother with a new understanding. Devi decides to leave him as well and search for her own identity, free from any masculine reminiscences. Devi becomes aware that she has been escaping during all its life, and feels the necessity to define her identity through her union with her mother, who welcomes her with a promise of freedom that entails the recognition of her individuality.

5.1.2. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*.

Arundhati Roy was born in Bengal, 1961, and grew up in Kerala with her mother Mary Roy, a Syrian Christian who married a Bengali Hindu and later divorced him. She runs nowadays a very successful school in Kottayam district, where Arundhati used to attend as a child. Arundhati grew up in Ayemenem without a *tharawaad* lineage, which prevented her from the conditioning that a conventional middle class Indian girl would have.²⁹ At age sixteen, she left home and went to study Architecture at the Delhi School of Architecture.

²⁹ *Tharawaad* lineage implies a joint family structure, involving uncles and aunts. Father, in many traditional Kerala families, unlike in North India, was a peripheral figure with limited power and

Roy wrote and starred in "In Which Annie Gives Those Ones", and wrote the script for Pradip Kishen's "Electric Moon." She also wrote an essay "The Great Indian Rape Trick" about Phoolan Devi and the way the film Bandit Queen exploited her. When she published it the controversy that followed resulted in a lawsuit against her.

She claims herself to be an instinctive person, who took five years to write *The God of Small Things* (1997). It won the Booker Prize, coinciding with India's 50th anniversary of independence from Britain. Roy became the first non-expatriate Indian author and the first Indian woman to win the Booker Prize. The book attracted a lawsuit (Sabu Thomas sued her on the grounds of obscenity as she included sexual relations between a Christian woman and a Dalit) and angry criticism from Kerala's leftists (as Kerala communist E.M. Namboodiripad is caricatured in the book). Roy faced charges of obscenity and demands that the final chapter of the book be removed because of its sexual content. Roy attributed these hostile reactions to the book's explicit treatment of the role of Dalits in India.

Roy now lives in New Delhi, and in keeping with her longtime interest in social issues, she has immersed herself in causes such as the anti-nuclear movement and joined the Narmada Bachao Andolan (a grassroots organization

influence. The real power is held in the Tharawaads by 'carnavar' (the head of the family, mostly the oldest male member of the family, often not the father). I indebt this information to Bijoy Sagar.

which resists dam buildings).³⁰ It is her third time she has been accused in the Supreme Court, this time (January 2, 2001), for contempt of inciting violence and attacking a court official while protesting in a demonstration at the gate of the Supreme Court against the construction of the Sardar Sarovar, the most controversial dam project in the Narmada valley.³¹ She is the winner of 2002 Lannan Foundation Prize for Cultural Freedom.

Her two major essays, "The End of Imagination" about India's Nuclear Bomb and "The Greater Common Good" about the Narmada Dam have been published in her book *The Cost of Living* (1999). She has written a large number of essays about current politics, and participated in events where she gives passionate speeches.³² Her collection of essays, *Power Politics* (2001), deals with the politics of writing and the human and environmental costs of development, such as the nuclear war, the privatization of India's power supply by Enron, and the construction of monumental dams. The expanded edition of *Power Politics* includes her essays "The Algebra of Infinite Justice" (about violence against innocent people in Afghanistan) and "War is Peace" (another challenge to the war after the US attacked Afghanistan). Her new collection of essay has been recently released *War Talk* (2003) in which she talks about issues of democracy and dissent,

³⁰ For detailed information about Roy's view on globalization, and the consequences of building the dams, see her interview by David Barsamian.

³¹ Arundhati Roy wrote her own affidavit in reply, which was published in a mass-circulation magazine and can be read in outlookindia.com under the title of "Defence of Dissent."

³² She already senses her place on the intellectual map of anti-globalisation. Globalisation is for her a mutant variety of colonialism, remote-controlled and digitally-operated.

racism and empire, and war and peace (violence against Muslims in Gujarat and US war on Iraq).

The God of Small Things is divided into twenty-one chapters, in which Arundhati Roy examines the issues of hypocrisy, single parent families, mixed-caste relationships and unrequited love. It tells the story of twins Estappen and Rahel, and their mother, Ammu, a Syrian Christian who returns to her parental home after divorcing a Hindu man. She returns to Mammachi, her blind mother, founder of the family pickle factory, where she stays with her twin children and Baby Kochamma –Mammachi's sister-in-law, an ex-nun and their incumbent enemy.³³

The story centers on events surrounding the visit and drowning death of the twins' half-English cousin, a nine year old girl named Sophie Mol, whose father is Uncle Chacko –a self-proclaimed Marxist, son of Mammachi—who divorced the girl's mother Margaret Kochamma, and English woman who later

³³ The novel is set against a background of political turbulence in the region of Kottayam –a village called Ayemenen in the backwater area of Kerala. Kerala lies on the southwest coast of the Indian Peninsula, with an area of 15,000 square miles. The state is bordered by Karnataka to the north and Tamil Nadu to the East, and is separated from neighboring states by the Western Ghat mountain range. It is the first state each season to receive the monsoon rains, which contribute to the agriculture. It is among the world leaders in the production and export of such spices as pepper, cardamom, cinnamon, and turmeric. Notice that Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* is partly located in Kerala, in which the Da Gama/Zogoiby family's fortune comes from trade in spice. Malayalam is the main language, which originated from Sanskrit and Tamil. It includes words taken from English, Syriac, Latin, and Portuguese. Kerala boasts a literacy rate of between 90 and 100 percent.

married Joe.³⁴ This tragedy intermingles with Ammu's love affair with Velutha, the family's Dalit carpenter.

Told from the children's perspective, the novel moves backward from present-day India to the fateful drowning that took place twenty-three years earlier, in 1969. The consequences of these intertwined events--the drowning and the forbidden love affair--are dire. Estha at some point thereafter stops speaking; Ammu is banished from her home, dying miserably and alone at age thirty-one; Rahel is expelled from school, drifts, marries an American, whom she later leaves. The narrative begins and ends as Rahel returns to her family home in India and to Estha, where there is some hope that their love for each other and memories recollected from a distance will heal their deep wounds.

5.2. The development of female subjectivity.

5.2.1. The female *bildungsroman*.

It can be argued that in privileging the personal and individual over the public, both novels fall within the individualistic pattern of the western novelistic genre: the focus on individual experience, point of view, journey towards

³⁴ Notice that 'Mol' is an endearment in Malayalam, meaning 'daughter'; and 'Mon' means 'son.'

wholeness and identity. However, the way both authors deal with the *bildungsroman* is quite unconventional.

The majority of studies of the *Bildungsroman* do not only focus almost entirely on novels written by males about male protagonists, but also define the genre in terms that apply exclusively to male experience. An example of this is Jerome Buckley's study of the English *Bildungsroman --Season of Youth--* in which he states that the *Bildungsroman* explores the young man's progressive alienation from his family, his schooling, his departure from home, his sexual initiation, and his ultimate assessment of life's possibilities. Gilbert and Gubar suggest in *The Madwoman in the Attic* that some women writers "may have attempted to transcend their anxiety of authorship by *revising* male genres, using them to record their own dreams and their own stories *in disguise*" (51).³⁵

Elaine H. Baruch has observed that while the ultimate aim of a male protagonist in such novels is life within the larger community, the aim of the female protagonist of the *Bildungsroman* is marriage with a partner of her choice (335). According to Annis Pratt and Barbara White, one important difference between the *Bildungsroman* as written by men and the one written by women is that the female protagonist's initiation is "less a self-determined progression toward maturity than a regression from full participation in adult life" (36).

³⁵ Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists From Bronte to Lessing*, as well as Ellen Moers's *Literary Women* also suggest the existence of distinctively female literary traditions which both conform to and in significant ways depart from prevailing male literary modes.

Before the nineteen-sixties and seventies, most women authors created female protagonists who accepted their role as wife and mother or ended up either mad or committed suicide. After that, the feminist movement gave rise to a number of *Bildungsromane* more approximate to the male model in their delineation of the education, reassessment, rebellion, and departure of their respective female protagonists.³⁶

Generally speaking, the female *bildungsroman* tends to favor a plot ending that define women according to their romantic lives, thereby supporting a domestic ideology that advocates marriage as the only proper ideal for women. So by the end of the novel, the heroine marries, which signifies her integration into the existing social order.

In *GST* and *TFN*, not only do the authors not approximate the male model of the *Bildungsroman*, but they also deviate from the prototypical *Bildungsroman*. If the *Bildungsroman* frequently draws upon autobiographical material, Indian women authors live under quite different pressures than their male counterparts. Hariharan and Roy resist this ideology in two ways: first, by transforming romance plot conventions within specific stories, and by subordinating romance plot elements to quest plots of non-romantic development.

³⁶ A deeper insight can be read in Bonnie Hoover Braendlin "Alther, Atwood, Ballantyne and Gray: Secular Salvation in the Contemporary Feminist *Bildungsroman*."

Both authors clearly pursue the project of writing beyond the *bildungsroman* marriage plot, structuring their overall narratives to emphasize the female characters' aim to develop as individuals rather than as wives. Rahel as well as Devi, like their male counterparts in the traditional *Bildungsroman*, go off to a foreign land, and have a love affair. Moreover, both female protagonists remain childless, and bring back memories of the idyllic world of childhood before abuse took shape in their lives. Rahel and Devi go back to their native lands—in South India—in order to come to terms with their mothers' story, so that they can understand their present lives. So, these authors' revisionist program comes to the conclusion that these authors cannot achieve a break with their cultural inheritance, but subvert the sexism implicit in it, among other maladies, by resorting to an adroit manipulation of their narrative strategy.

Charlotte Goodman makes an interesting study on what she calls the 'Male-Female Double *Bildungsroman*' to describe the evolution of a pair of protagonists, one male, the other female.³⁷ This design is circular, differing from the prototypical *Bildungsroman*, which is linear. As she goes on explaining, the male-female *Bildungsroman* describes the shared childhood experience of a male and a female protagonist who inhabit a place somewhat reminiscent of a pre-lapsarian mythic garden world where the male and female once existed as equals. Then,

³⁷ As appears in Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1869), Willa Cather's *My Antonia* (1918), Jean Stafford's *The Mountain Lion* (1947), and Joyce Carol Oates's *Them* (1969), to name just a few.

such novels dramatize the separation of the male and the female character in adolescence and young adulthood as the male, like the hero of the typical male *Bildungsroman*, journeys forth to seek his fortune, while the female is left behind; and finally, the novels conclude with a reunion of the male and the female protagonists (30). She proposes that this final reunion signifies a turning away from mature adult experience and a reaffirmation of the childhood world in which the male and the female protagonists were undivided (31). However, those novels and tradition cited above appear to be congenial to the woman novelist who wished to emphasize the way in which a society rigidly differentiates between male and female gender roles and limits the full development of women and men alike.

In *GST*, Roy tells us the development of the twins –Rahel and Estha—from childhood to adulthood. According to Goodman, traditionally in this type of *Bildungsroman* female roles are assigned by a patriarchal society, while their male counterparts are free to journey into the larger world (33). However, we can see how Roy subverts the genre by reversing the traditional gender roles. Roy proposes the female protagonist to be the hero, who gets an education and seeks her fortune abroad, while the male one remains at their father's house doing the domestic chores.

In those novels, the paired male and female protagonists appear to function as psychological doubles, for each character is intensely involved in the psychic

life of his or her counterpart. This can be seen also in Roy, as Rahel could always tell what happened to Estha, and although they did not resemble each other physically, “the confusion lay in a deeper, more secret place” (2).³⁸ Roy has introduced the twins as a unit in order to legitimize Rahel’s telling of her brother’s story, which is after all her own:

In those early amorphous years when memory had only just begun, when life was full of Beginnings and no Ends, and Everything was For Ever, Esthappen and Rahel thought of themselves together as Me, and separately, individually, as We or Us. As though they were a rare breed of Siamese twins, physically separate, but with joint identities. Now, these years later, Rahel has a memory of waking up one night giggling at Estha’s funny dream. She has other memories too that she has no right to have. She remembers, for instance (though she hadn’t been there), what the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man did to Estha in Abhilash Talkies (2-3).

Like in any male-female *bildungsromane*, Estha and Rahel feel like they are a unit.³⁹ Roy appears to be suggesting that each represents a part of a single, divided psyche, and alone both are incomplete as they are inseparable. However, they do

³⁸ Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things* (London: Flamingo, 1997). All further quotations of the novel refer to this edition, and are indicated in parentheses.

³⁹ Similar is the case of the novels by the diasporic writer Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s *Sister of My Heart* (1999) and *The Vine of Desire* (2002), where she narrates the experiences during the growing of two cousins considered sisters and unseparable –Anju and Nalini-- into womanhood.

separate and the rupture between them becomes permanent till they meet in their adult lives, though Roy implies that each has always been aware of the other. As we will discuss below, the twins are limited and diminished by the lives they have been forced to lead. This unity made her leave her husband and return to meet her twin brother: "Rahel's eyes was not despair at all, but a sort of enforced optimism. And a hollow where Estha's words had been. He couldn't be expected to understand that. That the emptiness in one twin was only a version of the quietness in the other. That the two things fitted together" (19-20).

Estha and Rahel become inseparable companions, preferring the world of nature to the world of culture, desiring a life outside the adults' performance where touchables and untouchables exist as equals.⁴⁰ As Catherine in *Wuthering Heights*, Rahel is being socialized at the several schools she attends, but she is unable to assimilate into the cultured world. This ritual of initiation is broken by her incapability to adjust her nature. Rahel has been expelled three times from school, and later at the college of Architecture in Delhi, which much echoes Roy's own life. Rahel transgressed the school rules *as though she didn't know how to be a girl* (17):

Oddly, neglect seemed to have resulted in an accidental release of the spirit. Rahel grew up without a brief. Without anybody to

⁴⁰ Notice the similarity in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1972), where Catherine and Heathcliff follow the same pattern.

arrange a marriage for her. Without anybody who would pay her a dowry and therefore without an obligatory husband looming on her horizon. So as long as she wasn't noisy about it, she remained free to make her own enquiries: into breasts and how much they hurt. Into false hair buns and how well they burned. Into life and how it ought to be lived (17).

Goodman states that each character may also embody a separate aspect of the author's own psychic life, the female character representing the author's identification with those women who have been forced to conform to traditional female gender roles, the male character, the author's desire for learning, power, mobility, autonomy. Together the male and the female character suggest the possibility of androgynous wholeness, a state imaginable only in a mythic prelapsarian world of nature before a patriarchal culture gained ascendancy (31). Before, the twins could not communicate effectively with one another because the course of their respective lives has been so radically different.

She goes on asserting that offering a critique of a patriarchal society in which gender roles are rigidly defined, the male-female double *Bildungsroman* traces the way in which a harmonious and balanced androgynous self is fractured by a culture which assigns radically different roles to males and females. The fact that Chacko accuses his sister Ammu of disgracing the family name and refusing

to offer his sister asylum under his roof is also a topic in the male-female *Bildungsroman* as can be seen, for example, in Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*.

By employing the structure of the male-female double *bildungsroman*, Roy is able to dramatize the fragmentation of male and female experience in a society in which gender roles are rigidly defined. Only in the final scene of each novel is the fragmentation of the self momentarily healed as the male and the female protagonist are reunited. These novels as well, according to Goodman, dramatize the limitations imposed on both the male and the female protagonist in a patriarchal society where androgynous wholeness is no longer possible. However, the case in Roy's novel is that she proposes the androgynous as a symbolic alternative for a better future by the use of the incest taboo.⁴¹ Their mother Ammu and her untouchable lover Velutha die, but the twins stay as a sequel of their illicit love and revolution from the established love laws.⁴² They reunite in death, but the twins do so in transgressing their kinship rules, as we will analyze below.

5.2.2. The girl's development into womanhood: the socialization process.

⁴¹ Anita Desai also describes an incestuous feeling for Bim's retarded brother in *Clear Light of Day* (1980).

⁴² Anita Rau Badami also shows an inter-caste relationship in her novel *Tamarind Mem* (1996), in which Saroja --a Brahmin married lady-- falls in love with Paul da Costa --a caste-less car mechanic. Due the impossibility to fulfill that relationship, he commits suicide after which Saroja decides to become silent as a protest.

TFN and *GST* have the structure of a quest novel; at first the quest of a woman for her identity is also the quest of a woman for her past, which becomes a quest for their cultural roots. But it is not simply a journey backwards, it is also a journey forward, as the nation is created with the revisionism of history and mythology. The female protagonists' journey home ends where it begins: in their ancestral home. Here is the moment of recognition. Krishna Sarbadhikary makes an interesting comparative study of both novels regarding the construction of the female subjectivity.⁴³ She analyses the limits of postcolonial hybridity in the two novels and how the two authors re-form and re-shape earlier images of the female subjectivity.

5.2.2.1. Childhood: an Edonic phase.

Childhood, set in a rural outdoor environment, is described in both novels as an idyllic period in the life of the protagonists, where they can perfectly behave as equals. Even the Edenic period comes to a close for both protagonists, when nature is taken over by cultural traditions. The distinctive feature in Roy, as we will see below, is that nature degenerates as a consequence of human intervention,

⁴³ For an insight on hybridity and androgyny, as alternatives for female subjectivity, see Maithreyi Krishnaraj's "Androgyny: An Alternative to Gender Polarity?" (1996), and Krishna Sarbadhikary's "Mapping the Future: Indian Women Writing Female Subjectivities" (2000).

that is, the loss of innocence and the intrusion of consumerism and globalization. This signals the end of history's witnesses.

Traditionally, women have been responsible for early child care and for later female socialization. That is why the role of Devi's grandmother –Pati— becomes very important when socializing Devi.⁴⁴ This points to the central importance of the (grand)mother-daughter relationship for women as transmission of culture and tradition. Devi remembers that her: "grandmother's stories were no ordinary bedtime stories. She chose each for a particular occasion, a story in reply to each of my childish questions. She had an answer for every question. But her answers were not simple: they had to be decoded. A comparison had to be made, an illustration discovered, and a moral drawn out" (27).⁴⁵ Unlike Devi, the child Rahel in *GST* has no doting grandmother. The adult bounce recalls that her half-blind grandmother Mammachi and maternal uncle Chacko both slumped in their bereavement at Sophie's death.

Chodorow states that according to psychoanalytic theory, personality is a result of a boy's or girl's social-relational experiences from earliest infancy. Personality development is not the result of conscious parental intention. The nature and quality of the social relationships that the child experiences are appropriated, internalized, and organized by her/him and come to constitute

⁴⁴ Pati is the term for 'grandmother' in Tamil language.

⁴⁵ Hariharan, Githa. *The Thousand Faces of Night* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1992). All further quotations of the novel refer to this edition, and are indicated in parentheses.

her/his personality (1974: 45). These are important determinants of any person's behavior, both that which is culturally expected and that which is idiosyncratic or unique to the individual. The state of infantile dependence consists first in the persistence of primary identification with the mother: the child does not differentiate herself/himself from her/his mother but experiences a sense of oneness with her. Second, it includes an oral-incorporative mode of relationship to the world, leading, because of the infant's total helplessness, to a strong attachment to and dependence upon whoever nurses and carries her/him. The experience of mothering a woman involves a double identification (46). A woman identifies with her own mother and, through identification with her child, she (re)experiences herself as a cared-for child.

There have been studies proving that mothers in South India treat their daughters, who will have to leave their natal family for a strange and usually oppressive post-marital household, better than their baby boys from the time of their daughters' birth. Then, mothers in these communities identify anticipatorily, by re-experiencing their own past, with the experiences of separation that their daughters will go through. They develop a particular attachment to their daughters because of this and by imposing their own reaction to the issue of separation on this new external situation. In *GST* this becomes clear when Ammu tells her twin children the story of Julius Caesar: "you can't trust anybody. Mother, father, brother, husband, bestfriend. No-body. (...) With children, she

said (when they asked), it remained to be seen. She said it was entirely possible, for instance, that Estha could grow up to be a Male Chauvinist Pig" (83), and with Rahel's insistence on feeling close to the mother when she is obsessed with how much her mother loves her: "The sadness of Ammu's loving her a little less. And the sadness of whatever the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man had done to Estha in Abhilash Talkies" (115).

It seems that a mother is more likely to identify with a daughter than with a son, to experience her daughter (or parts of her daughter's life) as herself (Chodorow 1974: 48). A boy's masculine gender identification must come to replace his early primary identification with his mother. This masculine identification is usually based in identification with a boy's father or other salient adult males. However, Estha's father is absent and for that reason: "on the front of the book, Estha had rubbed out his surname with spit, and taken half the paper with it. Over the whole mess, he had written in pencil *Un-Known*. Esthappen Un-Known. (His surname postponed for the Time Being, while Ammu chose between her husband's name and her father's)" (156-7). Estha, as well as Rahel, chooses Velutha, instead of his maternal uncle, as the masculine role model. A boy's father is relatively more remote than his mother. Since his work and social life take place farther from the home than do those of his wife, he is often inaccessible to his son. As a result, a boy's male gender identification often becomes a positional identification, with aspects of his father's clearly or not-so-clearly defined male

role, rather than a more generalized personal identification, a diffuse identification with his father's personality, values, and behavioral traits, that could grow out of a real relationship to his father.

5.2.2.2. Adolescence: the tradition vs. modernity dilemma.

The theme of growing up from adolescence to womanhood is used by many Indian women novelists, and saw an emergence after the 1970s. An example is Kamala Markandaya's *Two Virgins*, and Santha Rama Rau's *Remember the House*.⁴⁶ Hariharan portrays the female protagonist's –Devi– adolescence and growth to maturity; she is a product of western education trying to find her roots, and consequently her identity. The genesis of the split personality of the Indian female psyche caught in the cross-currents of two cultures –the western and the

⁴⁶ See K. Meera Bai's "From Adolescence to Womanhood: Kamala Markandaya's *Two Virgins*, Ruth Jhabvala's *To Whom She Will* and Santha Rama Rau's *Remember the House*" (1991).

Indian—occurred in English fiction in India centuries ago. Krupabai Sattianadhan's *Saguna* (1895) and *Kamala* (1894) show the identity crisis, full of characters who challenge the traditional culture and religion which defined female identity only in terms of a definite role at any given moment –of daughter (in-law), wife or mother. We also find this topic in *An Unfinished Song* by Svarnakumaari Ghosal (1856-1932), which deals with the development of Moni, a Bengali Hindu woman, western educated and influenced by the western concepts of liberalism and individualism.

TFN has a protagonist girl who is at the threshold of womanhood. It portrays her adolescence and growth to maturity. Like for example Indira Goray in Santha Rama Rau's *Remember the House*, Devi is a product of western education trying to find her roots, as the author of the novel. Usually, these novels that deal with the growth and maturity of the female protagonists, go from their adolescent fancies and beliefs into accepting the realities of life. In Hariharan's case, Devi goes through this phase as an always challenging female, ending up in a decision to break with conventionality as she does not accept what she sees.

Devi, a young woman, may enact actual rebellion, or even project sexual desire, whereas the older women in the novel, invariably married, exercise their autonomy on behalf of the family's well-being.⁴⁷ All this is controlled and made acceptable by a certain femininity that is encoded as physical charm. The

⁴⁷ Kamala Markandaya explores the concepts of sex in *Two Virgins* (1973).

polarization subtly deconstructs itself into continuity: the young woman's freedom, because it precedes marriage and domesticity and will therefore be naturally tamed by them in due course, makes her youth a sanctioned space for a last fling of rebellion. The new woman does not, in any case, jeopardize the notion of a tradition which is preserved intact in the idealized conjugal and domestic sphere. R. Sunder Rajan studies how the female subject is dictated by the ideologies of patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism. She defines culture as: "the product of the beliefs and conceptual models of society and as the destination where the trajectory of its desires takes shape, as well as the everyday practices by which these are structured, is the constitutive realm of the subject" (1993: 10).

Both Devi and Rahel go to the US, the first to complete graduate studies, and the second through marriage. They both return to their native land some time later, which is significant as this detail differs significantly from Indian writers in the diaspora, whose protagonists usually leave India after a short period of time trying to get their cultural roots, due to an impossible adaptation, claiming this way that they are truly American.⁴⁸ This may be due to the fact that the authors themselves remain in India, more concretely in Delhi. Rahel's as well as Devi's homecoming as an adult from the US, in a way repudiates the metropolitan

⁴⁸ Clear examples are Ameena Meer's *Bombay Talkie*, Bharti Kirchner's *Shiva Dancing*, and Mira Kamdar's *Motiba's Tattoos*.

culture and is a journey from the center/West to India –a small village in Kerala, Ayemenem, in the first case, and Madras in the other.

In *TFN*, the protagonist's quest begins when she finds herself caught in-between her new experience in an American university and a possibility to go back to her native land. Once she has returned to her ancestors' house, she begins by questioning the inherent expectations of the given role. Her quest for self-discovery begins, and freedom of the self from these pre-established roles emerges as her primary concern. Devi is a subject-in-process in whom the contradictions of tradition and modernity are played out. Her time in Madras and Bangalore seems to be the timeless world of Brahmanic high culture, where the outside rarely intrudes. In Devi we see a troubling and contradictory affinity with oppressive aspects of tradition, while opting for a liberated modernity, which leads her to pre-marital and extra-marital sexual alliances with Dan and Gopal respectively. Devi's graduate student days give her an opportunity to "shed her inhibitions and her burden of Indianness" (4), but unable to shed either her Indianness or her Brahmanic tradition, Devi feels uncomfortable among Dan's friends and their expression of black identity, and resolves to reject his marriage proposal in order to return to India as: "these proposals were not potent enough to reconjure the myth-laden world that had soaked up her past. Instead they led her gently, with grasping, watery fingers, to walk along the shores of an Indian rebirth" (6). From

her superior class/caste position, Devi others the West and Dan --an alien mirage-- and their brief clandestine passion.

Nayantara Sahgal explains schizophrenia as “a state of mind and feeling that is firmly rooted in a particular subsoil, but above ground has a more fluid identity that doesn’t fit comfortably into any single mould. A schizophrenic of this description is a migrant who may never have left his people or his soil” (30). She posits the example of Jawaharlal Nehru, a product of colonial times, who called himself a man of two worlds. He explains that some people related to the East-West encounter by discarding their Indianness to become brown carriers of the white culture they admired and adopted. But nationalism produced another breed of westernized Indian for whom his plural culture meant a bewildering reckoning with himself, a balancing act, where the priorities were never in doubt, but where ‘Who am I?’ remained an on-going search and question (30-31). Devi feels right before leaving the US that: “Above all, she felt a piercing ache to see her mother. But equally powerful was a nameless dread she only partly acknowledged: the dread of the familiar love, stifling and all-pervasive; of a world beyond her classroom and laboratory, charged with a more pungent uncertainty” (7).

The genesis of this split personality of the Indian female psyche caught in the cross-currents of two cultures --the acquired western and the instinctual

Indian—occurred in English fiction in India with Krupabai Sathianadhan,⁴⁹ born in 1862 and the thirteenth child of the first Brahman converts to Christianity in the Bombay Presidency. Her only novel in English, *Kamala*, was published in 1894, through which she attempted to eradicate archetypal religious and cultural norms that prohibited Indian women's emancipation, proposing a social and religious reform. *Kamala* exposes the female identity's metamorphosis from tradition to modernity. The three women together—similar to the case in *TFN*-- form sequential links in the evolution of this identity. Kamala attempts personal identity and fails because she was bound fast to orthodox India. Such a range of female characters prevents any simplistic formulations such as oppressed Indian women versus independent American women.

The women, though influenced in varying degrees by progressive western ideas were still, generally, the custodians of the indigenous culture. Devi as well as Rahel are individualistic products of the Indian-British encounter.⁵⁰ They are poised between two worlds: the feminine, dictated by traditional Hindu socio-religious ideologies of duty before self and female inferiority and the feminist, generated by the modern western concepts of liberalism and gender equality.

⁴⁹ For a deeper insight, see Chandani Lokugé's "The Cross-Cultural Experience of a Pioneer Indian Woman Writer of English Fiction."

⁵⁰ Jai Nimbkar's *Temporary Answers* (1974) and *Come Rain* (1993) present a new version of the East-West encounter. On the other hand, Kamala Markandaya, in her *Pleasure City* (1982), does not explore the cultural confrontation East versus West, but tradition and modernity—as the stock theme of postcolonial fiction is the encounter with the West.

However, it is clear how the unconventionality of Rahel's mother paved her daughter's way towards individualism.

Memory and imagination are two powerful human possessions. The past is so much with Indian people, in the beliefs and routines people live by, in conversations whose allusions can go from legend to modern in minutes; no time is ever entirely past. Time itself, an important even of the novel, is not the same in the Indian --especially the Hindu-- reckoning as in other societies. Rahel's encounter with a mad-looking woman in the train led her close to her return to India: "Memory was that woman on the train. Insane in the way she sifted through dark things in a closet and emerged with the most unlikely ones (...) A mother's marble eyes. (...) Unremembered. Her co-passenger's madness comforted Rahel. It drew her closer into New York's deranged womb. Away from the other, more terrible thing that haunted her" (72). The passage of the mad woman in the train may belong to a common folk mythology in South India: that of the possession of women by the goddess Devi in some temples. The retelling of this incident points us to a reading of Rahel's own experience in her maternal house, as echoing the experience of her mother possessed by her own passions.

This propensity to see herself as divided is echoed and reinforced by the narrative structure of the novel. Both narratives alternate chapters in first-person narrative and third-person narrative effectively as the protagonists' mind is moved to remember past events. The implicit suggestions of their achieving

wisdom by returning to their culture seems to suggest the authors' stand that in order to accept and adopt any change, there should be adequate preparation and understanding. This way, Hariharan and Roy touch upon the theme of confrontation of East and West, the emphasis is on the conflict itself, rather than on the evil effects of an alien culture. The protagonists stand at the crossroads of transition, from tradition to modernity, trying to evaluate both and accept the best out of both worlds.

5.2.2.3. Adulthood: the hybrid state.

Both Devi and Rahel are liberated women who know their traditional cultural roots, and are critical about them. They not only do not submit to them but make individual decisions. However, their final stage is to seek redemption through the figure of the mother to remake their female identity. So they are Indian as well as modern. In this context, Indian women --perennially and transcendently wife, mother and homemaker-- used to save the project of modernization-without-westernization. It is only the female subject who can be shown as successfully achieving the balance between (deep) tradition and (surface) modernity, through strategies of representation. For instance, Devi tried

to gain this balance, but she ends up refusing everything to start from the very beginning, from the womb to create her own goddess to follow.

The authors take the investigation of the distinctive hybridized characteristics of the protagonists shaped by their specific familial conditions. Their perception of the idea of cultural formation is a main project. They propose a space in-between their own cultural traditions and their own individuality. They are portrayed as victims of culture, but only of its negative aspects in their effort to belong to it. That is why the authors do not offer rejection as final goal, but re-interpretation. This is when a discussion about the dilemma of the hybrid becomes essential. Paul Rabinow says that the danger implicit is that "Tradition is a moving image of the past. When a culture stops moving, when its structures of belief no longer offer a means to integrate, create and make meaningful new experiences, then a process of alienation begins. Tradition is opposed not to modernity but to alienation" (1).

What is proposed here is a new generation of non-mother female characters. Women's universal mothering role has effects both on the development of masculine and feminine personality and on the relative status of the sexes. Men, while guaranteeing to themselves socio-cultural superiority over women, always remain psychologically defensive and insecure. Women, by contrast, although always of secondary social and cultural status, may in favorable circumstances gain psychological security and a sense of worth and importance in

spite of this. Social and psychological oppression is perpetuated in the structure of personality.

Our understanding of the problems of 'real' women cannot lie outside the 'imagined' constructs in and through which 'women' emerge as subjects. Negotiating with these mediations and simulacra we seek to arrive at an understanding of the issues at stake. Culture, then, viewed as the product of the beliefs and conceptual models of society and as the destination where the trajectory of its desires takes shape, as well as the everyday practices, the contingent realities, and the complex process by which these are structured, is the constitutive realm of the subject. As a result, culture appears as the chief matter and consequence of dominant ideological investment, powerfully coercive in shaping the subject; but since it is also heterogeneous, changing and open to interpretation, it can become a site of contestation and consequently of the reinscription of subjectivities. Therefore cultural analysis both calls forth the critique of ideology, and –given the crucial function of representation in the dialectic of social process—enables political intervention, scenarios of change, theoretical innovation and strategic reinterpretations (Sunder 1993: 10).

One of the ways in which such a political appropriation may take place is by installing in the space vacated at the center (of history, society, politics) a resisting subject –one who will be capable of the agency and enabling selfhood of the 'active' earlier subject, while at the same time acknowledging the politics of

difference. The cleared site of the subject must provide the grounds of (new) gendered subjectivities that will enact more contingent, varied and flexible modes of resistance (Sunder 1993: 11). It is this that has prompted me to explore the historically victimized female subject as the site for the constitution of 'alternative' subjectivities. Hariharan and Roy claim the need for constant renewal.

Bhabha states that if the effect of colonial power is seen to be the *production* of hybridization rather than the noisy command of colonialist authority or the silent repression of native traditions, then an important change of perspective occurs. The ambivalence at the source of traditional discourses on authority enables a form of subversion, founded on the undecidability that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention (1994: 112). Nationalism equated with a valorization of the traditional. The traditional is represented as the timeless, and hence inclusive of the modern, while the modern is viewed merely as a transitional phase, which disguises the permanent essence of timeless tradition.

Kumkum Sangari states that the hybrid writer is "open to two worlds and is constructed within the national and international political and cultural systems of colonialism and neo-colonialism. To be hybrid is to understand and question as well as to represent the pressure of such historical placement" (1995: 144). In her influential work with Sudesh Vaid in *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, they comment about this issue that "Both tradition and modernity have been, in

India, carriers of patriarchal ideologies” and are “eminently colonial constructs” (17). The concept of ‘representation’, it seems, is useful precisely because and to the extent that it can serve a mediating function between the two positions, neither foundationalist (privileging ‘reality’) nor superstructural (privileging ‘culture’), not denying the category of the real, or essentializing it as some pregiven metaphysical ground for representation. This is the reason why feminism, for instance, as Jacqueline Rose shows, has found it so productive to engage with representation as a ‘domain with its own substantial political reality and effects” (12).

Both Devi’s and Rahel’s education is not over with marriage, as they are now divorced. Even when they fail to pursue a professional career after their graduation, they learn through women’s personal experiences and their own, how to cope with their inner desires.⁵¹ We can adequately read the protagonists of Hariharan and Roy as symbols of the triumph of the forces of modernity over those of the regressive pulls of tradition. It shows how the process of dealing with the cataclysmic changes is intertwined with women’s recognition of their own role both as women and as individuals. They, thus, fight two battles simultaneously. In one, they fight to gain a heightened self-awareness in the socio-cultural context of

⁵¹ Manju Kapur has published a new novel *A Married Woman* (1993), in which she also explores women’s sexuality inside and outside marriage. She personally told me how powerless women instead of getting empowered through education, sometimes lead uneducated lives in the sense that they feel entrapped in sentimental struggles where education is not enough to set themselves emotionally free (Indian Habitat Center, New Delhi, February 20, 2003).

their society; in the other, they fight a battle for and on behalf of the society to deal with modernity and change.

6. Power Structures: repressive forces.

Since the Frankfurt School it has been argued by many theorists that knowledge is historically and socially determined by those in power, and that it is used directly or indirectly as false consciousness to oppress people. The group in power is that of men. So, Foucault's juridico-discursive model of power becomes essential when discussing the setting up of the commonality of third-world

women's struggles across classes and cultures against a general notion of oppression. He describes its principal features as "a negative relation", "insistence on the rule"(which forms a binary system), "a cycle of prohibition", "the logic of censorship", and "a uniformity of the apparatus functioning at different levels" (1980: 134-45).

Alexander and Mohanty (1997: 214) discuss extensively how these power relations work and are structured in terms of a unilateral and undifferentiated source of power and a cumulative reaction to power. They claim that opposition is a generalized phenomenon created as a response to power –which, in turn, is possessed by certain groups of people. The major problem with such a definition of power is that it locks all revolutionary struggles into binary structures – possessing power versus being powerless. Women are powerless, unified groups. The struggle for a just society is seen in terms of the move from powerless to powerful for women as a group, and this is the implication in feminist discourse which structures sexual difference in terms of the division between the sexes, then the new society would be structurally identical to the existing organization of power relations, constituting itself as a simple inversion of what exists. They argue, then, that the application of the notion of women as a homogeneous category to women in the third world colonizes and appropriates the pluralities of the simultaneous location of different groups of women in social class and ethnic

frameworks; in doing so it ultimately robs them of their historical and political agency.

Tharu and Niranjana have discussed in "Problems for a Contemporary Theory of Gender," which appeared in *Subaltern Studies IX*, that the more complex task of feminisms that explore the political contexts of female sexuality is investigating the contradictions of gender, caste, class, and community composition that works upon the 'subject' in the dominant order. We will argue in this chapter that there are political, social and religious conspiracies against the subaltern. We will focus on the following common areas in discussing women's 'status' in South India: religion, family/kinship structures, and the State –showing the subversive political resistance.

In this chapter we will examine the roots of women's inequality and of their resistance in India, by looking at what we see as the major influences on the formation of gender relations, that is, the development of the patriarchal form of family organization, the formation of the caste hierarchy and politics, and the impact of male domination in religion.

6.1. The Family institution: stories of discontent.

In this section, we will concentrate on three important aspects of the texts, namely the institution of marriage, the cultural construction with regard to a woman's place in society, and the politics of language that perpetrates male domination and is thus inimical to the development of a woman's personality.

Both Hariharan's and Roy's essential concern is not with the feminist notions of polarity that marks man-woman relationship but with the conflict between the larger forces of history and the destabilization and re-organization of the social context. Thus, the inevitable march of change and dislocation had a profound impact on the protagonists' minds in both novels. They write mainly about Indian women who question the prescriptive constructs of social institutions such as marriage, motherhood, wifehood and widowhood. At the heart of these social institutions is the basic unit of family with its hierarchical and unequal power structure. Both authors depict how this unequal distribution of power between the sexes affects all areas of women's lives and keeps most of them from experiencing themselves as women. However, the protagonists of their fiction manage to discover and recover themselves.

Not only is it problematical to speak of a vision of women shared by Hindu and Christian societies, without addressing the particular historical and ideological power structures that construct such images, but to speak of the patriarchal family or the tribal kinship structure as the origin of the socio-economic status of women is again to assume that women are sexual-political

subjects prior to their entry into the family. Alexander and Mohanty (1997: 204) use the example of Hindus and Muslims, which we can apply to Hariharan's and Roy's novels when describing women's roles in the community. Alexander and Mohanty warn against the danger of considering all women to be structured as an oppressed group and be affected by the patriarchal system, without being aware of class and cultural conditions, as if they existed outside history.

Elizabeth Cowie suggests that women as women are not simply *located* within the family. Rather, it is in the family, as an effect of kinship structures, that women as women are *constructed*, defined within and by the group. Michelle Rosaldo pointed out that a "woman's place in human social life is not in any direct sense a product of the things she does (or even less, a function of what, biologically, she is) but the meaning her activities acquire through concrete social interactions" (400). Sunder has pointed out that "the construction of women in terms of recognizable roles, images, models, and labels occurs in discourse in response to specific social imperatives even where it may be offered in terms of the universal and abstract rhetoric of 'Woman' or 'women' (or the 'Indian woman', as the case may be)" (1993: 129). Kumkum Sangari, in response to Susie Tharu's "Women Writing in India", claimed that: "female-ness is not an essential quality. It is constantly made, and redistributed; one has to be able to see the formation of female-ness in each and every form at a given moment or in later interpretation, and see what it is composed of, what its social correlates are, what

its ideological potentials are, what its freedoms may be" (57). On her part, Sunder states that "if we acknowledge (a) that femaleness is constructed, (b) that the terms of such construction are to be sought in the dominant modes of ideology (patriarchy, colonialism, capitalism), and (c) that therefore what is at stake is the investments of desire and the politics of control that representation both signifies and serves, then the task of the feminist critic becomes what Jacqueline Rose describes as 'the critique of male discourse' born of 'a radical distrust of representation which allies itself with a semiotic critique of the sign' (11). What is required here is an alertness to the political process by which such representation becomes naturalized and ultimately coercive in structuring women's self-representation.

Since what is male and what is female depends upon interpretations of biology that are associated with a culture's mode of life, Roy proposes a break with culture (with any artificial way of manipulation and establishment of oppressive rules) to favor the flow of biology. She proposes the world as being a social one created by male and female actors, where women, Dalits and children are treated as relatively invisible. So kinship organization is characterized by some degree of male dominance. They have no publicly recognized power and authority surpassing that of men. Of course, the degree and expression of female subordination in a male-dominated community vary greatly due to various factors such as generational, personal, local, religious... On the other hand, Githa

Hariharan focuses on the life of women in the Brahminical world. Damodar K. Rao states that the whole female order of the Hindu pantheon informs the lives of the protagonists as the real and mythical are combined in focusing a sustained ideal of womanhood over the ages despite the changes in individual circumstances governed by education and modernization (159).

6.1.1. Marriage: the exchange of women.

Family, the smallest sociological unit, implies marriage, implicit or explicit, which in turn lends this unit stability, togetherness, and mutual care. According to Lévi-Strauss's theory of kinship structures as a system of the exchange of women, what is significant is that exchange itself is not constitutive of the subordination of women; women are not subordinate because of the *fact* of exchange, but because of the *modes* of exchange instituted, and the values attached to these modes. In merely describing the *structure* of the marriage contract, the situation of women is not exposed. Women as a group are positioned within a given structure, but there is no attempt made to trace the effects of the marriage practice in constituting women within an obviously changing network of power relations. Thus, women are assumed to be sexual-political subjects prior to entry into kinship.

The institution of marriage is commonly treated by female writers as an enclosure, limiting and circumscribing their lives. Adhikari states in her article "Enclosure and Freedom: Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*" that Durga, Sita and Savitri are the creations of male imagination and are either empowered by the male gods Vishnu, Brahma, Mahesh (like Durga) or are the symbols of sacrifice and service expected to live and die for their Lords (Sita and Savitri). Dictats of *Manusmriti* are deeply rooted in our collective unconscious. The images of women controlled by the institution of marriage are those of suffocation, dwarfing and mental illness. Women writers are constructing successful, self-aware, emancipated protagonists who also manage to continue with the respectable ideology of womanhood (40).

Lévi-Strauss argued that culture is based on a system of exchange, the underlying law of which is reciprocity. This for him was the key to understanding kinship systems, as a means of organizing the exchange of women in marriage. This definition implies that women are treated as property. The masculine norm presented and cultivated in tradition considers the existence of women as dependent on the male-governed and male-defined social structures, treating them as a piece of property to be passed on from one man to another. This image denies women's personhood. The image of subordination is to control and confine women, so that women are marginalized through cultural institutions and

religious rituals. The mythical dimension informs and enforces the crisis of identity in the context of the divergent forces stultifying the female ego.

An Indian woman's self-perception as also the society's expectations from her have for long been largely determined by the complex of ideas and values and beliefs codified in the *Manusmriti*. In mythical terms the dominant feminine prototype still is the chaste, patient, self-denying, long suffering wife, Sita, admirably supported by other figures like Savitri and Draupadi. The values embodied in these ideal figures loom large in the consciousness of women even when they reject these role models. The injunctions relating to women in the *Manusmriti* and the Sita/Savitri prototype together provide a framework within which the response of women characters to male domination could profitably be studied. There is a considerable variety in the women characters' attitudes reflected in the novels. These range from passive sufferers like Savitri to those who defying traditional wisdom about marriage and family, and plough a lonely furrow. Between these two extremes lie a lot of attitudes combining acquiescence and protest in varying proportions. The cherished Indian values sanctified by tradition and particularly enjoined upon women are: first, subordination or acceptance of male authority whether of father, husband or son; second, *dharma* or duty; third, sexual purity in both premarital virginal and marital fidelity; and finally, silence. However, women have been moving towards new directions under the impact of new ideas: autonomy, personal goals, sexual emancipation,

and speech. According to this, we will analyze the roles of the characters regarding their views about marriage in all its possible forms, except love marriages: arranged marriages, intercommunity marriages, and convenience marriages.

Thematically, *TFN* focuses on the survival patterns of four different kinds of women: Devi, the protagonist; her mother, Sita; her mother-in-law, Parvatiamma; and the old housekeeper at her husband's house, Mayamma. Similarly, *GST* deals with four different types of women regarding their attitudes towards the family: Rahel, the narrator of the story; her mother Ammu; Mammachi, her grandmother; and Baby Kochamma, the twins' grandaunt. We also observe a dissenting note throughout the narrative against the conventionalized notions about female roles –especially those concerning the alleged sacredness of marriage, wifedom and motherhood. The authors depict the female characters' married life in terms of entrapment, progressive mental deterioration, and increasing physical disability.

Devi, who was brought up on a romantic diet of stories about the sanctity of matrimony, finds her own married life vastly disappointing. Her grandmother used to assure her that all husbands were noble. Marriage meant that a woman offered herself completely to her lord and master, as Pati tells her: “when you marry, Devi, your heart moves up to your shoulder and slips down your arm to the palm of your hand. The hand that holds yours tightly as you walk round the

five receives it like a gift. You can't do anything about it: when you marry, it goes to him and you never get it back" (37).

Devi had often dreamt of a god-like hero who would guide her gently when he saw her "own desperate desire to fly with him" (46). Her husband Mahesh, however, is "no prince, but a regional manager in a multinational company that makes detergents and toothpaste" (22). He views marriage with restraint and detachment, "as a necessity, a milestone like any other" (49) and he does not believe in talking "about ifs and buts, at least not with his wife. All that spewing out of feelings is self-indulgent, he says. It is un-Indian" (49). She soon realizes that in taking up the occupation as a housewife ("a twenty-four hour, thirty days a month job"), she is going to play out a travesty of the myths that had filled her childhood. She feels her life becoming increasingly lonely and purposeless in the huge mansion, and tries to get her husband to spend more time with her unsuccessfully; for her lord and master is a busy man with a lot of business trips to make.

Devi thus discerns that marriage merely meant that she would have to learn to love her tormentor, while the heart she had prepared so well for its demands would remain "untouched, unsought for" (54). When she asks Mahesh why he married her, he finds the question absurd and answers evasively: "Whatever people get married for" (54). Slowly she gets used to spending all her time listening to the stories and reminiscences of her father-in-law, Baba, and

later, after Baba goes to New York, the old domestic help, Mayamma. Baba used to be a Sanskrit professor of some eminence, and he lovingly and endlessly lectures to her about the wisdom of the sacred texts of antiquity as also about the qualities and virtues of the ideal wife: "the housewife should always be joyous, adept at domestic work, neat in her domestic wares, and restrained in expenses. Controlled in mind, word, and body, she who does not transgress her lord, attains heaven even as her lord does" (70-1).

Mahesh is "far too civilized" to thrash her "rebellious body" when she refuses him her body but he calls her a "teasing bitch". She encounters the horrors of the thousand faces of the night, dreaming of "bodies tearing away their shadows and melting, like liquid wax burnt by moonlight" (74). Devi sketches a painful and accurate picture of her marriage:

This then is marriage, the end of ends, two or three brief encounters a month when bodies stutter together in lazy, inarticulate lust. Two weeks a month when the shadowy stranger who casually strips me of my name, snaps his fingers and demands a smiling handmaiden. And the rest? It is waiting, all over again, for life to begin, or to end and begin again. My education has left me unprepared for the vast, yawning middle chapters of my womanhood (54).

The patriarchal family system consolidated the position of the man by forever damning that of the woman. Devi's marital life lacks the color and

excitement that she had expected as she spends her time wandering about the house, talking to Baba and hearing Mayamma's stories about her past. Her desire to take up a job or acquire another degree are met with such a discouraging tone and attitude that she is forced to put them aside. Mahesh seems insensitive to the possibility of Devi possessing an individuality and a personality that need to be expressed in a role away from that of a wife. Rahel's case is similar, but changes in the nature of her relationship with her husband Larry, an American research scholar, who loved everything about her but the way her eyes looked till that brought divorce.

Alladi Uma explains that most educated women comply with the traditions of society, some because they are unwilling to face social ostracism, others because they are too imbued with traditional concepts. Even where the daughter, wife, or mother works due to economic necessity, her freedom ends when she leaves her work place and enters home. She may have more of social, political, and economic awareness than those who do not go out to work, but she still yields to the threats of conventional decorum. Often there is frustration, anger, dejection, and disappointment. Most women, in spite of all their grievances, give in to the system, for they are not able to break away from their acculturation; they often end up unhappy, putting on a façade of happiness (7). However, Hariharan as well as Roy propose a new generation of women who do not pretend any more and are brave enough to make individual decisions.

Both Hariharan and Roy reject the idea of the institution of marriage. They show a new image of woman: a frustrated one caught between the Sita-Savitri figure and a more modern, individualized one. However, in order to avoid stereotypes, they show a heterogeneous range of women, who deal in their own possible ways with their circumstances. By juxtaposing and intermingling the lives of three generations of women, the authors present a picture of the multi-faceted Indian women. We find women who accept their archetypal female role as a wife and mother and live a frustrated life without questioning it; women who are victims of both mental and physical abuse and suffer in silence; and a more modern version of women who seek their own individuality and rebel against social conventions. However, marriage is projected in both novels as a barrier for women's self-development, being either widowhood or divorcehood the only escape from oppression.

In the three generations of women, love remains only an unfulfilled dream. Familial ethic remains in conflict with the emotional urges of the individual. Marriage, which seals the bond of love, turns out to be a social obligation, which has to be lived through the family code. However, the succeeding generation is governed by no such rigid ethical code and finds a loveless marriage a burden fit to be shrugged off. The trend continues in the third generation when marriage breaks off even before it develops into a family. The sacred façade of marriage either lacks harmony or comes crumbling down in an imbalanced familial set-up

in all cases that the novels depict. Mainly, the focus in Hariharan's and Roy's novel is on the irrationalities and injustices of domestic and social life. They attack the double standard that one sex is to be sheltered, and judged and kept from power, while the other --regardless of its behavior-- runs the world.

Both novels present a gloomy picture of marital brutalization, imprisonment and suffocation. In *TFN* when Baba was twenty-one years old, his mother asked him to look at a set of photographs and choose as his wife one from three prospective brides. Baba did not even want to look to their photographs, and instead he told his mother: "if you think they are healthy and well-trained, why should I doubt your word? But I don't like the names Hema and Mohana. They are too frivolous. They sound like back-chatting, tantrum-throwing, modern girls. You can go and see Parvati. There's an old, reliable name! Go see if you like her" (62). Hariharan shows extreme sarcasm with this statement, as the young man is choosing a bride in the most frivolous way, and at the same time discarding two of the girls for having frivolous names. Moreover, the author mocks Baba by presenting Parvati as a woman who leaves her family to become a devotee.

Male aggression obviously gets suggested in the scene which depicts the loyalty of Aleyooty Ammachi --Rahel's great-grandmother married to Reverend E. John Ipe-- who in the photograph "looked in the direction that her husband looked. With her heart she looked away" (30). In *TFN*, we also find a similar scene when Devi found her mother's studio photograph "of her alone, the kind that is

still sent, but now in real life colours, to prospective bridegrooms by the girl's family. Amma did not look like herself. Her eyes had a vague, dreamy look about them" (27). In this case, it shows totally the opposite feeling, as by then Sita was not married so kept illusion in her eyes.

As we have seen above, both Sita and Mammachi are made to drop their love for music, and consequently, they behave coldly with their families out of resentment and frustration. Sita dedicated herself to guide her husband to promotions, and showing a stoic acceptance, controls all of them. She is remembered by her daughter as someone who ruled with an iron hand, even acting for them. The reason given is: "Sita hated all illusions, however tantalizing a form it assumed. She knew what illusion was: she had seized it firmly by its roots and pulled it out of her soul till the enticing stems of the seven-noted scale, came apart, broken and disharmonious in a cluster of pathetic twangs" (105). She considered Devi's elopement with Gopal a betrayal, for which she was not ready. Similarly, Mammachi was made to drop her violin lessons due to her husband's jealousy. She as well feels betrayed when her daughter Ammu returned to her, even when she never consented that marriage, after having left her husband, because: "a married daughter had no position in her parents' home" (45). Mammachi's reaction is a manipulated one by centuries of conventions of submission and acceptance. A powerless Mammachi suffers the tyranny of her husband, but basks in reflected glory of the Ipe family name. She imbibes their

feudal attitudes and shows her power in exploiting the poor Paravans. K. Damodar Rao explains how women try to turn their aggression against themselves as oppressed by the system. This is in itself a resultant factor of the realization of the impossibility of turning their anger against those who are responsible for inflicting humiliations on them. This hostility against oneself is personified in the mythical figure of Gandhari in the *Mahabharata*. Gandhari was given in marriage to the prince of Hastinapur, Dhritarashtra. Initially she was much impressed by the refinement of culture and riches of the people of Hastinapur on her arrival with her bridal entourage. It was only much later that she realized that she was married to a blind man. In her pride, in her anger, without uttering a word, she tore off a piece of her cloth and tied it tightly over her eyes (160).

Baby Kochamma –the twins’ grandfather’s younger sister—is Ammu and the twins’ chief oppressor. Her real name is Navomi Ipe, but everybody called Baby and later, when she was old enough to be an aunt, she became Baby Kochamma. She had fallen in love with an Irish monk --Father Mulligan-- and as her desperate efforts to impress him failed, she converted to Catholicism, against the wishes of her father. She proved to be an unconventional girl, defying her father’s wishes and being involved in an illegitimate relationship. She is described as “displaying a stubborn single-mindedness (which in a young girl in those days was considered as bad as physical deformity)” (24). With the purpose of being

near Father Mulligan, she took her vows and entered a convent in Madras, where he was, as a novice. However, within a year she gets disappointed at the impossibility to be near him, as the other senior nuns monopolized all clerical men in the convent. She starts writing letters to her parent, which she signed as Koh-i-noor⁵² (the reader is informed about her materialistic nature, which also implies her vanity for believing herself to be her father's diamond), and leaves the convent. It is, thus, her frustration in love and the unspent force of repressed desire that makes her instrumental in making Ammu's life miserable. She is a study in the meanness and perversion that may result from unnatural self-repression and the consequent frustration. Her resignation did not put an end to her obsession, as even after his death –actually he had changed faith to become a devotee of Lord Vishnu, which was resented by her for not having renounced his vows for her--, he remained in her memory as death did not alter his availability. Rahel depicts her childhood tormentor sitting at the dining table of the old house, rubbing the “thick bitterness out of an elderly cucumber” (20), a clear sexual image that implies Baby Kochamma's repression and frustration, as later will be stated by the fact that she had convinced herself that she had accepted “the fate of a wretched Man-less woman” (45), the main reason for resenting Ammu.

⁵² The name of the world's biggest diamond that belonged to the Mughals (Muslim rulers in India), and then it was stolen to become part of the crown jewels of England.

When Rahel came back to Ayemenem to meet her brother, she found Baby Kochamma, at age eighty-three, with a new hair style, make-up, and a lot of jewellery. Baby Kochamma embraced the material world that previously she had renounced for an obsessive love. She became more and more angry and resentful and peevish. Actually, it was due to her bitterness and ferocious jealousy that Velutha was dismissed from the factory, imprisoned, and charged with the rape of Ammu. Baby Kochamma is the only survivor at the Ayemenem House, the solely representative of a dead and irredeemable past. She now lives in opulence, turning more and more greedy and inhospitable for fear of losing her property. These material possessions are the substitute for her unrequited love for Father Mulligan. Keeping herself enclosed, she thinks she will keep for herself what she has fought for, showing this a neurotic decadence. She becomes obsessive about material things, as a reaction for not having been able to conquer the priest's love. She focused on her garden, very tidy as a sign of correctness, but now she focuses just on herself. She lives in a world of unrealities (everything she sees is through TV, no communication with the outer world), because she fears two things: first, that the communists may come and dispossess her of her belongings; and second, she is afraid of being discovered, bringing to light her most terrible plans when she prevented Ammu's love story to be a happy one, and when provoked the death –direct, indirect and figurative-- of several innocent people. For this reason, she is one of the so many hypocritical characters in the novel. Roy places many

ironies in her character by, for instance, depicting her as a woman who fights to be involved in an intercommunity love relationship –parallel to what Ammu did twice, with her husband, a Hindu, and her lover, a Dalit. She breaks the religious taboo by loving a priest, becoming a novice, then reverting to material life. Another irony lies in the fact that Baby Kochamma considers the twins' reading backward the ultimate in heresy, and later it is she who leads Estha to make a false confession out of indignation (about the social scandal upon her family), revenge (when communists made fun of her at the riot) and envy (as Ammu accomplished what she never could: a true love relationship). Roy ironically makes the twins' reading backwards echo the feeling that she is "living her life backward" (22), as she renounced the material world as a young woman and in her old age she has a different relationship with the world, as we have seen above. Moreover, a supplicant of love, she is finally the one who destroys the love of Velutha and Ammu for it is she who goes to the police station to officially register a case against him. Not happy enough for having destroyed Velutha's life, she condemns Estha's by forcing him to make a false confession. And then, she provokes both Chacko and Mammachi in the wake of the grief caused by Sophie Mol's accidental death. As she could no longer stand the presence of Ammu, she prompts Chacko and his mother to demand Ammu's departure from Ayemenem. She is a clear exponent of the idea that what you have been deprived from in earlier age, becomes later a site of eager welcome.

6.1.2. Domestic violence.

Most of the male characters in the families of the novels exhibit --in a chronic way-- chauvinistic tendencies, which vary in degrees. Roy's assaults on the lopsided values of a male dominated society are characterized by their humor seasoned with irony and sarcasm, which tend to avoid extremities of aggression and hostility. All men in *GST* beat their wives or mistreat them, except for the underprivileged: the Dalit Velutha and the child Estha. Roy portrays all sorts of men with all sorts of ideologies and cultural levels as abusers.

The Kathakali men are uneducated and uncultured, and they beat their wives after the performance: "the Kathakali Men took off their make-up and went home to beat their wives. Even Kunti, the soft one with breasts" (236).⁵³ Pappachi is the son of a priest, educated, and holds a high position as an entomologist. He also beats his wife and child out of anger due to his personal frustrations. The story is that he discovered a moth but was not identified as a new species. Twelve years later, "lepidopterists decided that Pappachi's moth *was* in fact a separate species and genus hitherto unknown to science" (49). It was too late to claim his discovery and his moth was named after the Acting Director of the Department of

⁵³ In Kathakali dance, all female characters are played by men.

Entomology, a junior officer Pappachi had always disliked. This incident only helped to increase his ill-humor, “black moods, and sudden bouts of temper” (49). So he resented the attention his wife was getting with the business, and he started beating his wife more often than usual with a brass flower vase, actually every night to the point of even breaking the bow of her violin and throwing it to the river. After Chacko prohibited him to continue in that fashion, showing physical opposition, Pappachi planned a psychological revenge: by buying a car which nobody except him could go into, and by performing in front of visitors as if he were neglected in his home. Nothing of this worked, as Mammachi now had a new lord to worship: her son, who also displaces her by taking over the business in his own way. This shows that a woman’s position in the family sphere is always supervised by a male figure. Usually it is the husband, but later the son becomes responsible.

Mammachi’s daughter –Ammu—is mistreated in several ways. Being a child of a discordant marital relationship Ammu “had learned very quickly to disregard the Father Mother Bear stories she was given to read. In her version, Father Bear beat Mother Bear with brass vases. Mother Bear suffered those beatings with mute resignation” (180). Pappachi’s double standards are clearly shown, as he used to behave publicly as a gentleman with kind charming attitude, while at the same time, he used to drive his wife and children out of the house after cruel beatings: “They were beaten, humiliated, and then made to suffer the

subaltern male and the subordinated female become, then, comrades-in-arms in a losing battle against the forces of oppression. They are no individual in the society, but just an object, a role necessarily submissive.

Alladi Uma suggests that there is pride in suffering and due to years of inculcation about the necessity to accept her role, a woman may not like her husband to step in and do her work. Subtle indoctrination atrophies a woman's desire to change her position as an object and to exercise her free will; she compromises her stand, for she is taught the importance and necessity of a stable marriage and family –family as security, as a source of emotional strength. Even in sexual matters she has very little choice; her husband's needs must be fulfilled first (4). In this way, as we have seen above, Mammachi never questioned her role in the family and stoically accepted it. Mayamma, in *TFN*, follows the same pattern, though she gains liberation not in widowhood, as Mammachi did, but when she was repudiated by her husband.

Mayamma was married at twelve to a gambler who abused her.⁵⁵ When two years of marriage brought forth no child, she incurred the wrath of her mother-in-law, and did penance till she finally gave birth to a male child. Eight

⁵⁵ Marriages of girls under the age of eighteen and boys under twenty-one are illegal in India. However, forced marriages are common, especially in rural areas. Social activists say that mass marriages of children are performed in public and frequently ignored by the authorities. A Unicef report said millions of children across the world were forced into underage marriage either because of poverty, tradition, or because of their families' desire to protect them from unwanted sexual advances.

years later, her husband disappeared, taking with him all the money in the house. Mayamma was relieved by the fact that she did not have to suffer from his abuses anymore, but found her husband's replica in their son. He threatened and cursed and even beat her till he finally caught a fever and died, about what Mayamma "wept for her youth, her husband, the culmination of a life's handiwork: now all these had been snatched from her" (82).

Mayamma, the servant maid, is the only woman character in the novel who has had to work outside her home for a living. She is from a much poorer family, and she never really had any choice in the tragic events and losses of her life, which includes beatings from an alcoholic husband and her mother-in-law, painful miscarriages and treatment for the same, a wastrel son who dies. However, she is not the only one to undergo physical torment by misogynist men. The cases of Gauri –Devi's grandmother's servant--, and Uma –Devi's cousin-- are also relevant: "Gauri had worked in the Brahmin houses as long as she could remember. As long as she could remember, she had been working to build a little pile of dowry-gold, chain by chain, bangle by bangle" (31). Finally, she gets enough gold for a man who asks for twenty sovereigns, and accomplishes her goal to get married. She left her husband's house because she was mistreated, though the gossip was that she felt in love with her brother-in-law. On the other hand, Uma was also mistreated by her drunk husband and sexually abused by her father-in-law (35).

Rahel feels concern about her mother's loving her a little bit less. Thus their twinship is reflected, but their closeness is about to be destroyed as these are the first of a series of disasters that destroys the happiness of the family.

We are both drawn and repelled by the abject; nausea is a biological recognition of it. At that point, the only way Estha has to express the conventionally inexpressible is by vomiting: "Estha convulsed, but nothing came. Just thoughts. And they floated out and floated back in. Ammu couldn't see them. They hovered like storm clouds over the Basin City. But the basin men and basin women went about their usual basin business. Basin cars, and basin buses, still whizzed around. Basin Life went on" (108). As the quotation implies, life goes on but the sexual encounter with that man paralyzed Estha's life, because sometimes life *does not* go on with coca-cola, as the narrator explicitly points out later (313). After a few frustrated attempts, he finally "vomited a clear, bitter, lemony, sparkling, fizzy liquid. The acrid aftertaste of a Little Man's first encounter with Fear" (119).

Kristeva (1982:2-3) states that food loathing is the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection. She exemplifies the process with the nausea provoked by milk cream. In the case of Estha, it is the mere thought of free bottled soda⁵⁷ what provokes nausea in him due to the fact that it was "exchanged" for

⁵⁷ Notice the symbolism of the bottle of soda, as it can be interpreted as a metonymy of the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man's penis and semen.

placating the man's sexual desires. Kristeva continues saying that consequently, as food is not an other for a person, when vomiting "I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which "I" claim to establish *myself*" (3). As it is the mother and father who proffer the food, Kristeva explains that it separates the "I" from them, as the "I" expels that sign of their desire. It is interesting how Ammu considers him "a Clean Orangedrink Lemondrink Uncle" (111), an ironic situation at this point of the novel.

When the Orangedrink Lemondrink man met Ammu after Estha's trying to vomit, he offered Estha free sweets, which Estha refused, fearing the same incident when he accepted the free soda could be repeated. But Ammu not only forced him to accept and be nice but also pushed him to thank the man, and so he did "for the sweets, for the white egg white" (109), referring to the Orangedrink Lemondrink man's semen, which will be compared to egg white through the novel. Estha repulses what Ammu offered him, when she proposed him to wait with Uncle, distancing himself for the first time from his mother.

Following Kristeva's reasoning, Estha gives birth to himself amid the violence of vomit. This is the beginning of his separation from innocence and the first step towards the definitive separation from his mother. Kristeva inscribes the violence of the convulsions in the symbolic system, being unable to be integrated. In fact, from now on, Estha grows with the conviction that he needs to get ready as anything could happen, keeping him away gradually from conventions. That,

as we will see later, will provoke a series of disasters that will only increase his trauma and guilty feelings. Kristeva claims that the abject is a land of oblivion that is constantly remembered (8). Estha finds that the impossible constitutes his very being as the nausea will accompany him the rest of his childhood, being unable to detach himself from the thought of it.

Estha has symbolically kept the hand used to masturbate the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man away from his body. He feels even unable to give a name to what he has in his hand, and consequently it is referred to as the Thing, capitalized, as an important weight that Estha will carry with him "in his sticky Other Hand" (217) through his life. He imagined he was carrying an orange, later related to the tangerine-shaped radio that Ammu used to take with her to the river in order to feel free and dream.

This image of the improper and unclean -- Estha keeps his hand covered with semen away from his body, becoming thus an abject as it is opposed to the "I" -- is contrasted to the idea of the clean and proper of the peppermint children shown in the movie *The Sound of Music*. When Estha came back into the movie after having finished his free drink with the pedophile, while holding his imagined sticky orange, he faces "Clean children, like a packet of peppermints (...) They all loved each other. They were clean, white children" (105). It is interesting how in the twins' thoughts they intermingle their concerns with their hero's Captain von Clapp-Trapp, and everything comes down to the fact that their

white cousin Sophie Mol is the one who fulfills their hero's expectations, so in their minds Captain von Clapp-Trapp said that he definitely could not love them (107). At that passage in the movie there are many allusions to whiteness related to cleanness, which are compared to the dirtiness of Abhilash Talkies and the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man. This abrupt contrast between clean /dirty will be the reference to the beginning of Estha's obsession, because as an adult he will be maniacally concerned with tidiness and cleanness in order to psychologically compensate for his dirty hand.

All kinds of random events and words trigger Estha's memory of his encounter with the Orangedrink Lemondrink man. Estha will eventually substitute his desire to vomit for silence, after the second trauma that will separate him from his twin sister and mother. He is unable to articulate his own identity because he stopped to speak gradually and became a "Catapult" (91). He does not communicate, and his sexual molestation is constantly remembered. He carries the scars of abuse and is unable to explain them. His mental health is an area of concern for his sister as she is able to get into his subconscious. His tormented thoughts dominate his psyche and this can be identified in his difficulty to detach himself from menacing thoughts about the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man, as he is plagued by references to that man, which seem to remain locked in his internalized world.

Women's speech is very much related to their permission to pursue formal studies. Sunder analyses the theme of dowry deaths to exemplify this matter. She explains that most of the killings or driven to suicide by her husband and his family are reported as domestic accidents. The dying women themselves maintain silence over their killing, in this observing an extension of the prohibition enjoined upon the good Hindu wife on uttering the name of the husband, a taboo founded upon the belief that with each such utterance his life is shortened by a day (1993: 83). The magical powers of language are affirmed in similar prohibitions traditionally imposed upon the wife's reading and writing which were also claimed to be fatal for the husband. The interdiction of the Name acts exactly like its opposite, the incantation (the 'japa' or repeated chanting of the Name of the Lord, an important aspect of Hindu religious worship). In this way, the signified is mystified and exalted. Her testimony is still conditioned by the ideology that will not name the husband. Speech and silence –testimony and taboo–work towards the same end: the protection of the husband.

Female education started on a large scale in the late nineteenth century, but at that time it was designed to develop in a woman those qualities that were seen as essential to making her a good housewife –reticence in speech, subservience of manners, fortitude, and conscientiousness (Uma 7). Ammu's mother –Mammachi- - as well as Devi's –Sita--had been forced to forego their love for the violin and *veena* respectively. The moment Mammachi's husband is informed by the violin

teacher about her exceptional talents, the lessons are stopped and he even destroys the instrument later. On the other hand, Sita is from a rich family and had been trained as an exponent of the *veena*. After her marriage she had continued to practice the instrument till her father-in-law, enraged when her practice one day delayed the domestic chores, roared at her: "put that *veena* away. Are you a wife, a daughter-in-law?" (30). On that day she broke the strings of the *veena* and became a "perfect housekeeper, a blameless wife" (101). She learns all about the virtues of her guiding mottoes –good housekeeping, good taste, hard work. It is only after her husband's death that Sita is able to take control of her own life, to enjoy gardening and playing the *veena*. Mammachi is also presented playing the violin after becoming a widow. In spite of her blindness, she plays Handel for her granddaughter, while the audience could notice how "on her scalp, carefully hidden by her scanty hair, Mammachi had raised, crescent-shaped ridges. Scars of old beatings from an old marriage. Her brass vase scars" (166).

Women's education has been an important element not just of statist initiatives for development but also of feminist agendas of reform. It is often projected as the panacea to all the ills of womankind, the magic key to open the cell of second-class citizenship. But what is often overlooked is the particular function of education in capitalist society and in the ideological connections established between women's subjectivity and their bodies. If the family has been a key institution for the reproduction of "social relations of production",

educational institutions are equally crucial as Ideological State Apparatuses: they play a central role in consolidating gender stereotypes through the lessons taught (be it in literature, history, civics, or even science), the options encouraged, and the questions marginalized. Thus, education in itself, as it has existed over time, cannot really guarantee women equal opportunities or improved lives.

Mahesh, eager to see his wife take responsibility of his home, disapproves of Devi's spending so much time with Baba and Mayamma. He detects one day that she has been reading in one of Baba's books about "a *kritya*, a ferocious woman who haunts and destroys the house in which women are insulted" (69). He asks with irritation: "Did your mother need books to tell her how to be a wife? I have never met a woman more efficient than your mother" (70), and blames Devi's education for her discontent. He keeps comparing her unfavorably with her mother, her grandmother and his colleagues' wives who appear more cheerful and efficient: "This is what comes of educating a woman. Your grandmother was barely literate. Wasn't she a happier woman than you are? What is it you want?" (74). On another occasion, he pointedly praises his junior colleague Ashok's wife, Tara: "Mahesh admires Tara's boundless energy, her bubbling, infectious enthusiasm: 'she keeps herself busy but has enough time for her children,' he says. 'I have never seen such well-behaved children before. Lucky Ashok!'" (56).

Mahesh feels that Devi should have something more useful to do than listening to the unreal stories of Baba and Mayamma. He has nothing but

contempt for "Baba and his unreal saints from a glorious past," because Baba has not learned "how things work in real life" (55). He also feels that an overfamiliar treatment of Mayamma would make her complacent. Initially, therefore, he tells Devi to do more housework because that would mean getting things done more efficiently, and because Mayamma was getting old and needed help. But when Devi is unable to cope with the work of constantly entertaining his official guests and their families, far from lending her a hand he tries to make her feel guilty at her incompetence and her lack of consideration towards him: "surely you don't think I can manage work at the office as well as at home?" (71).

She once suggests that she could look for a job of some kind outside the house to keep her mind engaged, but Mahesh quietly disapproves of this. Devi feels strangled. He suggests absently that she could go to Tara's painting classes if she really needed to go out of the house. But when Devi joins the painting classes, she discovers to her dismay that her identity there is completely subsumed under his: all the students there were wives of juniors working under Mahesh and she felt alienated from their "voices and laughter, eager to impress the unfriendly manager's wife" (57). It is very significant the fact that when she returns home and looks at the mirror, she sees "a pale, drooping figure, almost as lifeless as the stuffed bird, a grotesque study in still-life" (57), from which we suspect that Devi has not defined her identity yet.

Inexorably, their marriage deteriorates, and both feel deeply disappointed with each other. He finds her lazy and neurotic, her upbringing faulty. She refuses to uncomplainingly waste her hard-earned education polishing the floor for the stranger who tied the *thali* round her neck. Her formal education in the US, a marker of modernity, is by itself hardly ever adequate in enabling her happiness in marriage; on the contrary, it makes her suspicious of it. The female characters of *GST* do not pursue a formal education, either because it is seen as a waste of money and time, or in Rahel's case, because she was disappointed by the established conservative rules that refrained her from developing her own personality. Ammu had discontinued her studies after high school, as her father believed that "a college education was an unnecessary expense for a girl" (38), while her brother Chacko was encouraged to study at Oxford. With this double standard, the reader is aware of the injustices meted out to her because of her gender. Ammu had no other choice but to stay with her parents and help her mother with housework, while she waited for marriage proposals. Those never came because she had not enough money for a dowry. However, Baby Kochamma—one generation older—was sent to the US to pursue formal studies, but only because she would not reconvert, and because he realized that she developed a reputation. Her father decided, then, that "since she couldn't have a husband there was no harm in her having an education" (26).

We can notice a contrast between the siblings Ammu-Chacko and Estha-Rahel. Rahel transgressed the school rules "*as though she didn't know how to be a girl*"(17), and was expelled for smoking, colliding with the senior students, and stealing and setting fire to a hair bun, which resulted in an accidental release of her spirit. So, she grew 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" (17). Then, she studied Architecture in Delhi, where she met Larry McCaslin and went to Boston with him; she "drifted into marriage like a passenger drifts towards an unoccupied chair in an airport lounge. With a Sitting Down sense" (18). Unconventionally, Roy shows a male character refusing to go to college to stay at his father's home: "to the embarrassment of his father and stepmother, he began to do the housework. As though in his own way he was trying to earn his keep" (11).

6.2. Religion: the manipulation of knowledge.

6.2.1. The didactic purpose of Indian mythology.

The oldest examples of fantasy can be traced to stories written by the Sumerians around 2700 B.C. They are believed to have all the elements of fantasy such as gods, monsters, plants that confer immortality, and so on. There are events depicted in the fantasies that area accepted as literal truths when they belong to a particular religion. The stories of the *Ramayana* have been considered as literal truth and became myths.

History and fantasy can be differentiated when a particular event is described. History gives chronological and factual details, while fantasy adds its own magic and charm to the events. Reality is inverted and recombined in fantasy, but it does not escape reality. Existing as a parasitical or symbiotic relation to the real, the fantastic cannot exist independently of that 'real' world.

Modern fantasy includes in itself myth, legend and folk tale to fabricate a plot that is interesting and entertaining too. Myth or mythos is anything uttered by word of mouth. Different authors have stated the meaning of myth differently. As for what appears in *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, "a myth is

a story which is not 'true', which involves (as a rule) supernatural beings --or at any rate supra-human beings. Myth is always concerned with creation. It explains how something came into existence" (525).

Stories do not possess the authenticity, thereby they can be regarded as historical events. Passing from generation to generation, these stories are consecutive fictional renderings where the authorship is obscure. Religious in its form and content, myth motivates the people to follow ethic and moral codes and expands their religious outlook. Myth is a story with enormous scope for adaptation. It is considered universal in its overtones because single authorship is not accounted for. Although the idiom for the myth is supernatural, it deals with family and social issues. If gods are not acceptable, human beings are deified, divinized and raised to a pedestal where they are replaced with the gods. Realism, as we are explained in the Cuddon's dictionary, represents the world as it is:

Philosophy distinguishes two basic concepts concerning reality: correspondence and coherence. The correspondence theory suggests that the external world is knowable by scientific inquiry, by the accumulation of data, by documentation, by definition. The coherence theory suggests that the external world is knowable (or perhaps can be understood) by intuitive perceptions, by insight. Thus, correspondence will require referential language, coherence,

emotive language. The former will imply an objective point of view; the latter a subjective (728).

Story telling is the most ancient among the arts of narration. These stories depict the culture of a land. They bring to light the social, religious and political traditions of the time. Stories are told to highlight a particular person or event so that future generations can remember them. All art is created to instruct and delight. Similarly, stories were also written to instruct the populace and delight them. The narration of these experiences is carried from generation to generation and gives further scope for new additions to the narrative. A particular narrator might add her/his own experiences and delete something that is not applicable to her/his age. It is in this process of subverting and converting reality that fantasy rises.

In the context of the Indian novel, there has been a considerable influence of the European novel. Like the European novelist, the Indian one also followed the linear and sequential movement of events that took place along a temporal axis. In spite of this, many Indian writers are unconsciously influenced by their culture literature and other oral traditions. The Indian writers imitated and emulated their western counterparts, but were slow in catching up with the western theory of realism and using it in their novels.

The sudden emergence of the long narrative fiction, found itself entwined with works like *Kadambari* and the other older traditions of India such as the

Puranas, the epics and other folk and oral literature. This entanglement with the past and the history of the land gave the modern Indian writer a wider expanse to experiment with her creation. M. Mukherjee says that “therefore the Indian creative writer often turned to a more expansive past where human beings seemed to be of a larger stature, where valour and heroism counted, and where glory and splendour seemed infinite. Second, the so-called historical novel could be fitted more easily into the traditional concept of story-telling than realistic fiction of the western variety” (45).

Familiarity with popular forms of narrative and the cycle of Persian legends were available for the Indian writer to expand her creative canvas. Heroic adventures, chivalry, magic and love were the predominant themes of these stories. A preoccupation with particular recurring patterns of thought and experience is shared by the contemporary Indian English novelist. For most of these writers, whether in India or abroad, India is the central metaphor and framework. Serving as a concept, a fact, and symbol, India becomes a network of cultures, myths and relationships for the writer.

The Indian novelists could not remain unaffected by the social, political and economic conditions around them. In their own way they tried to investigate their situation, sometimes ideologically and objectively. Sometimes the dominant mode of expression of these novelists is the re-vision of religion, history, and mythology. Literary fantasy is determined by its social context. Recognizing all

such factors, the author should be placed in relation to the historical, social, economic, political and sexual determinants of her land and the world at large to understand this kind of literature, which does not conform to any particular time.

The popularity of the art of story telling has been proved from ancient times. In fact, India is the origin of various European and middle-eastern fables and folk-tales.⁵⁸ The existing mass of folk tales and the development of the Indian story can be traced from the *Rigveda* to the *Brahmanas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Puranas* and the *Kavyas*. Based on Gunadhya's *Brhathkatha*, written in Paisaci, the *Katha Sarit Sagara* of Somadeva is a great work. Somadeva belonged to the eleventh century and it is believed that some stories go back to even much earlier times. It is accepted by most critics that these stories were probably collected from the folk tales of that age and in some cases Somadeva himself could have included his own narrative.

The Katha (story) is the earliest form of literature. When the human being started narrating an event that had happened to a friend, it was the beginning of the Katha. With the development of language and literary forms, the Katha – which had simple beginnings—assumed different forms and names as can be seen from the varieties of the stories available and their description in theoretical works, in Sanskrit and Prakrit. Thus, in course of time, Katha lost its general sense

⁵⁸ I owe the historical overview of Indian folk tales to R. Lalitha Suhasini, who kindly let me use her M.Phil dissertation for this purpose.

of a story and came to be used in the restricted sense of a particular type of narrative in prose by some Sanskrit literary critics.

Krsna Yajurveda is believed to be the oldest prose literature in Sanskrit, though it dealt with the sacrificial formulae. Patanjali's *Vasavadata*, *Sumanottara*, *Bhaimarathi* are some other worlds of prose. Bana's *Harshacharita*, dealing with the life of emperor Harsha Vardhana and his sister Rajeshwari, gained great popularity as a historical Kavya. *Kadambari*, a collection of linked love stories, is another magnum opus of Bana. The *Champu Kavyas* also developed during the time of Trivikrama Bhatta who wrote *Damyanthikatha* and *Madalasachampu*. With the popularity of the *Champus*, some authors worked hard at this branch of prose. *Ramayanachampu* of Bhoja and Abhinava Kalidasa's *Champubhagavatam* were also acclaimed for their style.

As an original and fruitful branch of literature, the fables and fairy tales of India had conceived the responsibility of preaching morals. It is believed that some of these fables and fairy tales were first written in Prakrit and then in Sanskrit, as was found in the case of the *Brhatkatha*. These stories catered to those sectors of society that were deprived of the right to the knowledge contained in the *Vedas*, *Puranas* and the *Kavyas*. The *Jataka* tales of Boddhisattvas were also written in Pali Prakrit. Rao classifies the fables as: "the first consists of (a) collections of stories compiled for the purpose of religious edification such as the *Jatakas* and other story books of the Buddhists or Jainas written in Prakrit and (b)

story books written in Sanskrit for the express purpose of inculcating political doctrine and worldly wisdom, such as the *Panchatantra*" (1961: 140).

The works intended to delight the community were composed in Prakrit, like the *Brhatkatha* and the *Sukasaptati*. The novels and romances like the *Dasakumaracharita* were also popular. The unending chain of fables interwoven with fables was fabricated with the concealed purpose of associating them with human life, and thereby helping human beings in following the path of righteousness. With *Brhatkatha* begins the emergence of the popular tale and the *Panchatantra* heralded the fables into Sanskrit literature.

The *Vetalapanchavimsati* is available in about four recensions, without confirming to any particular age. In this narrative, a corpse possessed by the demon, *Vetala* narrates twenty-five stories. King Vikramaditya is supposed to carry the corpse to the burning ghat from the tree where it was hanging but in total silence. If the king spoke the corpse would suddenly disappear from his shoulder and again hang on the tree as usual. But the corpse hold the king stories and asked him questions. If he answered, *Vetala* would disappear and if he failed his head would break into pieces. The stories in this collection instructed the people of the land in various aspects including wisdom and righteousness.

The *Simhasanadvatrimshaka* is a compilation of thirty-two stories about the great king Vikramaditya and his various valorous deeds which are told by the maiden figures adorning the throne of Vikramaditya, to King Bhoja of Dhara

when he tries to ascend that throne. The throne was accidentally found by King Bhoja during an excavation. The maiden figures ask King Bhoja to ascend the throne if he considered himself as worthy as the late King Vikramaditya who had the great qualities called Dvattrimshalakshanani. After each tale is narrated the maiden figure that told the story vanished. With the last maiden figure vanishing, the throne also disappears.

The *Sukasaptati* is introduced beautifully by a romantic setting. It is very popular because of its intriguing stories and narrative. The main story is of an absent-minded merchant who had left behind his wife in the company of a wise parrot. The wife is not loyal to the merchant and tries to stray, but is nervous about the consequences of such actions and asks the faithful bird for advice. The wise bird pretends to come to her rescue and narrates many wondrous tales, presenting a newer and fresher lesson every night. These stories became very popular and have been translated into all the Dravidian dialects.

The didactic fables are spread throughout the *Upanishads*, *Puranas*, *Brahmanas* and the great epics like the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Like the parables in the *Bible*, they talk about various laws and moral teachings. Patanjali's *Mahabhasya* is also a great example of such parables; the various *nyayas* like *Markatakishoranyaya* and *Kakataliya* make them good examples of didactic fables. The *Panchatantra* is also one such work that is available in five recensions.

Githa Hariharan shows a fascination with the Epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, the folktales of India and of Arabia, and other oral traditions. Two of her novels: *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992) and *When Dreams Travel*⁵⁹ (1999) are based on the subversion of traditional mythological tales. A great deal of intertextuality is seen in these novels, as well as the subversion of fantasy to present reality. On the other hand, Arundhati Roy is influenced by the tradition of Kerala about Kathakali, a classical dance originated in the first half of seventeenth century A.D., which performs stories from the Epic *Mahabharatha*.⁶⁰

6.2.2. Hinduism regarding women's position: the authors' revisionary project.

Both Hariharan and Roy allow their characters to make an appropriative, revisionary reading of the religious texts of Hinduism to apply to their situations. Hariharan takes on Brahminism, and the ways it has been used to oppress women, and Roy takes on the hypocrisy of Syrian Christians towards caste issues, and how a huge tradition of mythological tales is manipulated for the sake of economic profit. The significance of the extensive use of myths in some forms of

⁵⁹ This novel is based on *A Thousand and One Nights*. In fact, it seems to be a sequel of it, told from a feminist point of view. Once again, subverting the fantastic ending of the work, *When Dreams Travel* looks at the life of the heroine Shahrzad after all the thousand tales have been told.

⁶⁰ Kathakali is generally presented in temples during festivals, starting at nine o'clock at night till early morning. It can only be performed by men and consists of hand and face gestures in twenty-four alphabets called Mudras in Sanskrit.

feminist writing is that far from thematizing supernatural reality or showcasing the mores of an ancient culture, it uncovers a subordinated female history of private experiences and silences. Both authors attack religious orthodoxy in the Indian social context. The female characters are a product of a culture that largely negates any meritocratic individualism and envisages an entirely subordinate role for women.

Myths have been often but uncritically employed by Indian novelists to strengthen the structure of the novels. However, writers such as Shashi Deshpande, Meena Alexander and Suniti Manjoshi show meaningful and creative re-interpretations of myth, as patriarchy has used them to keep women oppressed. They show a strong awareness of the need for retelling mythology from a feminist perspective, and so does Hariharan in *The Thousand Faces of Night*. Bruce Robbins states that the purpose is to undertake myth-making and to explore “the possibility and imperative to fashion alternative narratives [and an] alternative rhetoric that will work in the circumstances where we find ourselves” (15).

Rosemary M. George discusses Indian novels that deal with the theme of the search of a feminine self in the midst of a domestic crisis of some sort. She writes of the women protagonists:

What [they] desire remains undefined and elusive... And yet one can gather that it is a desire for something more than mere material comforts. It is the desire for an imagined self and setting that allows

escape from the mundane domestic routine of everyday life *and* from the usual alternative that a more public life (as working woman or as a socially committed public figure) would provide (133).

She characterizes these novels, which deal with the lives of such women, as representing elite plotting. Their predominant feature is that they construct “the figure of a contemporary, upper class, urban Indian female subject who is unsatisfied and unhappy, yet lacks the means to change the world or the subject positions she finds herself trapped in” (131).

Given the ideological division of labor implicit in the institutions of domesticity and the family, especially when these are marked as the spiritual-cultural-feminine spaces in postcolonial nations like India, the burden of propagating and emulating the idealized mythological characters is heavier on women. As a result, Gulati points out

The society’s expectation from women, the patterns of women’s lives, and women’s own ideals and orientations to life are significantly shaped by the models of womanly conduct set out in stories, legends and songs preserved by the past. The most pervasive cultural ideal for womanhood is ‘Woman as a selfless giver, someone who gives endlessly, gracefully, smilingly, whatever the demands, however unreasonable the demands may be and even of they are harmful to the woman herself’ (83).

If we need to analyze one's position in a religion, we also need to be aware of the way in which religious differences are being utilized and mobilized for many reasons by many people in power and by the state. Class, caste, regional, gender divisions that are changing and historically specific reveal that these entities are as constructed as is the nationalist history of India. Hariharan's is not a narrative of stereotypes, and neither is Roy's. So, one has to be clear as to which particular tradition one has in mind. The dominant Hindu tradition that we have in mind is the one that has governed, and continues to govern the attitudes to women in India today, namely, the framework of ideas, attitudes, and institutions as codified by Manu.

Vasudha Narayanan, in the book *Feminism and World Religions*, analyses the images of women in the Hindu tradition, reinforces the idea that myths can be manipulated by those who are in power positions. Hariharan herself says in an interview with Rosemary Sorensen that myths are being distorted and certain people are using them as instruments of fundamentalism, proposing to reinterpret them from the point of view of our times and life: "The cowardly way is to say, well all of this is obscurantist (...). The other way is to constantly reinterpret. A myth only grows alive when you reinterpret, when you see it from the point of view of your life, of your times" (45). Narayanan's chapter becomes essential in understanding the manipulation of mythological texts by male Brahmins. Narayanan argues that it was the British who wanted to 'create' a coherent set of

legal tools for India, and therefore employed *male Brahmins* to translate what they believed to be important scriptures. Through this process some texts began to receive the notoriety that they enjoy now, such as the laws of Manu (*Manu Smriti* or *Manava Dharma Sastra*). This text, while important in its own way, was “but one of many legal texts, but received undue importance after this time. Texts like the *Narada Smriti*, which were liberal in their attitude toward women, did not make it to stardom” (35). In doing this, the British promoted some texts (on the basis of their Brahmin consultants), even as the prescriptions in these *shastras* were not known or followed in many parts of India. There is a sense of dissonance between scripture and practice in certain areas, of *dharma* and the role of women and *sudras*. While it is important to stress that law books may not have been considered to be law in many places, nevertheless, the pictures of the ideal, chaste woman, obedient to her husband, which came through the androcentric literature of the stories and legends found in the Hindu epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, became part of the dominating ideology in the upper castes of society. The models were Sita, Sukanya, and Savitri. The story began to imply that if women were chaste and pure, their husbands would not die.

Referring to the gender of the supreme being, Narayanan argues that it has not been profusely debated within the many Hindu traditions because even the earliest texts provide a variety of prisms through which one can perceive the ultimate reality. The ultimate is a man (*purusha*) according to some hymns of the

Vedas: this God is variously identified in later Hinduism as Vishnu, Shiva, or one of their many manifestations or incarnations. Some texts, especially the *puranas*, portray the supreme as one of the many Goddesses. Others speak of the supreme being as androgynous (*Ardhanarisvara*, that is, as half-man, half-woman) in a literal and metaphoric way of conceptualizing the ineffable. Vishnu and Lakshmi are worshiped as the inseparable couple. The Upanishads and some later *bhakti* poems (especially those addressed to the lord as *nirguna* or without attributes) say that the supreme one is beyond gender, beyond all dualities, and beyond number. It is neither male nor female (66).

Goddesses are one form of primal energy among many. Both men and women have been devotees of the goddesses in India. While the Sanskrit hegemonic literature tries to contain the many goddesses in the roles of Lakshmi and Parvati, and makes allowances for Durga and Kali who are seen as distinct but sometimes as interconnected alter egos of Parvati in the eyes of the devotees, the reality calls for dozens of other *matas* and *ammans*, mothers of all forms and shapes in India. In Tamilnadu, the geographical setting of *TFN*, there are the seven sisters, who although thought of as 'village goddess' are as urban as they come.

Narayanan shows us many examples of positive attitudes towards women in religious texts, liberal attitudes in general. The Vedas, particularly the *Rigveda*, point to a society that was free of the inhibitions of later Hinduism. The Vedic *rishis* as well as the laymen relished beef and alcoholic drink. Nor is there in the

Rigveda any mention of child marriage, ban on the remarriage of widows, the caste system, *karma*, rebirth or *avatar*. Many nineteenth-century reformers made use of the resources to challenge unacceptable practices. For instance, Raja Rammohun Roy appealed to the Upanishads to argue against *sati*, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar to the *Parasharsmriti* (in place of *Manusmriti*) to struggle against the ban on widow remarriage, and Swami Dayananda to the Vedas against image worship. And so on and so forth, even Gandhi used the traditional symbols of Hinduism to mobilize the Indian masses and forged a mass movement for the freedom of the country.

Bhakti and *shakti* are major components in female religiosity in the many Hindu traditions.⁶¹ Narayanan states that the higher-caste woman had a far more repressed lifestyle than that of the lower castes. Perceptions of Hindu women have been based primarily on the Sanskrit literature produced by Brahmin men and the practices imposed on high-caste women, and this has led to the commonly held stereotype that Hindu women have had very little freedom. These groups, however small their percentage in terms of overall population, served as reference groups for society and were considered worthy of emulation for socially upward bound castes, and their influence in matters of women's freedom and rights has been insidious (Narayanan 28). However, this image is being re-directed towards

⁶¹ *Bhakti* means 'devotion,' in which there is both surrender and mutual love. *Shakti* means 'power,' in which we find vigor and energy.

a more individualistic one, as Hariharan proposes a new generation of characters that dare to step out brahminical traditions. With this, she accomplishes her aim of demystifying the stereotyped female role.

Traditionally, epic poets sing the glory of other men, armed men, to be precise. The ideals of the epic world obviously do not have much to share with women, nor do the women enjoy the heroic values. There is little they can do there –other than get abducted or rescued, or pawned, or molested, or humiliated in some way or other.⁶² These texts embody masculine traits and ways of feeling and pursue masculine interests in masculine fields of action. Female characters, when they play any role, are marginalized and subordinated to the males and are presented either as complementary or in opposition to masculine desires and enterprises. However, every myth in India is re-told on a daily basis. An example of this is the women's folk tradition in India, when they sing the story of Rama. Sen has made an interesting study of these tales and has found out that the responses echo each other in spite of the diversity along India.⁶³ They all deal with the most difficult or dangerous areas of a woman's life, the intense moments of

⁶² Notice, however, that Chandrabati composed a *Ramayana*, looking at it with her own eyes in the sixteenth century in Bengali. There she tells only the story of Sita and critiqued Rama from a woman's point of view. The Brahmins rejected Chandra's text as a weak and incomplete one.

⁶³ Nabaneeta Dev Sen's article "Sisters in Sorrow: Contemporary Indian Women's Re-telling of the Rama Tale" (201-220) is very interesting for an insight in women's *Ramayana*, and how they have used the myth in an alternative way. If patriarchy has used the Sita myth to silence women, the village women have picked up the Sita myth to give themselves a voice. They have found a suitable mask in the myth of Sita, a persona through which they can express themselves, speak of their day-to-day problems, and critique patriarchy in their own fashion. However, this happens only because the women's songs are outside the canon.

insecurity or physical risk; they all complain about neglect and denial of their rights as they show women have no social identity of their own. Hindu culture's normative construction of suffering and giving serves Hariharan's aim of subversion by showing female characters who find the power to defy their fathers and social norms. In relation to this, Hariharan, in an interview with Joel Kuortti, stated:

I stumbled onto the idea of the normative myth the kind that tells you what sort of wife you should be, what sort of daughter-in-law and so forth. Of course, once you get onto the normative myth you have to look at the other side of the coin, the subversive myth, the survival-teaching myth. (...) In a sense it was unlearning the canon that had been fed to me in college, and relearning these myths and tales so I could twist them for my own purposes (9).

Hariharan rewrites Hindu myths to invite revisionism, with a *bildungsroman* plot structure. She further questions the folkloric assumptions on the relation between the quest and romance plots, as we saw above. Two points need to be made about the use of myths in *TFN*. Hariharan, through her vivid and powerful invocation of stories and women characters from the classical past, attempts to interrupt and redouble Devi's narrative in order to highlight the long history of gender war within Brahminism. The silenced questionings and

phantasmagoric identifications serve to point to the continuities in the transgressive impulses that animate real and imagined women in India.⁶⁴

6.2.3. Women in the Brahminical world.

The first part of the novel explores the tensions inherent in the transition of her adolescent self into her womanhood. She accomplishes this by revising the ancient mythological stories as well as by discovering the stories of suffering by the women who surround her. Devi's growth as an individual is traced in the novel through her changing responses to the stories she hears from her grandmother –Pati--, her father-in-law –Baba--, and Mayamma –his housekeeper, among others. In the prelude to the novel, Devi laments that while she prefers the whole well-rounded story, she has grown up hearing the “sharp, jagged, tip-of-the-iceberg” variety, the kind that prompts her to “ask questions” (vii). These stories –about mythical figures like Gandhari, Damayanti, Amba, Ganga, and the devoted wife of snake husband—tell of wronged and suffering women. However, Mayamma warns her that questions are not for women, that to accept the given without asking questions is the duty of women.⁶⁵ The stories relating to daily life

⁶⁴ I thank Madhu Sinha for pointing this out to me. See her M. Phil. dissertation “The Family in Question: A Reading of “Breast Giver” and *The Thousand Faces of Night*.”

⁶⁵ See Kancha Ilaiah for a critique of brahminical patriarchy about the prohibition of questioning: “brahminical patriarchy operates by conditioning two different kinds of mentality. On the one hand, it creates a mind that can control, manipulate and finally structures: the male mind. On the other

and mundane situations told by Pati, Devi's uneducated grandmother, have left the most deeply etched and disturbing images in Devi's mind: as she sees it these stories constitute "a prelude to my womanhood, an initiation into its subterranean possibilities" (51). And this is because within them are encrypted the inarticulable meanings of what has always meant to be a woman: "in my grandmother's mind, the link between her stories and our lives was a very vital one" (30).

As a child, Devi looks forward each summer to escape her parental home, ruled by her mother's motto of order, reason and progress to Pati's world, a richer ambiguous domain of myths, ritual cleansing. At the beginning of the novel, in response to the curious child's queries about the conditions of the women around them, the grandmother narrated Devi a story appropriate to the occasion instead of giving a direct reply. In this way, Devi gets cultural prescriptions framed in a patriarchal context. Her childhood in the village where her grandmother lives symbolizes the cultural background, as the stories she tells are atemporal, that is, Hariharan uses the technique of juxtaposing the past with the present as consequence of the link produced by the lives of the people and the stories they tell.

Marriage, home, the claims of the family are traditional goals set for the female child. Childhood becomes very important because of the process of

hand, it forms a mind that can be manipulated, controlled and structures: the female mind. It does not provide any scope for questioning, debate and discourse" (44).

socialization. It is an important phase in the construction of the female identity because many values which women are expected to function by are being imbibed not just consciously.⁶⁶ The myths her grandmother tells her say that the welfare of the family is more important than the welfare of the individual, so that she is taught what a woman is, which becomes synonymous with being a mother and is inculcated with the ideas of patience and martyrdom. Myths put us in touch with the unspoken wishes and dreams and desires of a group of people in a society. Religion, based on the tradition of patriarchal control, represses women sexually, emotionally and psychologically.

Through myths, girls are taught their roles in society, but the prescriptive aspect of myth is far from what Devi gets. Predefined concepts are supposed to be unquestionable, unchallengeable and transmitted through the culture. But Devi's childish questions are a proof of her intelligence and non-conformism. At first sight, her grandmother's stories are cultural norms, which reflect the rules and tradition placed on Indian women. However, they also show a number of subversive possibilities, because they are double-edged, ambiguous and open to

⁶⁶ Brahminism proposes that by the mere act of worshiping her husband, a woman does not need to seek any other salvation. Again, this idea has been manipulated as there have been cases of female devotees and gurus. According to Sunder, a Brahmin is male by definition; a Brahmin woman is neither formally initiated into the rites of castehood, nor does she follow any separate practices of Brahminhood, except as they relate to her connection with the male Brahmin. A Brahmin is born into his caste, a Brahmin woman is born his daughter, so Brahmin woman is a derived identity (1993: 66). The supremacy of Brahminism as a cultural and ideological value is still prevalent in contemporary India. Sunder keeps on explaining that as long as the identity of 'wife' allows her to maintain also the identity of 'Brahmin woman'; and thus create a zone of safety, she holds on to it.

interpretation, as Hariharan herself claims in an interview with Susheila Nasta (23). These stories can be used at the simplest level as guidelines for behavior but if we go further, they subvert the conventional male-created myths about women.

Devi, as a woman, is defined as negative to the man, as an object of fantasy who occupies the place of the Other, and so, she is mystified as the object of desire of male desire. Hindu mythology has created multifaceted goddesses, dichotomizing them –the creative and the terrible—so that men adore mothers but demean women. However, Devi means goddess, the spouse of Siva, who unites both the personalities: the ferocious and the sublime. It is only Devi –whether benevolent or cruel—who among the goddesses has an independent personality of her own, thus giving a symbolic significance to her name, a woman who looks for her identity, breaking the social barriers, which limit her personality.⁶⁷ Devi's grandmother has offered her new possible interpretations of the legends. We could argue that Devi's are subversions of received myths and fables, but often a wishful fantasizing of Pati's happy endings or her own impotent desires for avenging goddesses. For Devi, the magical truth of Pati's tales and its ideal mould cracks when exposed to the politics of truth of patriarchal society. This andocentric ideology demands the fixity of an idealized image of female subjectivity and does not allow the fluidity of reconstruction.

⁶⁷ For a wider sense of the name Devi, see Dimmitt and Buitenen's *Classical Hindu Mythology* (1993: 150), and Kinsley's *Hindu Goddesses* (1987: 136).

Devi feels that Baba's stories were "less spectacular, they ramble less" (51), yet they are also significant, for they define the limits of women's existence. His stories are "never flabby with ambiguity, or even fantasy; a little magic perhaps, but nothing beyond the strictly functional" (51). They make one concise point: that the noble and wise saints of the past lived according to the laws of time-tested tradition. These stories "had for their center-point an exacting touchtone for a woman, a wife" (51). So much so, that his own wife, Parvatiamma, had left him and his home to go away to the pilgrim retreat of Kashi.

In *TFN*, Baba married Parvati, and treated her with the same indifference and presumption as his son treats Devi. And although Mayamma reports to Devi that "everybody loved her (...) She gave us all a home," (63) one day Parvati suddenly walks out of the house, ostensibly for spiritual gratification in Kashi. Countless years of rearing children, fasting, offering *pujas* and singing *bhajans* had taken their toll. Without giving any reasons, she hands Mayamma the bunch of keys, and departs with the resigned comment: "you know how to look after him, and keep him comfortable (...) Look after the children. My prayers will be with all of you" (63). When Baba heard about the news he acted in a coldly way and stated: "She has made her choice. For a woman who leaves her home in search of a god, only death is a home-coming" (64). According to his views it is the idiom of

Sanskrit *dharmic* narrative to show how wives like Savitri, Sukanya, Arundati, and others who surrender to their husbands, get miraculous powers.⁶⁸

However, the case is that, as Narayanan points out, this idiom is applied to religious *bhakti* also, to the negation of the *dharmic* ideals of proper married life. Among the cases of the women gurus and mediums, we encounter several models of marriage: some never marry (Amritanandamayi Ma), some marry but remain celibate (Anandamayi Ma, Ma Sharada), others bear children and continue to live with their husbands (Tara Devi, Sunithi), and still others bear children and then renounce them (Guru Ma Jyotishanand Bharati). The only common denominator is that the married life has been subsumed under or has totally eliminated the *bhakti* or *shakti* experience (68). Devi, who has been indoctrinated by Baba's Brahminical ideals, wonders about Parvati, who "had, like a man in a self-absorbed search for a god, stripped herself of the life allotted to her, the life of a householder. Had she misread Baba's stories? Or had she turned them upside down and taken the contradictions, the philosophical paradoxes, to their logical conclusion?" (64).

Baba quotes Manu, the second century B.C. encoder of Hindu customs and duties, whose patriarchal dictates were markedly anti-women. His stories are a

⁶⁸ Notice that Devi's mother-in-law is from the Indian state Tamil Nadu. For an insight on women devotees in the state, see Egnor's "On the Meaning of Sakti to Women in Tamil Nadu," (1980).

contrast to Pati's, and now Devi dreams of becoming a *kritya*.⁶⁹ Parvatiamma's story captures Devi's thoughts as also the mythical tale of Amba. She is fascinated with this ultimate fantasy: "a woman avenger who could earn manhood through her penance" (39-40). It is this defiance of gender stereotyping and subversion of Baba's tales that lays a hold on Devi's imagination. The combination of male power and female gentleness and sensitivity that she seeks in men and women, remains an impossible quest. Her quest is for a male akin to her idealized father, of whom death had deprived her, the rather spineless, ineffectual, gentle idealist, who, like her, sought something beyond the mundane and not finding it, settled like her for cunning and clandestine passions (85).

All the myths and women that have passed through her life come together in her dreams saying: "Like Sati you must burn yourself to death, like Sati you must vindicate your husband's honour and manhood. Like Parvati you must stand neck-deep in cold, turbulent waters, the hungry, predatory fish devouring your feet. Like Haimavati you must reap the bountiful harvest that will be yours of you embrace the lingam on the sacrificial altar" (94). These are the voices she has grown up with. Devi is filled with fury as she is expected to swallow her hard-earned education and follow her husband. Of the numberless mythical women

⁶⁹ A Kali figure, who avenges insults heaped on women.

who haunt Devi's narrative, the most enduring image is that of a warrior-goddess who rides a tiger and cuts off demonic male heads.⁷⁰

Devi feels the need to reinterpret and see for herself what myth means for her, challenging from the very beginning the tradition. An example is the story of Gandhari, which appears in the *Mahabharata*; she finds out that she has been married to a blind prince and she ties a life-long blindfold. Her grandmother said that what motivated Gandhari was to show her royal blood by self-sacrifice, but the lesson Devi learnt was different: "The lesson that was more difficult to digest was human anger: that it could seep into every pore of a womanly body and become the very bloodstream of her life. I listened to my grandmother's interpretation of Gandhari's choice, but the lesson I learnt was different. The lesson brought me five steps closer to adulthood" (29). Another myth that can be doubly interpreted is the story of Ganga, a woman who drowned her seven children because they were the reincarnation of gods and she tried to get them back to heaven. Again, we can interpret that motherhood brings boredom and desperation.

She does not identify with her mother Sita, that self-sacrificing and self-abnegating ideal emulated by orthodox Hindu womanhood, but with Durvasa in Kalidasa's *Sakuntala*, a man, who has the traditional right to be angry when

⁷⁰ Devi's imagined mythical warrior-goddess is strongly reminiscent of the female avenger who rides out on a white horse and beheads her enemies in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*.

betrayed, humiliated, and passed over. There is no doubt that the story that most deeply influenced Devi was the story of Amba, “the princess who shed her womanhood through her dreams of revenge and became a man” (35).⁷¹ What lies beneath this story is the difference between sex and gender. Once a woman transgresses the roles expected from her, she becomes a man.

6.2.4. Hypocrisy in traditional spiritual values.

The scene between Karna and Kunti in *GST* becomes the scene of understanding the mother-child relationship. Also the performance of *Duryodhana Vadham* recreates Velutha’s death and proves to be a catharsis for Estha and Rahel. If the Karna-Kunti relationship brought back ‘the memory of another mother,’ the killing of Duryodhana made them recognize the kind of frenzy that accomplished Velutha’s death. Both these performances serve as microcosmic projections of their own macrocosmic familial history. In order to understand the intertextuality, we will first go through the mythological story of Kunti and Karna.

As a young girl Kunti –the mother of the Pandavas-- had looked after Rishi Durvasa, well-known for his ugly temper, with unbounded patience and care

⁷¹ Ania Loomba makes an overview of the television serials depicting female powerful figures. She describes Laxmibai as the model of female valor, as she is a masculine woman who stripping her womanly weakness along with her jeweled bracelets, picks up a sword and fights like a man in a television serial of 1989 (1991: 167).

when he had stayed as a guest in her foster father's home. The Rshi was so pleased that he gave her the highest gift he could think of for a girl –a mantra, the recitation of which would compel any god, or man, to come to her whenever she so wished. The story goes on to relate how one morning Kunti was entranced by the rising Sun, and decided to test the gift Rshi Durvasa had given her. On recitation the Sun God instantly appeared in front of her. When a panicked Kunti apologized and said that she was merely curious about her new power, the Sun God replied he could not return without fulfilling her physical desire. He entered her through the navel in order to preserve her virginity, and in the same manner, it is said, in secret she produced a brilliant, powerful son, Karna. He was born with distinguishing marks of the Sun God on his chest and ears. Since he was born out of wedlock Kunti put the infant in a wooden box that reached a neighboring kingdom whose king, being issueless, adopted Karna as his son. Much later Kunti disclosed her secret for selfish reasons, and there was an interesting confrontation between the mother and the disowned son during the great battle of *Mahabharata* (Mahindra 54). The unwed mother Kunti who had cast away Karna in a river, now wants to secure the safety for her five other more beloved sons –the Pandavas. It is the mother who implores Karna to save her sons the Pandavas and receives the promise that Karna wouldn't kill four of her sons; only Arjuna would be killed.

Roy weaves into the pattern of the narrative, the reinforcement of myths that trace the fate of those who had broken taboos. She talks of two Kathakali

performances that the twins watch: *Karna Sapatham* and *Duryodhana Vadham*. Karna, who seeks to be the best archer, breaks the taboo of caste and is cursed by his Guru to meet an untimely death. His mother Kunti, who prompts him to take his famous pledge, had broken the taboo of the sacrosanct by her premature experimentation with boons that causes her to have a child prior to marriage, who she puts afloat in the river. She is therefore punished by being forced to keep the silence which gnaws her and she has to be content with the promised survival of five sons. *Dushasana Vadham* and *Duryodhana Vadham* are, performance-wise, two different texts. It is in *Dushasana Vadham*, that Dushasana, who breaks the taboo of honorable behavior and lays hands on his cousins' wife, is punished by Raudra Bheema. These ominously forecast Ammu's and Velutha's fate. Thus, "the unsaid and the unsayable have thus a place in the mythic frame" (Nair 51).

The novelist links up this story with Ammu and Estha's. The twins, while watching the performance, felt they were "joined by a story. And the memory of another mother" (234). It is Ammu, the mother, who is saved by her son Estha, with his declaration at the Police station that Velutha had killed Sophie Mol. Roy further draws parallels between the Kathakali dance of Duryodhana Vadham-the death of Dushasana and Duryodhana at the hands of Bhima and Velutha's death in the hands of the police officers. Bhima "continued to kill him long after he was dead" (235), fulfilling his vow to Draupadi who was insulted, humiliated and almost disrobed in the court of Dhritrashtra. The twins link this episode with

Velutha's brutal death at the police station: "it was not performance. Esthappen and Rahel recognized it. They had seen its work before. Another morning. Another stage. Another kind of frenzy (with millipedes on the soles of its shoes). The brutal extravagance of this matched by the savage economy of that" (235). In the Great mythological story evil is punished and destroyed, whereas here it is the innocent who is destroyed. Roy skillfully uses the reversal of roles to sharply focus on the plight of Velutha and Ammu. This concludes with the idea that it is always the Big Stories that are known, the official History, while small stories, the personal ones, are the ones that destroy the victims of societal norms.

With the re-telling of this mythological passage, Roy also criticizes overtly the way the Kathakali men are driven to violate their own stories for the need to survive, as in the evenings the hotel showed a truncated Kathakali performance for the regional flavor, and ancient stories (six-hour classics) were "collapsed and amputated to twenty-minute cameos" (127). Rahel stopped to see how they, after consuming alcohol and drugs,

danced to jettison their humiliation in the Heart of Darkness. Their truncated swimming pool performances. Their turning to tourism to stave off starvation. On their way back from the Heart of Darkness, they stopped at the temple to ask pardon of their gods. To apologize for corrupting their stories. For encasing their identities.

Misappropriating their lives; [...for] turning to tourism to stave off starvation" (229).

Moreover, Roy investigates the destructive divisions that pitted the powerful against the powerless. She interrogates the religious hypocrisy of the Syrian Christian community, which discriminated not only between Christians and Hindu-hybrids, but also between touchable Christians and untouchable 'rice-Christians.' The narrator informs the reader that "when the British came to Malabar, a number of Paravans, Pelayas and Pulayas (among them Velutha's grandfather, Kelan) converted to Christianity and joined the Anglican Church to escape the scourge of Untouchability" (74). Because they were given a little food and money, they were known as the Rice-Christians. However, it was like jumping from the frying pan into the fire. They were made separate churches, with separate services, and separate priests. As a special favour they were even given their own separate Pariah Bishop. After Independence they found they were not entitled to any Government benefits like job reservations or bank loans at low interest rates, because officially, on paper, they were Christians, and therefore casteless (74).

What is implied here is several facts: first, Roy depicts modern Christianity as a western imposition, which arrived "in a boat and seeped into Kerala like tea from a teabag" (33). This quotation makes reference to when the Portuguese tried to impose Roman Catholicism on the members of the older Syrian Church, which

predated them. Tradition says that St. Thomas, the disciple of Jesus, brought Christianity to Kerala in 52 CE. Second, many Dalits converted to either Islam or Christianity, which promised to relieve them of the burdens of inequality. However, Muslim and Christian caste systems evolved along the lines of the old Hindu one. And finally, the Indian government has engaged in strenuous affirmative action on behalf of Dalits ever since independence, but these measures have not reached all of them. As we can see, their disadvantaged situation is exposed by Roy with fierce criticism.

Roy discloses the hypocrisy of some members of the Syrian Christian Church, as even though Christianity survived in India on the strength of low caste converts, these converts could never be assimilated into the mainstream Christianity. She lashes out at the hypocritical moral code, which disapproves of such relationship on the basis of caste, when actually there is not supposed to be caste among Christians. However, a Brahmin converted to Christianity felt superior than a Dalit who did. Baby Kochamma is the clearest exponent of hypocritical Christianity.

The narrator describes in a comic way the passage when Baby Kochamma force-bathed a poor village girl, not out of charity but with the purpose to impress Father Mulligan, "with weekly exhibitions of staged charity" (23). So every Thursday, they met by the well, "the young girl and the intrepid Jesuit, both quaking with unchristian passion. Using the Bible as a ruse to be with each other"

(24). This episode is contracted to the one in which she mentions her caste-biased ideas about bodily pollution: "*How could she stand the smell? Haven't you noticed, they have a particular smell, these Paravans?*" about which the narrator satirically thinks that "she preferred an Irish-Jesuit smell to a particular Paravan smell" (78). Ironically, Velutha dies as a consequence of a Christian Baby Kochamma's hatred to Dalits in general, and to Velutha in particular for having dared to satisfy Ammu's needs.

Following Gilmore's reasoning (1994) when she states that "The confession is a discourse that both requires and shapes 'truth' according to the notions of heresy and orthodoxy in the religious confession and according to criminalized definitions of human activity in the legal confession" (110), it is evident that Estha's confession has been manipulated with a totally contrary purpose. Baby Kochamma follows the Christian ideology of confession. However, it is herself the one who is a heretic for many religious reasons. She, thus, kisses her crucifix and starts praying before inducing the twins to falsely confess against Velutha using emotional torture. Her strategy was well planned. First, she accused them of having murdered Sophie Mol out of jealousy. Then, she built up a macabre future for both the twins and their mother, as she is supposed to be the one responsible for them. Finally, she offered them a solution based on a religious code that she hypocritically was skipping for herself. The only alternative offered to save their mother is the one that will condemn their lives. The message is clear "God would

never forgive them for what they had done, but here on Earth there was a way of undoing some of the damage. Of saving their mother from humiliation and suffering on their account. Provided they were prepared to be practical" (317).

Again, this reminds us of another critical moment in Estha's life when, for practical reasons, Estha arranged everything to leave home with Rahel and Sophie Mol "Because Anything can Happen to Anyone, (...) It's Best to be Prepared." (198) To this point Estha has been portrayed as the "keeper of records" (163), "the accurate" (217), "the compassionate" (292), "Estha-the-Practical" (200), to become Estha Alone, which comes to stand for his vulnerability and withdrawn nature in the rest of the novel. It is precisely his personality that makes Baby Kochamma choose him to accomplish her plan "knowing him to be the more practical of the two. The more tractable. The more farsighted. The more responsible" (319). His declaration accusing Velutha of having molested them is going to transform Estha in an archetypal traumatized character. It is at this point when his "childhood tiptoed out" (320).

Gilmore points out that "according to prescribed rules, one is authorized to question and the other is bound to confess. In the absence of witnesses who could deny or corroborate my answer, 'truth' was always the best place to lie" (1994: 106). These shifts enable the confession's authority to be recuperated by a variety of practices and discourses interested in controlling and structuring the confessing subject's speech. It is interesting how Roy writes about the confession, using a

metonymy: Estha's mouth talking for himself, or better, talking for Baby Kochamma's interests. Estha, thus, actively interacts with the abject by saying what he was told: "The Inspector asked his question. Estha's mouth said Yes./Childhood tiptoed out./Silence slid in like a bolt" (320). It is at this point that the reader understands Estha's silence as a way of managing his trauma, as the already discussed Estha's concern with cleanness as an escape valve. Baby Kochamma insisted in the rewarding consequences if they were to say what they are told. 'Immortality,' represented as the ability to avoid eternal punishment, is offered through confession. What is supposed to serve as the clarification of truth, is developed as a lie by Baby Kochamma's search to control their confession according to her own elaborate codes disguised as religious ones. Consequently, for the twins, it was better to tell a lie than to accept the consequences, a falsehood resented in the guise of truth, for which they will ever repent: "He had terrible pictures in his head. (...) But worst of all, he carried inside him the memory of a young man with an old man's mouth. (...) And what had Estha done? He had looked into that beloved face and said: Yes. *Yes, it was him*" (32).

Gilmore continues explaining that a person's relation to God and her or his spiritual decorum and social conduct were all defined in order to implicate the social subject in both "this" world and the "next." For this reason, the confession formed a crucial site for maintaining and generating power and exerted influence far beyond the darkened space of the confessional, a space we may now associate

with secrecy, and which can be related to Estha's confession in the darkness of the bowel.

6.3. The State: taming the subaltern.

6.3.1. The family and civil society in contemporary India.

In the last half of the twentieth century, a period marked as much by massive changes in modes of production as by the relative successes of civil society-based social movements such as feminism, the family has often been spoken of as marking the site of extensive ungluing.⁷² It is, therefore, not surprising that Political Science has at long last begun to seriously analyze the underpinnings of what Freud called 'the family romance.' This is not to imply that political science had hitherto been totally silent on the subject. The changing meanings and roles attributed to the family in the long history of the discipline make fascinating reading. However, there is little doubt that recent work on the subject, especially with the intervention of feminists and scholars from the non-western world, has fronted the gender implications of the functioning of this institution which most previous political theory had, ironically, de-politicized.

⁷² Nivedita Menon mentions in her introduction to *Gender and Politics in India* (1999) that there is no one women's movement in India, but rather, several women's movements, claiming that a concern with gender inequity is what holds them together (1).

An important clue to an understanding of the family in the history of the discipline is that the word itself comes from the Latin *famulus*, referring to a servant or slave –a reminder that wives and children, along with servants, were historically a part of man’s property.⁷³ This ancient meaning of the concept was modernized when the older, ‘natural’, society rooted in agricultural life was displaced by the rise of industrial capitalism. In what was for long an influential text on the subject, Hegel sketched out in *Philosophy of Rights* the place of the bourgeois family in relation to society. He postulated that there were three moments of *ethical life*. The Family was the first of these, constituted by the merging of male and female ‘natures’ into a single ‘personhood’ through marriage, with the wife assigned duties within the home, and the man representing and earning for the family outside it.⁷⁴ This outside, termed Civil Society, was the second moment of ethical life: it was the ‘associational’ domain of economic service and enterprise by *burghers* (bourgeoisie) or property-owning men, based in contract; it was, in other words, a sphere of relative freedom from the state, constituted through duties (to abide by the law and pay levies) toward the state, and rights (protection of person and property) guaranteed by the state in return. The State itself was the third, and according to Hegel the highest, moment of ethical life: it represented the common will of all the people –or the

⁷³ Casey Miller and Kate Swift, *Words and Women: New Language in New Times* (1976), 9.

⁷⁴ For a deeper insight on this, see Jean B. Landes’s essay “Hegel’s Conception of the Family” in *The Family in Political Thought*.

national/universal Idea—and was therefore absolute and non-contractual. Hegel argued that the modern family was the 'ethical root of the State.' He therefore excluded family life from the sphere of contract.

Within Hegel's non-contractual view of the family, to allow women to adopt the standpoint of individuality and rights in the sphere of civil society would constitute a regression from the ethical achievement of the State. Therefore, modern women were supposed to deny, or be denied, the attribute of public individuality and instead become embodiments of 'ideal' family life within their domestic realm. The enforcement of such a sexual division of labor⁷⁵ was deemed necessary because for Hegel 'the sanctity of marriage', along with the dignity of Corporation membership, "are the two fixed points round which the unorganized atoms of civil society revolve" (154).

This authoritarian scope of the family was clearly compelled by the inimical property arrangements within civil society. For most of the political theorists following Hegel, the Family specifically referred to a social unit that owned transferable/alienable property. The family, through its possession of property, acquires the status of personhood. He writes: "the family as person has its real external existence in property; and it is only when this property takes the form of capital that it becomes the embodiment of the substantial personality of the

⁷⁵ Carole Pateman describes it as 'the sexual contract.'

family" (116). It had an important social and political function: that of offering the gendered individual a realm in which subjective feeling is revered.

It was at the historical conjuncture of the rise of capitalist society that the new family, in which women were to play a crucial gendered role, emerged. The rise of capitalism was above all accompanied by the rise of the notion of private property, thus inaugurating the demarcation of the private and the public spheres of activity. The household unit ceased to be the center of economic production. It was now dependent on –and subordinate to–the newly established market, or what Hegel described as the "civil society." The concept of work was radically redefined: it henceforth meant only those activities that were seen as contributing to economic production in the public domain, and paid for in cash. Since the work done by women at home was seen purely in culturalist terms as mere homemaking, it was denied the status of work. Only the adult male was considered to have the capacity and the right to participate in civil society. The woman's estate was naturalized into her glorious nurturant duties within the all-important family, the man's haven in a harsh world of strife.

Feminists have pointed out that the elevation of the family above civil society was compatible with efforts to award women positions of spiritual reverence and authority out of accord with their actual social status under capitalism. Carole Pateman writes:

If the full history of three hundred years of feminist theory is ever written, it will reveal how feminists have persistently criticized a body of radical thought, liberal and socialist, that had not just happened to exclude women... but which is constructed from within a division between the public (the social, the political, history) and the private (the personal, the domestic, the familial), which is also a division between the sexes... The classic theorists... are explicit enough about women's lack of the capacities required by the free and equal 'individuals' who can take their place in the public real (1986: 6).

Virginia Woolf put it succinctly: "woman pervades poetry from cover to cover; yet she is all but absent from history" (1979: 45). Thus, the woman's role within a home, which in the earlier era of agrarian economy had given her an important productive role in society, now condemned her to a secondary social status. Nevertheless, as feminist studies investigating the political economy of housework have clearly revealed, the fact remained that housework was productive work too. It performed an essential function for capitalism, creating surplus value, since women's work in the home was not paid for in wages. Lillian S. Robinson states:

As long as the interests of capitalism continued to be served by the family, the institution could be made to serve a new ideological

function along with its material one. Indeed, the ideology of the loving couple as the foundation of a domestic haven could serve to strengthen and support the household's economic function, especially insofar as that function involved the rearing of the next generation and the shelter of those for whom there is no room in the wage labor system (which, under capitalism, has meant at various times women, children or the aged (174).

It is easy to recognize today Hegel's influential conception of family life was consistent with the requirements of the incipient capitalist social organization, and was in fact used to legitimate the practice, common to most nineteenth and early twentieth centuries liberal industrial societies, of denying women civil and political rights. The hierarchical structure of the family was instrumental in normalizing the hierarchical relations within society.

To invent a fair and unbiased representative democracy, which includes women as complete citizens, it is essential to dismantle the widespread and deeply held convictions about state and society, and to reassemble the social institutions and practices that give expression to them. This task extends from the breaking down of the patriarchal separation of the private and the public, to a revision of our conceptions about individuality and gendered identities. In a postcolonial nation like India the task is complicated by the necessity to understand and to deal with the specific cultural politics of nationalist (liberal and

socialist) anti-colonial patriarchy. We find the concepts of the passive revolution and Brahminism useful in furthering the insights gained from the women's movement.

Partha Chatterjee comments:

In classical theory, the family is the elementary unit of social organization: by the nineteenth century, this is widely assumed to mean the nuclear family of modern bourgeois patriarchy. (Hegel, we know, strongly resisted the idea that the family was based on contract, but by the late nineteenth century the contractually formed family becomes the normative model of most social theorizing in the West as well as of reformed laws of marriage, property, inheritance and personal taxation. Indeed, the family becomes a product of contractual arrangements between individuals who are the primary units of society) (1997: 31).

While Indian feminist writers are often concerned with a man-woman relationship, it is not necessarily within the context of a nuclear family. The joint family pattern –as Shirin Kudchedkar tells us-- is still widely prevalent in Indian society and even where the members of this extended family are not physically located under the same roof, family pressures are exercised.

Carole Pateman has shown that the original contract was both a social and a sexual pact, and feminists since the days of Mary Wollstonecraft have

persistently pointed to the interdependence of the public and the private spheres of society. Pateman thus emphasizes that the sexual contract is not just limited to the private sphere. She writes: "patriarchy is not merely familial or located in the private sphere. The original contract creates the modern social whole of patriarchal civil society. Men pass back and forth between the private and the public spheres and the writ of the law of male sex-right runs in both realms" (1988: 12). In the case of Devi, it is even more difficult due to her Brahminical condition, with its strict rules.

Although women like Devi have indeed never been completely excluded from participation in the institutions of the public world, they have been incorporated into the civil order differently than men. In the patriarchal construction of the difference between masculinity and femininity, women are treated as lacking in the capacities necessary for political life. In the story of the creation of civil society through an original agreement, we have seen how women are brought into the new social order as inhabitants of a private sphere, which is part of civil society and yet is separated from its public world of freedom and equality, rights, contract, interests and citizenship. Women, in other words, are included not as citizens but as women –as beings whose sexual embodiment prevents them from enjoying the same political standing as men. Thus, the manner in which they are included is grounded, as firmly as their position in the domestic sphere, in patriarchal beliefs and practices. It is thus not just for marriage

that her education has not prepared Devi. She realizes with a shattering pang that despite the best possible education she is hardly prepared to cope with the demands and requirements of civil societal institutions. This is because she is as much of a misfit there.

6.3.2. The politics of development: communism and its manifestations.

Arundhati Roy clearly points out in her only novel the fatal effects of massive industrialization. The novel is a quest for truth in a corrupted, degenerated world where capitalism has taken shape in the form of globalization. The author overtly criticizes how hypocrisy and longing for power destroy the people who do not submit to the established rules and, instead, live in accordance to nature. Roy, by telling personal stories, questions the power structures and attempts to change them through the power embodied in literature.⁷⁶

Roy shows irony and even sarcasm towards decadence. The binary 'house/factory', representing the 'inside/outside' dichotomy, and its people are equally involved in a power relationship, being the powerful corrupted. Roy investigates the oppressive conditions powerless people suffer from the three 'Big' power structures: Family, State, and Religion. What is supposed to protect the peoples, and/or what people pursue to protect, are in fact degenerated by feelings

⁷⁶ See Judith Fetterley's "On the Politics of Literature" (1991).

of power and control. Actually, hypocrisy is the major reason for its decline, as it is proposed to corrode every corner of the world and every single human being (Syrian Christians, Marxists, etc.)

We will focus on the significance of the 'factory' in the novel, as the factory is not an innocent place. It is where all communism began, the rebellion of the masses referred to by Marx and the description of the alienation in a factory work. There are several consequences that Roy takes into account regarding the factory: the decadence of a domestic business when modernization and capitalism takes over; the exploitation of Dalits; the sexual abuse of women and the property laws referring to them. We will analyze in *GST* how some male characters' Marxist ideology allies itself with capitalism and the devastating life-altering consequences for its protagonists.⁷⁷

Karl Marx tried to show that capitalism was promoted by the ruling class in a conspiracy to perpetuate its power and wealth, and at the expense of the poor and powerless.⁷⁸ Inherent in this view are the following points: first, utopianism: belief in the possibility of creating a paradise for a classless society; second, dualism: oppressor vs. oppressed, and bourgeoisie vs. proletariat; third,

⁷⁷ In 1957, Kerala became the second state in the world (the first one was San Marino, Italy) to form a democratically elected communist government, and in 1970 Kerala became the first state in India to abolish landlordism. Hinduism has long been accompanied by Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. The prevalence of the caste system in Kerala has become more a social phenomenon than a religious convention, being of extreme importance in the Syrian Christian community.

⁷⁸ See Karl Marx's *Capital*.

collectivism: promoting class interests by subordinating the individual to the group; and finally, revolutionary struggle. Taking into account all this, we will proceed to analyze the character of Chacko –a self-proclaimed communist who has left his job as a lecturer to run his mother’s factory after the death of his father—and the affected lives of those who report to him. In doing so, we will see if the aims of Communism has been achieved at Paradise Pickles & Preserves ruled by him.

First of all, we need to have a background of this self-proclaimed communist character. We discover in the novel the ludicrous idealism of Chacko, how he does not personally follow any of the ideals proclaimed by Marxism, and how he turns to be in fact an exploiter of the powerless. Roy depicts women around the factory as either displaced (Mammachi), not considered to have any rights towards it (Ammu), or sexually exploited (women workers).

Chacko –unlike his sister Ammu—is sent to Oxford to complete his studies. There he falls in love with Margaret Kochamma, who marries him and soon bears a daughter to later divorce him for an Englishman. Consequently, Chacko returns to India and gets a job at the Madras Christian College --the reader, then, can immediately notice a certain contradiction between his communist ideals and his working for an institute allied to a religious entity. When his father dies, Chacko resigns his job as a lecturer and leaves for Ayemenen to take over her mother’s business “with his Balliol Oar and his Pickle Baron dreams” (57). This implies that

when a woman becomes a widow, and consequently loses her husband's 'protection,' another male figure –in this case the son—needs to take over, as if a widowed woman could not run a business by herself. The irony lies in the fact that she had been doing it by her own very successfully even when her husband was alive –for which he became violently jealous. It is only when she is displaced from the business by her son that the factory slides down.

Mammachi ran her business successfully, as if it were a big kitchen, until her son displaced her from the management of the factory and “had it registered as a partnership and informed Mammachi that she was the sleeping partner” (57). He proceeds to ‘modernize’ –that is, make out of it a capitalist enterprise--, and finally he gives it a name.⁷⁹ Roy emphasizes the fact that when Chacko invested in equipment and expanded the labor force there was a financial slide thanks to extravagant bank loans, which Chacko raised by mortgaging the family's rice fields around the Ayemenen house. Modernization led the business to bankruptcy, and with this instance, the author emphasizes how the power of money operates in the factory and how far it was responsible for the family's degeneration.

⁷⁹ Notice Roy's criticism towards labeling. For a deeper insight on this issue, see Mary Kaldor's *New and Old Wars: Organised Violence in a Global Era* (1999), about what she argues that labels are mobilized for political purposes, as they offer a new sense of security in a context where the political and economic certainties have disappeared. These labels, thus, provide a new populist form of communitarian ideology, a way to maintain or capture power.

The very word 'Paradise' in the name of the factory is very ironic, as it denotes an idyllic place. Actually it was Chacko and Pillai who gave a name to the factory, as originally Mammachi's factory had no name: "Everybody just referred to her pickles and jams as Sosha's Tender Mango or Sosha's Banana Jam" (57-8). Not only is Mammachi displaced from the business of the factory, but she also has no say in the giving of the name. Chacko instead discussed it with Comrade K. N. M. Pillai going from the foreignness of 'Zeus Pickles & Preserves' to the localism 'Parashuram Pickles'. Both names were vetoed for its lack of relevance in the town. So ultimately, 'Paradise Pickles & Preserves' was the final answer. 'Paradise' implies that industrialization and modernization are supposed to transform the state into a paradise. However, the factory is not such a paradise for the powerless; in fact, it is the setting of oppression and exploitation as much for women as for Dalits. The irony lies in the fact that the feudal self-proclaimed owner --Chacko-- is also a self-proclaimed communist. And with the excuse of his ideology, he alienates his workers, especially those who are in a powerless position.

Gayle Rubin, in her influential essay "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," has argued that if sexism were a by-product of capitalism's relentless appetite for profit, then sexism would wither away in the advent of a successful socialist revolution (157). The factory, in spite of being ruled by a self-proclaimed communist, is the main site for sexism in several ways. Roy

denounces in her novel women's position either inside or outside the household, as even when a woman steps from the domestic to the public sphere, she is equally exploited. An example of this is Ammu –Chacko's sister-- and the women workers. Then, though Ammu did as much work as Chacko in the factory, she had no claim to the property. Chacko refers to anything related to the factory as 'his,' and clearly confesses to his sister that "what is yours is mine and what's mine is also mine" (57). She, as a daughter, has no claim to any property, no *locus standi*, and she is aware of the reason why: "thanks to our wonderful male chauvinist society" (57).⁸⁰ Rubin claims that capitalism is just an heir to a long tradition in which women do not inherit, in which women do not lead, and in which women do not talk to god (164).

Marx argued that capitalism's unique aim is the creation and expansion of capital. Capitalism is a set of social relations –forms of property, and so forth—in which production takes the form of turning money, things, and people into capital. And capital is a quantity of goods or money which, when exchanged for labor, reproduces and augments itself by extracting unpaid labor, or surplus value, from labor and into itself. Taking into account all this, Roy equals Dalits' and women's labor to capital in the sense that they help in the increase of capital,

⁸⁰ Actually, Arundhati Roy's mother, Mary Roy, led a court case to change the inheritance laws in favor of women in 1986. The Supreme Court handed down a verdict that gave Syrian Christian women equal inheritance retroactive to 1956.

either by getting lower wages, by serving as a political instrument, and by being used for sexual favors.⁸¹

Actually, when Chacko's communist activism is needed, "our Man of the Masses" (137) –as Ammu calls him-- escapes his responsibilities. For instance, when they approach a communist march in demonstration while driving to Cochin, he immediately commands all passengers to roll up the windows in fear of them –those who supposedly belong to his same party: "stay calm. They're not going to hurt us" (64), to which Ammu responds with cynicism: "how could he *possibly* know that in this old car there beats a truly Marxist heart?" (70). Again the irony lies in the fact that their demands were "that women's wages be increased from one rupee twenty-five paise a day, to three rupees, and men's from two rupees fifty paise to four rupees fifty paise a day. They were also demanding that Untouchables no longer be addressed by their caste names" (69), when actually Chacko, with all his Marxist ideals, is also perpetuating the established unfair system either by gender difference in wages or by discriminating against Dalits.

Considering that women are a reserve labor force for capitalism, as their lower wages provide extra surplus to a capitalist employer; they serve the ends of capitalist consumerism in their roles as administrators of family consumption.

⁸¹ Dalits and women are considered to belong to subalternity. This is a much controversial area, and has provoked a lot of literature. For a deep discussion on this topic, see for instance Kamala Visweswaran's "Small Speeches, Subaltern Gender: Nationalist Ideology and Its Historiography."

Chacko is portrayed as a manipulator of ideals,⁸² as he is a self-proclaimed Marxist who forces pretty women to his room on the pretext of lecturing them on labor rights and trade union law: "a landlord forcing his attentions on women who depended on him for their livelihood" (65). The emphasis goes to the word 'force' as it is repeated several times when describing his attitude towards the women workers. Chacko is described as an English-influenced reincarnation of the traditional landlord, that is, he took advantage of his 'owner' position and behaved as a modern version of the feudal landlord. Ammu called him a "case if a spoiled prince-ling playing *Comrade! Comrade!* An Oxford avatar of the old zamindar mentality (65).

While dealing with Chacko's position towards the women workers of the factory we can see that Mammachi as well as the aunt Baby Kochamma did not see any contradiction between Chacko's Marxist mind and his feudal libido. For the purpose of having Chacko sexual needs satisfied, Mammachi built a separate entrance in the house, so that the factory women workers could enter Chacko's room easily. The irony lies in the fact that Mammachi, in an effort to divide classes, and to disjunct needs from feelings, gave them money. They did not really care about those women workers, as they are considered as mere labor force (including the sexual implications of their job). She could resolve the situation by

⁸² See Ashis Nandy for an explanation of how ahistoric societies are driven by factors other than ideology. Ideology does not manifest in deliberating their actions and is muted. So, in this case, it could be argued that the feudal landordism and the class values supercede the ideology of communism which stayed muted in its actions.

giving them money, as we have seen, which they took because they needed it, “they had young children and old parents. Or husbands who spent all their earnings in toddy bars” (169). However, Mammachi and Baby Kochamma did care about the Naxalites, “who had been known to force men from Good Families to marry servant girls whom they had made pregnant” (168).

By describing Chacko’s improper sexual advances to the factory workers and juxtaposing it to Ammu’s love affair with Velutha –Mammachi then feels repulsed by the mere idea of Ammu having sex with a Dalit, which is described in animal terms (257)-- Roy emphasizes a crucial difference between the siblings: he is depicted as one of the exploiters of female sexuality, and she along with the female workers in the factory as the sexually exploited. That first generation of women in the novel, give extreme importance to social norms, as they also succumb to them. When it is publicly discovered that Ammu, a respectable high-class woman, also has ‘Women’s Needs’ the situation becomes unbearable to the traditional conservative sector of the community. The feeling is well summarized when the narrator says Mammachi’s “tolerance of ‘Men’s Needs’ as far as her son was concerned, became the fuel for her unmanageable fury at her daughter. (...) for generations to come, for ever now, people would point at them at weddings and funerals. At baptisms and birthday parties. They’d nudge and whisper. It was all finished now” (258). Roy exposes the double morality in both situations, being

the division of class/caste the most important justification, and what leads the characters to complete alienation to the extend of losing their own lives.

There is a major concern in the factory to keep every individual in its communal position, that is, women workers are paid less for their work and offered the possibility to get extra money through sexual 'forced' relations. By payment, they are kept in the position that society considers is appropriate for them. Another case is the position of Dalits in the factory. Ironically, Velutha is the only card holding member of the party, a skilful carpenter, and indispensable at the factory due to his way with machines. Chacko and Pillai are apprehensive of Velutha's association with the party. Pillai, who is ironically described as the 'crusader for justice' and 'spokesman of the oppressed,' sees the danger posed by Velutha. He fears this situation might antagonize the other laborers due to his untouchable condition. He therefore asks Chacko to send Velutha away. As he is the key person in the factory, the problem is solved by Mammachi, who suggests paying Velutha less than any other worker, even when he was indispensable and skilled. Moreover, Chacko wants Velutha to remain only as an excellent carpenter with an engineer's mind, so that he could be used at his convenience. On the other hand, from her point of view, Mammachi considers that Velutha "ought to be grateful that he was allowed in the factory premises at all, and allowed to touch things that Touchables touched" (77).

When Velutha is falsely accused of having killed Sophie Mol and raped Ammu, he goes to Comrade Pillai, as representative of the Party, for protection. However, what Velutha hears is unexpectedly surprising. Pillai turns his back on him, with a couple of insults, saying that "it is not in the Party's interests to take up such matters. Individuals' interest is subordinate to the organization's interests. Violating Party Discipline means violating Party Unity" (287). He calls Velutha "comprador capitalist,"⁸³ and he is left alone, persecuted and feeling that "another religion turned against itself. Another edifice constructed by the human mind, decimated by human nature" (287).

As we have seen above, the aim of communism has not been achieved. On the contrary, a factory run by a self-proclaimed communist is the site of oppression for those who are socially in a powerless position. No paradise has been created, but a hell that provokes even death, class divisions remain stronger than ever, those in need of protection are left aside by the party, and the utopia and passion of a revolutionary struggle turns out to be a façade. Even inside Communism, there are actually victims of the pattern of slave/master, which is created and regains the entire power structure. The factory is built and operates on principles of injustice, dishonesty and hypocrisy, which degenerate and

⁸³ A Marxist insult suggesting that Velutha is a sellout, one who collaborates with the exploiters of the working class. But it almost certainly not the fact that Velutha has crossed class lines that so offends Comrade Pillai, but that he has crossed caste lines. Supposedly, there is no caste system for the Christians. Therefore, in theory, Velutha could not cross any caste line by having a sexual relationship with Ammu.

disintegrate everything around the factory. By the end of the novel, the factory is described as a place where “the lonely drummer drummed. A gauze door slammed. A mouse rushed across the factory floor. Cobwebs sealed old pickle vats. Bone dust from a Bar Nowl. Long dead. Pickledowl” (328).

Kate Millet pointed out that: “When a system of power is thoroughly in command, it has scarcely a need to speak itself aloud. When its working is exposed and questioned it becomes not only subjected to discussion, but even to change” (58). So, Roy questions, through the technique of story telling, the power system and attempts to change it not only through the power embodied in literature but also through her activism. She makes a compromise, and not only – as we have seen above—about gender specifics as many other women writers have done, but also about the destructive results of massive industrialization. With this, Arundhati Roy has not hesitated to voice her criticism on the hypocritical sectors of any given ideology. In a word, she is trying to expose the many Chackos all over the world; those hypocritical individuals who exploit the powerless even when they profess an ideology that conveys equality, manipulating it to their own benefits.

Destruction does not leave anything behind. Not only does Paradise Pickles & Preserves --a factory where inequality and oppression is present—fall off, but also the river (and nature in general) are described as degenerating thanks to the intervention of modern foreign investment. Nature also denotes a sense of decay

(the river, the border which once divided 'real' from 'façade' and represented the characters' transgression, now "smelled of shit, and pesticides bought with World Bank loans. Most of the fish had died. The ones that survived suffered from fin-rot and had broken out in boils"(13). In this quotation she refers to the World Bank schemes such as the Narmada River Valley Project, which the government of India has taken over. Not only does Roy talk about the polluted river but also about her popular views on the construction of dams: "with her she had brought the sound of ...Trains. Traffic. Music. The Stock Market. A dam had burst and savage waters swept everything up in a swirling" (14-5).⁸⁴

Satirical allusions to international trademarks are constantly made and artistic traditions are presented as being modified for the sake of profit (Kathakali shows are manipulated for tourists). Roy overtly criticizes an age of consumerism though satellite TV, as she portrays them as invading the village homes. With this, she implies in her novel that History can be manipulated and globalization contributes to it, showing postmodern 'fake' histories: "History and Literature enlisted by commerce. Kurtz and Karl Marx joining palms to greet rich guests" (126), and "Would the Thin People – the famine victims and refugees – slip

⁸⁴ In her support against the construction of big dams in areas where people are displaced, the upper class people did not appreciate it, and defined her as anti-national, anti-development and anti-progress. Their critique is based on the idea that Jawaharlal Nehru called dams the temples of modern India. However, she wants to arouse passions about the Indian development model, which, though it has lifted millions out of poverty, has also driven debt-ridden farmers to suicide and failed to eradicate starvation-related deaths from some parts of rural India. See Roy's *Power Politics*.

through the cracks in the doors? Would Genocide slide between the tiles? The sky was thick with TV. If you wore special glasses you could see them spinning through the sky among the bats and homing birds – blondes, wars, famines, football, food shows, coups d'état, hairstyles stiff with hairspray. Making patterns in the sky. Wheels. Windmills, flowers blooming and unblooming" (188). Roy is concerned with the daily violation of human rights and its insensitive portrayal on TV to satisfy capitalist interests such as a moribund audience, and more concretely, against the promotion of the tourism industry at the cost of the basic needs of the local people and of the ecological balance.

6.3.3. The caste system: an oppressive hierarchy.

Power struggles have always been part of the human condition everywhere. The situation is complicated somewhat further in the case of India because of the institution of caste.⁸⁵ Brahminical patriarchy pervades the entire world depicted in the novel. Brahminical domination over civil life in India is premised on two inter-linked but different modes of power: cultural and economic. Ilaiah --one of the foremost dalitbahujan intellectuals in India today-- has pointed out that the Brahmin patriarch establishes his authority over his

⁸⁵ There are 3,000 castes and 25,000 subcastes in India, which fall under four basic varnas: Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (traders), and Shudras (laborers). Outside of the caste system are the Dalits (previously known as Untouchables).

family –particularly over the women—“by conditioning two different kinds of mentalities. On the one hand, it creates a mind that can control, manipulate and finally structure: the male mind. On the other hand, it forms a mind that can be manipulated, controlled and structured: the female mind. It does not provide any scope for questioning, debate and discourse” (44). Ilaiah goes on to state that male Brahmins negate women in their own families and dalit-bahujans in the larger society. Their blend of spiritualism and political power gets expressed in neo-fascist forms even as they attempt to “establish control over the institutions of state and civil society by bringing into existence all kinds of classical brahminical notions to life itself” (49).

In *TFN*, Hariharan depicts a female character, a Brahmin woman, who now assumes and deploys Brahmin values, in the context of an identity crisis. Her gender position is inscribed via the crisis in caste identity. Both Sita and Baba, who are the closest mentors of the novel’s protagonist, are acutely conscious of their superior caste and urge her to maintain an exalted distance from all others. Devi recalls that she never really had any friends during her childhood. Even when she went to college, her mother would be very suspicious of the caste background of any friend she brought home. Sita’s inquisition would be in the form of questions about whether the friend was a good student and what rank she got, but Devi had no trouble in understanding that what her mother really wanted to know was whether the friend was a Brahmin: “she always wanted the best for

me, she always said" (84). Baba was more direct; he tells Devi: "wherever you are, remember you are a Brahmin. You may not know it, but underneath that skin flows a fine-veined river of pure blood, the legacy of centuries of learning" (52). Perhaps he does not realize the irony as his voice stiffens with pride and a new authority when he quotes Manu: "a Brahmin shrinks from honors as from poison; humility he covets as if it is nectar" (52).

The constant equations drawn between being a Brahmin and being worthy and meritorious are not really surprising. Brahminism has been a mode of domination in modern India through economic and cultural capital. When the majority of teachers, textbooks, curricular practices and cultural values promoted by educational and other civil institutions have been overwhelmingly brahminical, it has followed that the students who perform most meritoriously at school and college have proved to be Brahmins. This merit has also allowed them to claim and occupy most of the civil and political institutions almost as a matter of right. In a revealing little incident, one afternoon Devi rummages through Mahesh's vast and empty mansion and discovers an old teak cupboard with a trunk containing a pile of old photographs. Among them is an old picture of Mahesh as a schoolboy: "Mahesh seems to have changed very little. His child's face stares into the camera, already defined and a little pompous, as if he knew he would carry a great company's image on his shoulder... A model child, perhaps on his first day home for a holiday from boarding-school" (59-60).

In *GST*, Vellya Paapen considered it was his duty to tell Mammachi about the affair between his son Velutha and her daughter Ammu, because “as a Paravan and a man with mortgaged body parts, he considered it his duty” (256). When Vellya Paapen went to Mammachi to tell off his son’s affair with Ammu, Baby Kochamma “recognized at once the immense potential of the situation (...) She saw it as God’s Way of punishing Ammu for her sins and simultaneously avenging her (Baby Kochamma’s) humiliation at the hands of Velutha and the men in the march” (257). And very sarcastically, the narrator explains Baby Kochamma’s start of the plan as “She set sail at once. A ship of goodness ploughing through a sea of sin” (257). The sin was a simple one: two single people were having a love relationship, though “they had made the unthinkable thinkable and the impossible really happen” (256). What makes this relationship sinful, impossible and unthinkable is the traditional concept of taboo and pollution. When Mammachi hears the unexpected news, she pushes her hard, which took Vellya Paapen by surprise, as “part of the taboo of being an Untouchable was expecting not to be touched” (256). Her reaction included insults, and humiliations. On the other hand, Vellya Paapen shows his submission not only by offering her his mortgaged eye, which he held in the palm of his hand, but also offered to kill his son “to tear him limb from limb” (256). She immediately “groped her way to the sink, and soaped away the sodden Paravan’s eye-juices. She smelled her hands when she’d finished” (255). Baby Kochamma gives specific

olfactory observations: "How could she stand the smell? Haven't you noticed? They have a particular smell, these Paravans" (257), and Mammachi exposes her repulse – provoked in a way by Baby Kochamma-- by imagining her daughter "naked, coupling in the mud with a man who was nothing but a filthy *coolie*. (...) His particular smell. Like animals, Mammachi thought and nearly vomited" (257).

The narrator explains the reader that these caste taboos exist since time immemorial. Ritual purity has played a key role over the millennia in order to make caste distinctions. Brahmins, in the orthodox circles, believed that even the mere shadow of an Untouchable would pollute them. Kristeva argues that we are both drawn and repelled by the abject; and nausea is a biological recognition of it. For Kristeva the abject manifests "in anything in fact that threatens rigid boundaries and evokes powerful fears of filth, pollution, contamination, and defilement" (quoted in Jay, 146). Mary Douglas, in her *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, points out that India's lower castes used to keep in their place because of effective social sanctions, and all the way up the edifice of caste political and economic forces help to maintain the system. But whether the lines are precarious we find pollution ideas come to their support. Physical crossing of the social barrier is treated as a dangerous pollution, with any of the consequences we have just examined. The polluter becomes a doubly

wicked object of reprobation, first because he crossed the line and second because he endangered others (140).⁸⁶

Both Mammachi and Baby Kochamma are clear exponents of the intense prejudice and phobia that the upper lineages have against the Dalits who dare to violate the sexual code operating in a largely traditional community. We could analyze Velutha as an exponent of abjection, as he is considered perverse because –according to Kristeva’s definition of abject– he “neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or law; but turns them aside” (15). When we are propelled into the world of the abject, our imaginary borders disintegrate and the abject becomes a tangible threat because our identity system and conception of order has been disrupted. The abject is located in a liminal state that is on the margins of two positions. This can be related to the fact that the Paravans’ hut is located in the other side of the river, where pollution in the form of untouchability and illness (Velutha’s mother died of tuberculosis, his brother is waiting for death in a corner of the hut due to an accident he suffered, and Vellya Paapen is handicapped)

⁸⁶ According to Mary Douglas, Hindu castes conceive status in terms of purity and impurity as these ideas are applied throughout the regime of castes. The lowest castes are the most impure and it is they whose humble services enable the higher castes to be free of bodily impurities. They wash clothes, cut hair, dress corpses, and so on. Their whole system represents a body in which by the division of labour the head does the thinking and praying and the other parts carry away waste matter. Each sub-caste community in a local region is conscious of its relative standing in the scale of purity. Seen from ego’s position the system of caste purity is structured upwards. Those above him are more pure. All the positions below him, be they ever so intricately distinguished in relation to one another, are to him polluting (124). She concludes saying that “caste pollution is a symbolic system, based on the image of the body, whose primary concern is the ordering of a social hierarchy (126).

resides not by coincidence. Velutha had certain qualities and attitudes that made his father fear: “while these were qualities that were perfectly acceptable, perhaps even desirable in Touchables, Vellya Paapen thought that in a Paravan they could (and would, and indeed, *should*) be construed as insolence” (76).⁸⁷ Kristeva keeps on arguing that the abject has only one quality of the object –that of being opposed to I. It lies outside, beyond the set, and does not seem to agree to the latter’s rules of the game. And yet, from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master. What disturbs identity, system, order is the cause of abjection. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite (16). Vellya Paapen’s other son, the physically handicapped Kuttappen, was unlike Velutha “a good, safe Paravan. He could neither read nor write” (207).

Dealing with Mammachi and Baby Kochamma’s repulse for this relationship, we could argue, following Kristeva’s reasoning, that abjection persists as exclusion or taboo in monotheistic religions, as transgression (of the Law) within the same monotheistic economy. It encounters, with Christian sin, a dialectic elaboration, as it becomes integrated in the Christian Word as a threatening otherness—but always nameable, always totalizable (17).

In order to show the present situation that the Dalits suffer from, Arundhati Roy goes back to describe the time when:

⁸⁷ This father-son relationship about cautioning and fearing for a daring and challenging son, resembles much the life under slavery. See, for instance, the similitudes with Fred D’Aguiar’s *The Longest Memory* (1994).

They were not allowed to touch anything that Touchables touched. Caste Hindus and Caste Christians. (...) Paravans were expected to crawl backwards with a broom, sweeping away their footprints so that Brahmins or Syrian Christians would not defile themselves by accidentally stepping into a Paravan's footprint. In Mammachi's time, Paravans, like other Untouchables, were not allowed to walk in public roads, not allowed to cover their upper bodies, not allowed to carry umbrellas. They had to put their hands over their mouths when they spoke, to divert their polluted breath away from those whom they addressed (73-4).

Velutha suffers from this background. He is described as "The God of Loss. The God of Small Things. He left no footprints in sand, no ripples in water, no image in mirrors" (265). The metaphor of the image in the mirror implies his loss of identity. Once he has been abused, rejected and abandoned he has no place to return. The idea of pollution is clearly a parasite in today's society. He, by his mere condition as a Dalit, is considered to smell different, due to his polluted nature. To make matters worse, the fact that he has had sexual intercourse with Ammu, is the most aggravating transgression. Ironically, since the caste system does not work among Christians, Velutha should not be transgressing any laws with this act. However, as Brahmins who converted to Christianity, they considered themselves superior to those converts who were Dalits. Even after the

State has abolished the caste system, Christianity makes no caste distinctions, and Communism proclaims equality, "Their Work [Velutha], abandoned by God and History, by Marx, by Man, by Woman and (in the hours to come) by Children, lay folded on the floor" (310).

Roy is very ironic with the police system, and leaves a whole chapter "The History House" to the description of its corruption. The Kottayam Police officers are described as "History's Agents" (310), "Dark of Heartness" (306), "Servants of the State" (304), and comically as "Hairy fairies with lethal wands" (306), "a cartoonplatoon. New-Age princes in funny pointed helmets. Cardboard lined with cotton. Hair oil stained. Their shabby khaki crowns" (304), who are referred to along the novel as Touchable policemen playing Touchable games. In the children's mind "policemen can direct traffic so that there won't be too many invalids to go to hospital" (157), but soon their innocence will end when they realize that the police officers can actually make people invalids, or even worse, can become murderers of innocent people. Again, who is supposed to protect and safe becomes destructive and oppressive, depending on to whom the service is directed: "A Kind Touchable policeman. Kind to his kind" (311).

A detailed description of a scene on TV, where American police officers are arresting a teenager (296) is only a reflection of what happened at the other side of the river with Velutha. The scene of Velutha's beating by the police officers –

“Batons in their hands. Machine-guns in their minds” (307)—witnessed by the twins is ironically commented by the narrator as:

The twins were witness to this injustice, and is described in the novel as the twins were too young to know that these were only history’s henchmen. Sent to square the books and collect the dues from those who broke its laws. Impelled by feelings that were primal yet paradoxically wholly impersonal. Feelings of contempt born off inchoate, unacknowledged fear – civilization’s fear of nature, men’s fear of women, power’s fear of powerlessness. Man’s subliminal urge to destroy what he could neither subdue nor deify. Men’s Needs. What Esthappen and Rahel witnessed that morning, though they didn’t know it then, was a clinical demonstration in controlled conditions (this was not war after all, or genocide) of human nature’s pursuit of ascendancy. Structure, order, complete monopoly. It was human history, masquerading as God’s Purpose, revealing herself to an under-age audience (308-9).

The passages which describe Velutha’s beating by the police officers and his condition in the bowel are highly descriptive and overtly self indulgent to the point where gory undertones ensue. Roy further intensifies the abject through the allusion of defecation, urination and blood. The passage about the twins’ stay at the police station begins – not by coincidence -- with Inspector Thomas Mathew

offering Coca-Colas to the twins, "So once again, in the space of two weeks, bottled Fear for Estha. Chilled. Frizzed. Sometimes Things went worse with Coca-Cola" (313). The twins are left aside while the inspector is negotiating with Baby Kochamma. Then the narrator begins a closer description of the police station, which evokes a sense of immediacy, to later be guided to the core of the bowel where Velutha's corpse lies. The abject is encountered by Estha when he enters the bowel, and the impact of this moment is powerful. The narrative continues to carry us past the core to the marginal shadows of the room where he can see Velutha's swollen face, which is described through elegant and beautiful imagery, "A pumpkin with a monstrous upside-down smile" (320), and his damaged head, "Blood spilled from his skull like a secret" (319-20). Then anticipation takes over as Estha becomes familiar with his surroundings. This is shown by the fact that he pays attention to every detail, "Police boots stepped back from the rim of a pool of urine spreading from him, the bright, bare electric bulb reflected in it" (320).

The reader is aware that death awaits Velutha. Hence, Estha crosses Kristeva's imaginary boundary into the realm of death, mutilation, blood, and horror. According to Kristeva's theory of abjection, the cadaver is the limit and the most sickening of wastes, a border that becomes an object as "I" is expelled (3-4). However, Roy does not focus much on Velutha's cadaver – the reader is told that he did not live through the night, and personifies death: "Death came for him" (320). On the contrary, we are offered a full description of the body fluids previous

to his violent death. She focuses on the border of his condition as a living being, which makes out of Velutha the ultimate of his abject position. The idea of death is defamiliarized by the glamour and the fact that "Estha imagined that something in him smiled. Not his mouth, but some other unhurt part of him. His elbow perhaps. Or shoulder" (320), and by the fact that he fantasizes about the corpse, exchanging Velutha's identity by his fictional brother.

According to Gilmore's article, "telling the truth may be a form of punishment, as well as an effort to stave it off" (1994: 55). Estha's confession at the police station can be compared to the conventional darkened space of the confessional, being it a dark bowel with a "bright, bare electric bulb" (319) switched on only for Estha to accuse him. Gilmore goes on saying that "it may function as a place where one speaks not only *to* priests but *for* the fate of one's soul" (58). The church/state code of 'truth' is enmeshed within a complex and diffuse network of power relations, and it participates in producing the notion of personhood. A person's relation to God and her or his spiritual decorum and social conduct were all defined in order to implicate the social subject in both 'this' world and the 'next.' For this reason, the confession formed a crucial site for maintaining and generating power and exerted influence far beyond the confessional. Gilmore talks about the Middle Ages, but the Christian tradition of confession can be related to what happens at the police station in the hands of a hypocritical Christian Syrian, Baby Kochamma, and another, the Inspector.

In fact, what was supposed to save them from punishment is what really destroyed their lives. The trauma of not being able to represent the truth (either at the police station or with the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man): “in the years to come they would 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?” (318). The cultural notion of truth is being distorted by personal interests. The idea of telling the truth or not meets with dramatic and fatal results in many of the characters. The twins do not confess pleading for their lives, but as advocates for their mother and their fate after death. If confession is supposed to ensure you a better safe future, in the twins’ case it condemns them to a perpetual grief, as it is the cause of the death of the dearest ones. What is implied here is that the confession was manipulated by the State and the Church, and that what is supposed to protect children (they were treated kindly by the police officers, the Police Inspector, and Baby Kochamma) is what destroys their lives. The discipline of confession is then subverted by the fact that even when Estha’s mouth said ‘Yes’, it was not his own voice, requiring this a later version of Truth that will be uttered this time by Rahel who is transformed in a speaking subject.

7. Dissenting from the absolutist rule: towards liberation and independence.

7.1. The man-less woman: negation of motherhood, widowhood, and divorcehood.

No wonder then that Devi –despite getting perhaps the best education available before getting married—is utterly disillusioned after marriage. The breaking point comes over the question of children. Devi herself feels no great desire to have children, but Mahesh --who is a great believer in the cure of doing like everybody else-- believes that motherhood will teach Devi to be a better woman. Despite protracted attempts, Devi cannot get pregnant. Her inability to conceive makes her whole being defined in terms of her unproductive womb: “I feel myself getting blurred in Mahesh’s eyes. The focus gets softer and softer, till everything dissolves into nothingness, everything but my stubborn, unrelenting womb” (93). Through this “stubborn, unrelenting womb,” Hariharan attempts a feminist statement of resistance.

The novel shows the marginalization and alienation of even educated and apparently rich women like Devi from the civil society constructed by the urban coalition partner in India’s passive revolution. It is best illustrated through the corrosive experience Devi has at the hospital, a modern corrective institution par excellence. It is Devi’s malfunctioning womb that mediates her gendered passage from home to hospital. Her husband, impatient for progeny, has found a doctor

who will set right the rebelling organ and the straying tubes inside her, so that she can be “mended, an efficient receptacle for motherhood” (89). Devi feels revolted at the way her body is subjected to gloved and instrumental inspection by the insensitive and pushy medical experts. She is completely distraught when she is dictated by the mercenary strangers about the proper schedule for her sex life:

Only a few years ago, I would have burst into laughter. But I seem to have lost, along with many other things, my sense of humour, even my girlish ability to giggle. I am someone else now. The doctors bristled with impatience. What was I to them but a stupid woman who couldn't even get pregnant, the easiest of accidents? Look at the obedient, dutiful wives around you, they seemed to say. They are born wives, they don't need others to regulate their functions and coax them to grow in the right direction (91).

Devi's inner organs begin to stray as a mark of rebellion. Her urge for a strong sense of revenge is manifested in different forms and plans definite means of escape. She derives satisfaction in not being able to carry children for Mahesh. She considers it a powerful weapon to be hurled against him. Sudhir Kakar analyses the socio-psychological implications of the situation: “an Indian woman knows that motherhood confers upon her a purpose and identity that nothing else in her culture can. Each infant born and nurtured by her safely into childhood, especially if the child is a son, is both a certification and a redemption” (1981: 56).

However, Devi does not define her identity through motherhood; she denies it and tries to find a self, detached from any socio-cultural restrictions:

In my waking hours I am still no conqueror. My petty fears, and that accursed desire to please which I learnt too well in girlhood, blur the bold strokes, black and white, of revenge. I write elaborate scenarios in my mind for the last act –humiliating Mahesh, saying all the things we have left unsaid. I do something bloody, final, a mark of protest worthy of the heroines I grew up with (95).

As in many other cultures, motherhood is seen as the final act in establishing womanhood, but Devi's failure to become a mother is a crucial factor in her development as an individual. She liberates herself from the pressures of feminine role-play to attain a state of free, creative individuality. She asks herself about her identity, about being a woman for the first time. Until then, she has been defined by other people, asking numerous questions and accepting her role:

Am I a neurotic because I am a lazy woman who does not polish her floors every day? An aimless fool because I swallowed my hard-earned education, bitter and indigestible, when he tied the *thali* round my neck? A teasing bitch because I refuse him my body when his hand reaches out; and dream instead, in a spare room, of bodies tearing away their shadows and melting, like liquid wax burnt by moonlight? (74).

At this point, the sexual politics of motherhood becomes a major theme as Devi's self-fulfillment does not lie in the bearing and rearing of children, but in recognizing her own inherent potential to live with herself on more positive terms. It is a self that endures suffering, but it is a suffering that leads to self-understanding and an inward strength to break loose from past thoughts and experiences that are negative. The figure of the woman moving from a family to another epitomizes patriarchal continuity even as she is herself drained of proper identity. She lives imprisoned in the role of a wife, and escape from it is possible for her through adultery; she says:

I will gather together the fragments which pass for my life, however laughably empty and insignificant, and embark on my first real journey. I would like to do better than sneak out, a common little adulteress. (...) so that I can learn to be a woman at last. I will soar high on the crest of Gopal's wave of ragas, and what if I fall with a thud, alone, the morning after? I will walk on, seeking a goddess who is not yet made (95).

TFN presents a picture of the institutions of family and marriage in the wealthy classes of the Indian society. In the fictional cosmos of the book, the family is crumbling and marriage comes to be re-defined, which is a rejection of the traditional brahminical arranged marriage. The authors of both novels show a development in the awareness of the female characters towards the institution of

marriage, as it is related to the transformation of India. The first generation women accepted their role, without questioning it. Then, the second generation shows a degree of rebellion but still had children. The third generation –the narrators of these novels—reject marriage after having given it an opportunity with no success, deciding, then, to remain motherless.

Traditionally, a wife cannot fathom a complete life without her husband. Then, the position of the widow is often socially tenuous and frightening, and consequently, she wishes to die before her husband (Uma 3).⁸⁸ Susie Tharu, in her essay “The Impossible Subject: Caste in the Scene of Desire”, discusses the role of the Brahmin widow in Githa Hariharan’s “The Remains of the Feast,” a short story taken from her 1992 collection *The Art of Dying*. She argues that the widow is a figure whose every life is marked by a specific death. She is *vidhava* (without a husband) and consequently in need not only of public protection, but also of regulation, governance. Widow stories therefore are invariably also subtly modulated historical engagements with questions of governmentality and citizenship (256). This is a story about a Brahmin woman who was widowed

⁸⁸ One of the most blatant areas of misogyny and discrimination within the Hindu tradition has been the prejudice shown against widows, especially against those of the higher classes and castes. This discrimination has been sanctioned, encouraged and perpetuated in the name of religion. It was higher caste widows with no means, and who were left without progeny, who were generally physically and mentally abused. While the higher caste widows were physically rendered ugly in some areas of India (their heads were shaven and they wore a rough white sari and no ornaments), it is generally held that the lower caste widows were allowed to remarry. With the increasing prevalence of child marriages, the trauma suffered by child widows has been one of the most callous aspects of the religious tradition.

young and has lived the prescribed life of austerity. She has outlived her only son and his wife, and is now with her grandson, a retired bureaucrat, his wife, and their medical-student daughter. Suddenly, at ninety when she is dying of cancer, a new life bursts forth in a hitherto controlled appetite that declares its scandalous self. It desires everything that it has been forbidden: cakes with eggs in them, from the Christian shop with a Muslim cook, Coca-cola laced with the delicious delight that it might be alcoholic, *bhel-puri* from the fly infested bazaar, possibly touched by untouchable hands, tweezed eyebrows, shaven legs; and finally, in the flourish of death, a sari of bridal red.⁸⁹ Years of deprivation pale into insignificance against the grandeur of this feast in which the flesh reasserts its primal authority.

The example that Tharu explains is quite similar to the life of Baby Kochamma in *GST*, even as she is not a real widow –she never married Father Mulligan--, but after his death she devotes herself to the material world. Hariharan implies the same situation with the character of Sita. After years of complete devotion to her family, she discovers –after the death of her husband– that she has been deprived of her most precious activity: playing the *veena*. So, once she becomes a widow, she drops her meticulous garden, which becomes

⁸⁹ Food that has come into contact with another person from a different caste is considered unclean, and any cook should ever taste food during preparation. Ideally all food should be offered to the gods before it is eaten. Food preparation itself falls into two main categories: *pukka* (deep fried) and *katcha* (raw, boiled, baked or lightly fried in ghee). Upper castes may accept *pukka*, but not *katcha* foods from lower castes. There is a huge amount of rituals that the orthodox Brahmins practice, being the majority of them related to purity and pollution. Those who have been exposed to death or blood (here, especially women for their relation with blood shed during menstruation, virginity loss, child birth) need to go through a ritual purification process.

“wild and over-grown” (139), as Baby Kochamma also does: “after enduring more than half a century of relentless, pernicky attention, the ornamental garden had been abandoned. Left to its own devices, it had grown knotted and wild” (27). In both cases, the garden is a symbol for an identity dominated by external influences.⁹⁰ She substitutes the hard work by a dish antenna with which she “presided over the World in her drawing room on satellite TV” (27). Mammachi also enjoys the restrictions she had previously to her husband’s death. As a punishment, her husband had prohibited Mammachi to use the new car, which she uses after his death.

Widowhood is displayed as a liberation, instead of a penance. Actually, it is depicted as liberation from a married life that conveys penance. We do not encounter the familiar shaven-headed figure, victim-widow. As Tharu says about Hariharan’s short story, the figure of the widow as sufferer “has been replaced by a body whose robust appetite and Rabelaisian humour is a capable substitute for feminist struggle” (260). Ascetic widowhood and sati⁹¹ are the two prescribed options for the widow in the religious texts. A widow who remarries is a transgression that may lead to problems in her second marriage. When a woman

⁹⁰ I own this insight to Prof. Cuder Domínguez.

⁹¹ The Hindu widow who immolates herself on the funeral pile with her husband’s body. For a critique of this problematic, see Madhu Kishwar and Ruth Vanita (1987), Sujata Patel and Krishna Kuman (1988), Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (1981), Lata Mani (1986), Ashis Nandy (1982 and 1988), Shakuntala Narasimhan (1991), Spivak (1987), and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (1993).

has violated the taboo against remarriage, and she plays out the second option in an ironic fulfillment/reversal of the prescription. As Sunder points out, the perception that Hindu women were victims was the basis for the establishment of sati as a women's issue, as I noted earlier; it provoked an implicit comparison of their devalued social position with the freedom and privileges of British women—thus offering further proof of the superiority of British civilization (1993: 46).

The colonial ambivalence towards sati was, in any case, productive for the achievement of the diverse goals of imperialism (Sunder 47-48). Moreover, contemporary diasporic writers who aspire to impress a western audience,⁹² use in their narratives images of sati. With this, the Indian woman is depicted as victim, while the non-Indian woman is depicted as independent. That is probably why we do not find sati cases in Hariharan's and Roy's novels, as we might find in other exotic works about India.⁹³ The widows that we find in both novels are no longer victims, as we argued above.

A more radical response to male oppression is the resort by women to divorce, a theme that both novels deal with.⁹⁴ Divorce provides the writer with an occasion to castigate Hindu and Christian traditions where a woman's life is

⁹² I thank Bijoy Sagar for pointing this out to me.

⁹³ For example, Elisabeth Bumiller's *May You Be the Mother of a Hundred Sons* (1990).

⁹⁴ For a close study on divorce laws and situations in India, see P. R. Amato's "The Impact of Divorce on Men and Women in India and the United States"; J. N. Choudhary's *Divorce in Indian Society: A Sociological Study of Marriage Disruption and Role Adjustment*; Paras Diwan's *Family Law: Law of Marriage and Divorce in India*; Ratna Kapur and Brenda Cossman's *Subversive Sites: Feminist Engagements with Law in India*; and P. K. Viridi's *The Grounds for Divorce in Hindu and English Law: A Study in Comparative Law*.

hemmed in by a web of duties to her husband, and where she is conjoined to stay faithful to him irrespective of his character or treatment of her. Divorce is also presented as an assertion by women of their need for personal freedom including sexual freedom. Divorce is a potent weapon of revolt. Traditionally in India, many women's psyche has been determined by the need to do one's duty or act according to one's *dharma*. A wife, according to Manu, must live for her husband and children. Clearly, Manu does not give a woman an existence apart from that of her husband or his family. In the novels questions of self-awareness do keep rising. The goal of self-fulfillment includes happiness. The question of happiness including sexual happiness is slowly edging its way past several other concerns into the frame. Both Hariharan and Roy create a space for change in women's position and status, though they approach it from different perspectives.

Ammu's marriage had been a way to escape her ill-tempered, calculatingly cruel father John Ipe and her long-suffering mother. Attracted to an independent life away from her family, Ammu yields to Baba, and gets pregnant. However, she soon discovers --as the other female characters in the novels-- how disappointing marriage is. For her, even when she chose an unconventional sort of marriage (not an arranged one, and moreover an intercommunity one) she realizes that a marriage of convenience can be as disastrous as an arranged marriage (39). The inhuman treatment meted out to Ammu testifies about the inflexible ethical values which deprive the self of its autonomy. Consequently, her longing for happiness

results in tragedy. Even at her parents' home she is a mere visitor, always a dependent, because "as for a *divorced* daughter (...) 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 a *intercommunity love* marriage –Baby Kochamma chose to remain quiveringly silent on the subject" (45-6). Her divorcee condition is ironically parallel to her brother's. Both got married outside their community and both later got divorced. However, Ammu is the only one repeatedly humiliated, while even Margaret –who not only divorced Ammu's brother but also remarried an Englishman, and is now a widow-- is placed on an altar. With this, the author explains how the colonial forces are still prevalent. One generation later, Rahel also finds divorce a way of re-stating her individuality. After her return to Ayemenem, when she meets Pillai, she does not try to hide the fact that she is divorced as her mother was, instead she wanted to shock him into silence to which he concluded: "*One was mad. The other die-vorced. Probably barren*" (130).

The 'Law of the Threshold' is a methodological resource for feminist literary criticism in India by Malashri Lal. The threshold is a bar marking a critical transition from inside to outside, that is, the domestic and the public worlds. For women, unlike for men, a step over the bar is an act of transgression, once committed they are never to re-enter the boundaries of home. In the home, the woman plays a determining role, but as we have seen above, Devi transgresses

her husband's norm. As Lal points out, from the woman's perspective within the home, the world beyond the threshold is an unknown arena full of male activities. Devi's husband protects her with his authority from the outer world, forbidding her to exercise her intellect or achieve economic gain. Devi is in a critical zone, in a space between two types of influences: from the interior (custom, heritage, beliefs from upbringing, and messages of conformity coded by generations of patriarchal hegemony) and from the world out there (freedom, risk). The strains of the threshold zone are located in the problematic of gender. The interior space has sensitized her to her female identity and the expectations aroused.

Feeling utterly humiliated and revolted at having to submit to an insensitive gynaecologist's check-up at the insistence of Mahesh, Devi finally decides to elope with Gopal.⁹⁵ Devi's escape with Gopal serves as an illustration for this critical situation, but it is not until she leaves Gopal when she finds the freedom of self-expression like her mother found with widowhood and symbolized by the sound of the *veena*. Since a little girl she has been engaged with fundamental questions about the nature of womanhood, and she has made her exploration from which we can conclude that there are not biological determinants, but sociological constraints superimposed to limit women. Once in

⁹⁵ Nayantara Sahgal's novels focus on freedom and a new definition of the virtuous woman, who is courageous enough to risk the unknown (in for example, *Rich Like Us*). If the conventional woman suffers cruelty, the new woman is determined to live with self-respect. In most of her novels, the heroines are aware of the injustice done to them in their marriages and they walk out of their homes.

a world beyond the home, she is not accepted by the others, but Devi succeeds in building a self. Lal (20) points out that his situation often leads to suicide or mental breakdown, and in fact, this is the ending for most female characters in for example Anita Desai's novels, but Hariharan offers a new perspective, that of success in independence.⁹⁶

The conflict between individual and restrictive domestic and social norms is resolved by the heroine's direct assertion of and adherence to the principle of independence. Until now she had been seeing her reflection mirrored by the others, not the self; she has been the definition provided by the other, by the male-centered community. The crucial recognition of the Other (someone who is not really her) in the mirror occurs the night before she leaves Gopal. Before that, Devi did not own any identity, she was building it through the definitions provided by the people who surrounded her. Devi finds her true Self once she has been detached from the definition provided by the male-centered world. Culture has tried to idealize her position in society, but Devi breaks with this concept once she, in a symbolic gesture, throws her sari over the mirror to blot out her reflection:

She stood in front of the ornate, teak-bordered, full-length mirror that she and Gopal shared, (...) she looked into the mirror, but it was as if she was still looking at Gopal's sleeping face. It threw back at her myriad reflections of herself. Devi undraped the sari and folded

⁹⁶ For example in Anita Desai's *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988)..

it carefully, lovingly, till it was one long, multi-layered curtain. She covered the mirror with the silk so that the room suddenly became darker, and everything, the beds, the table, the sleeping body of Gopal, were themselves again, no longer reflections (138).

Divorce is definitely the only alternative these authors propose. Self-love and satisfaction of needs and passions are the only way out. They intend to put an end to oppression and repression for a more liberated woman, detached from moral conventions that are man-made.

7.2. Return to the maternal: rejecting male norms.

Devi and Rahel advance the feminist critique of historiography through the imagined life of their mothers, an anagram and double of both the narrator and of her widow mother, Sita, in the first case, and her dead mother Ammu, in the second. Despite the general cultural amnesia shrouding women's lives, the mother's life is remembered through the power of fiction to write beyond the ending, to fly in the face of the plot's incontrovertible logic of cause and effect. Through the power of imagination, the narratives reconstruct the life of their mothers. Their story-tellings will embody the truths of interpretation, of the making of history, the provisional truths of a subject in the making and hence subject to transformation with the changing situation or perspective.

Devi has been building her identity by means of disagreements with the others, challenging the traditional feminine roles. And this is the very moment when Devi realizes that something is missing, and says: "I was too well-prepared, and not prepared at all. America, Jacaranda Road, Mahesh, Gopal. I have run away from my trials, my tail between my legs, (...) She was, for the first time, no longer on the run" (137-38). Devi goes back home to join her mother because she feels the necessity to start from the beginning. It is the knowledge and acknowledgement of the reality of life that leads her to an acceptance and a final transcendence. Devi goes back home to join her mother because: "She rehearsed in her mind the words, the unflinching look she had to meet Sita with to offer her her love. To stay and fight, to make sense of it all. She would have to start from the very beginning" (139). Propensity to ask questions is indicative of an intellectual quest that necessitates a mode of enquiry or a quester asking a series of questions that may bring forth a redeeming answer. This is what Devi has been doing through her whole life, but realization has come when she has been able to find the right answer to her questions.

Her visit to her mother's house by the sea where she stays away from everyone after her husband's death brings Devi close to her own independence. Her education and maturation is complete with the realization of her genuine feelings. As Hirsch points out, the process of en-genderment is tied to the process of transmission and the relationship to previous and subsequent generations of

women (11). However, what challenges any psychoanalytical approach is the fact the Sita stops being the negative model for the daughter Devi. Although the psychoanalyst author Kristeva argues that the return to the mother conveys a fall into the symbolic, in this novel, Hariharan offers a new beginning, a liberation away from male-dominance symbolized by the image of the house by the wild sea. It is true that there is a recuperation of the maternal in the novel, but against any traditional psychoanalytic perspective, Hariharan offers a reversal and subversion of the lacanian thought as well as that of Kristeva who claims that the return to the mother is a way to fall into the symbolic. Devi returns to her mother, and she does not become insane, as Kristeva may argue. What psychoanalysis has interpreted as repression, it is in fact an act of liberation represented by the wild background of her home. Kristeva turns to an examination of female suicide because of the impossibility of either refuse to insert themselves into the symbolic order, or embrace the masculine model for femininity.

Devi's mother – Sita-- decided to choose the role ordained by centuries of social conventions, that of a wife and daughter-in-law. Everything about her and her house was orderly, but after having broken with the demands of her music, and having lived all her life only according to what was expected from her, she finally faces liberation after the death of her husband. Now the sound of her musical instrument suggests the possibility of her attempting to attain what she had denied herself: to live her own life. To her pleasant surprise, Devi finds her

mother's garden wild and hears the sound of her music welcoming her into the house. Her mother's gesture is a clear indication that they are to free their roots and to be true to their own selves.

Devi finds her true Self once she has been detached from the definition provided by the male-centered world. Culture has tried to idealize her position in society, but Devi breaks with this concept once she, in a symbolic gesture, throws her peacock-colored sari over the mirror to blot out the myriad reflections of herself. As the mirror image represents the moment when the subject is located in an order outside itself to which it will henceforth refer, Devi rejects being defined socially, becoming thus a creature beyond gender. What the novel is showing is how modern attitudes infiltrate and modify traditional values even as these values are questioned and severely criticized. She is challenging the old myths of marriage, wifhood and love symbolized by Sita. Chanda points out that Hariharan suggested that, in a reversal of roles, Devi's story creates a space for her mother to relinquish her conformist, protective attitude. The name Sita is not random. The invocation recalls the Sita of the *Ramayana* and interrogates a traditional model of womanhood –both as the ideal Hindu wife and as a literary foremother. The text suggests a shift from a self-sacrificing to a self-preserving femininity. The location of the house by the sea holds the promise that the wildness of the sea can enter the house (60).

The protagonist is a young educated and –according to her family– marriageable girl. The plot of marriage soon is taken by the casting off of her social disguise, and transgressing its boundaries to first become an adulteress and later an independent woman. The ending in which she returns to her liberated mother's house by the ocean hints at her future return to her own self. Hariharan situates the romance plot within the quest plot and reveals how Devi brilliantly overcomes all conflicts between heroism and femininity. She no longer needs to feel acknowledged as an exemplary wife, she does not even set the standard for motherhood excellence. Finally, Devi experiences exile from the community, first eloping with a lover and then returning to her mother, who translates the music of her place of exile. She is found playing the *veena* in a slovenly house by the ocean. By adapting her grandmother's, Mayamma's and Baba's oral tradition of talk-story to her own enunciation of self as an individual, Devi has achieved her purpose, offering an open-ended space for further development.

Sudhir Kakar talks of the dominant narrative of Hindu culture being that of the Devi or the Great Goddess, especially in the manifold expressions as mother in the inner world of the Hindu son. The maternal-feminine is more central in Indian myths and psyche than their Western counterparts, and affirms the permeability of gender boundaries (1997: 65-66). Hariharan's desire for the removal of gender polarities suggests the incorporation of feminine values in the male. But an avenging powerful *kritiya*, the angry Gandhari or the bitter and frustrated Amba,

remain unsatisfactory models of power and agency. Devi's introspection and self-knowledge lead her to an admission of her failings, but there is also a self-justification: "I have mimed the lessons they taught me, an obedient puppet whose strings they pulled and jerked with their love" (136-7). The simultaneous projection of a mother image of protector /nurturer, as well as a devouring one, is very much in keeping with Devi's ambiguous feelings towards Sita. She returns to the maternal, with which she reunites with the maternal-feminine, seeking to start from the very beginning: "I have made very few choices, but once or twice, when a hand wavered, when a string was cut loose, I have stumbled on-stage alone, greedy for a story of my own" (137).

In *GST*, Ammu's story is a tale of traditional sexual fall. It is interpreted by the community as a cautionary story, as Ammu disgraced the family not only by having married out of the community but also by maintaining an out of caste relationship with a Dalit.⁹⁷ Her death alone in a dirty lodge can be considered as a warning of the consequences of sexual transgression. The church refused to bury her, and consequently she had to be cremated where only beggars, derelicts and police-custody dead were (162), which implies that she is out of society, considered not only homeless but also a criminal.

⁹⁷ Anita Rau Badami also shows an inter-caste relationship in her novel *Tamarind Mem* (1996), in which Saroja --a Brahmin married lady-- falls in love with Paul da Costa --a caste-less car mechanic. Due the impossibility to fulfill that relationship, he commits suicide after which Saroja decides to become silent as a protest.

She has been punished by her own family, by condemning her to a silence that conveys an erasure of her self. Even her twin children are considered illegitimate and are accused of having made their cousin drown in the river that separates her family's house and that at the other side of history, the Paravans'. As Martin Jay puts it "the abject shatters the wall of repression and its judgments" (147). Ammu does not repress her feelings and overtly speaks her mind. Society, however, always answers back, trying to put her in her conventional place. Chacko, in spite of being a 'liberal' man who is for equality, is a patriarchal man who takes advantage of women.

The intercommunity relationship between Ammu and Velutha goes beyond the thinkable, as Kristeva argued regarding abjection, "beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable" (1). Actually, in the novel, the narrator says: "it was a time when the unthinkable became thinkable and the impossible really happened" (31). This conveys that Ammu becomes an abject too, in the way she attempts to identify with something on the outside and finds the impossible within; when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very being. According to Kristeva, "it acknowledges the impossibility of Religion, Morality, and Law—their power play, their necessary and absurd seeming (16). This is why she used to cross the river to meet her lover at the other side, away from the façade played in the Ayemenem house, crossing over what Kristeva calls "the dichotomous categories of Pure and Impure, Prohibition and Sin, Morality and Immorality"

(16). During the scene of welcoming the English relatives, the twins refer to it as a play being performed. There, Ammu “saw that he saw. She looked away. He did too. History’s friends returned to claim them. To rewrap them in its old, scarred pelt and drag them back to where they really lived. Where the Love Laws lay down who should be loved. And how. And how much. Ammu walked up the verandah, back into the Play. Shaking” (177).

Kristeva’s work in abjection becomes especially useful for contextualizing Roy’s insistence on the enigmatic trauma of Estha’s individuation from the mother, as Estha fully inhabits self-abnegation. As the abject threatens life, and must be radically excluded from the place of the living subject, Estha considers himself guilty not only of Velutha’s death but also of his mother: “It was *his* fault that the faraway man in Ammu’s chest stopped shouting. *His* fault that she died alone in the lodge with no one to lie at the back of her and talk to her. Because he was the one that had *said* it” (325).

The idea of Estha being re-returned is repeated through the novel as another dramatic line to be crossed. His father sent him back to the Ayemenem house with the excuse of his immediate emigration to Australia. Kristeva claims that everything is under the desire to return to the period of pre-separation, so Estha establishes himself in Ammu’s room:

The room had kept his secrets. It gave nothing away. (...) The floor was clean, the walls white. The cupboard closed. Shoes arranged.

The dustbin empty. The obsessive cleanliness of the room was the only positive sign of volition from Estha. (...) Silence hung in the air like secret loss. The terrible ghosts of impossible-to-forget toys clustered on the blades of the ceiling fan (91).

According to Jay, in his chapter "Abjection Overruled," abjection refers back to a presymbolic state of semiotic fusion prior to separation from the mother. The myths of originary plenitude, prior to the very split between subject and object, are ideological exercises in nostalgia for a past that never was (153). Estha's childhood was very traumatic, not only due to the two violent encounters he suffered, but also by the fact that he was separated from his mother and returned to his father, a man he barely remembered and from which he felt a distance exemplified in this passage: "Estha had rubbed out his surname with spit, and taken half the paper with it. Over the whole mess, he had written in pencil *Un-Known*. Esthappen Un-Known. (His surname postponed for the Time Being while Ammu chose between her husband's name and her father's)" (156-7).

Kristeva explains that the abject tries to cleanse himself of an emptiness, a maternal hatred without a word for the words of the father; "a father, existing but unsettled, loving but unsteady, merely an apparition but an apparition that remains" (6). It is significant that the two men referred as uncle in the novel leave in Estha a mark hard to overcome. First, the fear of the Orangedrink Lemondrink man – called Uncle --, and then Uncle Chacko saying that both the twins and their

mother are a millstone in his neck. Ammu has told them so and even accuses them, in a scene of frustration and anger, of her miserable life. The fact that they are growing up without a father as a masculine role model is criticized by the community. Estha will grow with the idea of being a millstone, even for their uncle Chacko, and trying to obey their mother so that people do not get the wrong impression of a single mother educating her children. During one of her quarrels with her husband, Ammu pushed Estha to him, complaining about having to take care of both the twins (84). From his experience at his father's after being returned to him, we know very little except that he finished school with mediocre results and refused to go to college, keeping himself busy with the housework, which embarrassed his father. However, we are never told any direct experience between father and son. The figure of Baba stays distant, as a plain character whose only function in the novel is that of representing the irresponsible unsettled father.

As Linda Anderson --following Kristeva's theory-- puts it, the mother who speaks is the phallic mother, "the mother fantasized from the side of the symbolic as subject, as able to fill the spaces which would otherwise be unrepresentable (126). Due to the absence of a father figure, Ammu has told the twins that she was both their mother and father; she encompasses both masculinity and femininity. When Estha is abruptly sent to his father's new family, he feels a sense of

helplessness as he experiences abjection again at the point of separation from the other and entering the symbolic realm, or law of the father.

Kristeva goes on saying that the abject causes -- along with loathing -- fear, out of the daze that has petrified him before the untouchable, impossible, absent body of the mother. On pages 253 and 291 of *The God of Small Things*, the words pronounced by Ammu to her twins right before they left home are repeated: "The twins, weighed down by their mother's words – *if it weren't for you I would be free. I should have dumped you in an orphanage the day you were born. You're the millstones round my neck* – carried nothing. Thanks to what the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man did to Estha, their Home away from Home was already equipped" (291). This quotation implies both his fear of being found by the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man and the guilty feeling about their mother's grief. Kristeva defines the abject as "a deep well of memory that is unapproachable and intimate" (6) and that "The time of objection is double: a time of oblivion and thunder, of veiled infinity and the moment when revelation bursts forth" (9). The telling of the story twenty-three years later by his twin sister becomes, thus, essential.

7.3. The androgynous as alternative: the power of memory to heal.

"To forget is to collude in one's own erasure"

Marlene Nourbese Philip.

Frontiers: Essays and Writings on Racism and Culture (20).

Devi becomes the androgynous principle, a self in quest of self-hood. It is the knowledge and acknowledgement of the reality of life that leads her to an acceptance and a final transcendence. As Sarbadhikary proposes, male female fusion (the basis of the concept of androgyny) seems to be a desired goal in Hariharan's novel (59). A clear instance of it is the significance of the epigraph –a vachana by Devara Dasimayya-- about the bamboo tree and also in the marriage ritual of newly weds garlanding the Neem and Peepal trees. The Neem then would seem to suggest Devi's mother Sita, who stood for all that was reasonable, scientific, and not for a world of myths and dreamy nonsense. Devi becomes Devi --the androgynous principle --neither male nor female, but a self in quest of self-hood.⁹⁸ The construction of an androgynous male or female subject is a desired alternative to pronounced gender polarization. The conscious interplay of masculine and feminine aspects of the individual subject is not an impossibility in a culture where gender binaries among mythical gods are not so sharply demarcated, and finds an echo in religious mysticism, which advocates that human beings acquire qualities associated with the maternal.

⁹⁸ Devi, the goddess is Sakti, Prakriti and Maya. She is portrayed as an overwhelming presence that suffuses the world with vitality, energy and power. Some Hindu myths also stress that the male gods are entirely dependent on Devi for their strength and power, and that if she withdraws her power they are impotent and helpless (175). See D. R. Kinsley's *Hindu Goddesses* (1987: 136-7).

In *GST*, Estha allows voiceless words to be born by the sexual act with his sister, a transgression that offers Estha to speak from the depths where language has failed, as the subject who speaks vanished, gravitating thus in a space increasingly silent. Language has failed in his try to provide symbolization. Estha finds now only refuge in the river and his maniacal concern of cleanness, as if trying to clean his guilty consciousness of acts he was forced to commit in his past. He substitutes the dispossessed language by his body: "in his clean room in the dirty Ayemenem House, Estha (not old, not young) sat on his bed in the dark. He sat very straight. Shoulders squared. Hands in his lap. As though he was next in line for some sort of inspection. Or waiting to be arrested" (295). He committed the crime of having accused Velutha even when he knew that was not true.

Estha is perceived as abject by the other characters in the novel although he is not explicitly labeled as such. The locals talk of his strangeness, Baby Kochamma of his craziness, and he only associates himself with the river. The image of the river and its transformation with time stands for the image of the border that separates moral from immoral, Self from Other. Estha is driven to the place of the abject by society. This position has been manifested along his life in the compassing of bodily wastes, his false confession, and the incestuous intercourse, which Jay Martin has considered as evoking powerful fears of pollution and contamination (146).

Kristeva defines the abjection in terms of mourning for an impossible, always, already lost object (15), in Estha's case, the dramatic loss of his childhood, provoking – in his own belief – the death of innocent people. Kristeva points out that: "The various means of purifying the abject – the various catharses – make up the history of religions" (17). Although Estha does not confess in a confessional, he is doing so through Rahel's telling of the memories. He first made a false confession at the police station manipulated by an adult interested in that version. This time, Rahel will focus on truth; that is why the novel takes the shape of autobiography. There is a need to speak up for the covered reality, and the catharsis for them comes after having told the 'Truth', unifying both bodies in a sexual encounter. Estha allows voiceless words to be born by the sexual act with his sister, which stands for the approximation and reconciliation of the feminine and masculine.

R. Hema Nair states that as the tale traces memory, there are innumerable returns, reversals and rewinds. The novel ends with Ammu's broken promise to return, which lends a circularity and mythic ambience to the structure of the text (49). Nair further argues that the structure of the novel is circular and mythic rather than the linear structure of the novel promoted by the inclusion of memory in the narrative. However, in contesting this argument, my point is that --by the end of the novel-- no return is needed, as the word 'tomorrow' promises a changed future. The epigraph by John Berger that opens *GST* suggests that the

novel is going to tell a personal version of History: "Never again will a single story be told as though it's the only one." Once the story has been re-told by Rahel, the history has been recreated, and boundaries have been transgressed, the circularity needs to be broken to give way to a renewed future. Human agency means freedom, freedom depends on possibility, and possibility exists in even the most totalizing discourses.

Rahel, the third person retrospective narrator, needs to recollect, examine, and account for how a story changed her family's lives as events are refracted in time: "little events, ordinary things, smashed and reconstituted. Imbued with new meaning. Suddenly they become the bleached bones of a story" (32-33). Estha is trying to define himself through language. First, the identity of his name—as we have analyzed above—is 'postponed' and then his use of silence, as language failed for him. So if, speechlessness equals lawlessness, and Law functions as a social phenomenon, whose inmost nature is the same as that of language, Estha chooses silence in words. However, as we have been arguing, with the language of his body, and his sister's telling of memories, Roy shows the reader hope for a better future. In the sexual encounter, Rahel and Estha find the ideal combination of silence and speech, sex and love, needs and feelings, the masculine and the feminine in an attempt to transcend the opposites to grasp the essentials of human understanding. This is an androgynous ideal.

Both novels can be defined as utopian narratives, as they propose a return to the idyllic maternal place, as the protagonists return to their native land, and more concretely to their mother's house, in order to start from the very beginning. A new androgynous breed is proposed as the ideal future; a final erasure of gender restrictions that hinder women's independence and development.

In *TFN*, Devi's memories are those of her childhood in her grandmother's village, her experience in the US, and her insipid life by her husband. On her way back to her mother's house by the sea, she sees herself as "an obedient puppet" (136), who has "made very few choices, but once or twice, when a hand wavered, when a string was cut loose, [she has] stumbled on-stage alone, greedy for a story of [her] own" (137). In *GST*, the most vivid memories are of the twins' greedy flamboyant great-aunt Baby Kochamma, Estha's sexual molestation, the hypocrisy of comrades who are supposed to help the affiliates, the cruelty of inept police officers, and the death of innocents. Memory – linked to the loss of innocence -- plays a decisive role in the twins, Estha and Rahel, especially in Estha, who is traumatized by a past. Memory is linked to the loss of innocence and it conveys a strong sense of power. Rahel uses memory as a mechanism to recover her family history and liberate her twin brother from his trauma. In their memories, they are guilty for their mother's miserable life and Velutha's death. They are only kids, unable to blame the system, such as the police, the communists' hypocrisy and Christians' terrifying lack of compassion.

The twins –Estha and Rahel– are torn apart by the exigencies of conventional morality. Roy reconciles the feminine and masculine in the twins, as Estha is traumatized by the memory and Rahel tells the story that could not be told. Consequently, Rahel and Estha feel the need to seize those moments during their childhood before they vanish. With the telling of their story, as they saw it, they try to fix those memories in order to give meaning to their lives.

Both Estha and Rahel have a need to remember in order to build the other side of history, a history that has not been written or told, but another valid version. Memory is identified as a central and vulnerable location of identity, and Estha's trauma is a threat to the self due to how it injures memory. That is why Rahel narrates the story, though the thoughts and experiences are Estha's. Community and political interests forced Ammu to split her children, but finally they came together to re-write history through memory. The twins' own voice beyond the limited sphere of the living into the potentially boundless sphere of death. Finally, confession speaks in the voice of the living and the dead --both for their own lives, their mother's and Velutha's.

Sunder studies how the legendary figures of Ahalya and Sita from Hindu mythology --women raped or abducted-- are forced to establish their chastity through miraculous tests or prolonged ordeals. As traditional narrative models, these legends propose purification for the violated woman through symbolic death (transformation into a stone, passage through fire) to resolve the crisis of

rape or attempted rape (1993: 67). In the case of *TFN* and *GST*, the purification comes through story-telling, as the protagonists Devi and Rahel heal their pain through memory. Ahalya and Sita become triumphant and enduring cultural symbols of *pativrata* (husband-worshipper), their legendary and heroic chastity has retained a powerful ideological hold on the Hindu imagination. The social imposition of tests/ordeals through which women must pass in order to qualify for their re-entry into 'society' is exemplified this time in the figures of the divorced women, both Devi and Rahel.

The two novels are not just exotic postcolonial ones about the land of heat and spices. They deal with memory and what it means to an individual, how memory is a bridge that imparts a sense of self and security. Then, too, there is the theme of loss and frustration. Hariharan's and Roy's novels reveal the undercurrents of disappointment in marriage, the shoals that linger beneath what seems to be proper according to moral laws and what does not. Like other novels by South Asian women writers, this too seems to be a tale about family, about women and their hopes and regrets. However, there is a strong political content as they urged a more thorough examination of the political background, and the state, noting the varying themes in their work. The novels are an emotional journey into family history by a lonely woman set adrift by divorce as the narrator.

The authors' greatest gift is their power of memory. The authors follow the conventions of recovered-memory-driven fiction, giving voice to the characters' most traumatic repressed memory. Through flashbacks and flashforwards, *TFN* and *GST* unfold the secrets of the characters' unhappiness. The stories reveal themselves not in traditional narrative order, but they jump through time, wending their way through the protagonists' memories and attempts at understanding the hand fate deal with their family.

Brenda Marshall stated that the feminist critique of representation "translates into a refusal to see the past as constituted by events which we can innocently recapture and re-present through language. We are no longer able to think about absolute and unquestionable 'facts; or truths of history, speaking now of 'histories' instead of History" (147). Marshall further argues that like literature, history is a discourse, "and thus not to be talked of in terms of truth, as much as 'whose truth'" (150). Thus, contemporary feminist theorists emphasize the need to interrogate the past from various ex-centric positions (for example, from the subject position of women, lesbians, people of color and those living below the poverty line), identify the historical and cultural contexts in which historically privileged texts have been produced and, wherever necessary, add a supplement. As we have argued above, we cannot ignore the importance of feminists who critiqued white feminists who, according to Hazel Carby, wrote their *herstory* and called it the story of women but ignored the lives of women of color and denied

their relation to them. That is the moment, she argues, in which they were acting within the relations of racism and writing *history*.

Toni Morrison refers to her poetics in *Beloved* as an act of "literary archeology" wherein memory facilitates the retrieval of lost narratives –those stories that have been disavowed by the hegemony and even repressed by the Self in willful acts of forgetting. Similarly, Michael Frisch locates memory as a catalyst for identity: "Memory simply cannot exist without presuming the active verb, to remember ... For all the dilemmas of subjectivity, then, the evidence of memory is indispensable" (17). Frisch is concerned with the ensuing products of subjective consciousness, the "Public History" that memory makes possible. He articulates a trajectory for any act of retrieval at the border: Memory – History – Text.⁹⁹ Gayle Green makes an analysis of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, a text which depicts memory and narrative as means to liberation. According to Green, Morrison shows that even a past as horrific as this is not fixed but is open to revision by 'rememory' (315). If Morrison used this technique to depict the times during slavery, *TFN* and *GST* also deal with a terrible past –their families' secrets and stories of frustrations-- which can be related to the horror of (neo-) colonization, and civil society in India.

⁹⁹ Memory as enabling a revisionist history is implicated in a complex debate. For a useful summary of this issue, see Joan W. Scott's "The Evidence of Experience" (1991), and Satya Mohanty's "The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity"(1993).

In giving a voice to the subaltern, and empowering the silenced with memory and speech, Hariharan and Roy accomplish their task of restoring a past—through the means of re-telling of mythology, alternatives to oppressive family relations, and offering transgressions to the state laws—in order to transform their nation. Both Hariharan and Roy are committed to social change, as the women's movement challenges the dominant model for transformation in Indian society, by exposing the limits of representation with its liberal claims for individual rights and freedoms. The personal stories, then, become political. Contemporary feminist theory foregrounds the disruptive, re-visionary project of herstorians to imagine alternatives. They write to challenge the ordering power of narrative itself with the consequent truth claims.

In their novels, the quest for a self becomes a quest for a nation, a nation to be changed, rules to be revised, and myths to be retold. Hariharan and Roy represent in their novels those breeds who are dispossessed. They relate the quest for the lost world of the people with the discovery of a possible alternative. History, memory and politics converge in the text of the postcolonial woman author, subverting generic codes to form a form of postcolonial discourse. It designates sub-continental fiction by women as primarily autobiographical which, through the use of memory, politics, and personal history, recreated the nation and also serves as a commentary on the South Indian women's existence.

Like many South Asian writings, *TFN* and *GST* reflect the cultural and political complexities of India.¹⁰⁰ Memory is precious to the novelists as the protagonists return to their homes and homelands in their minds all through the process of assimilation. These memories are unforgettable and often traffic portraits of family and friends interspersed with abstract musings and sharp studies of the influence of politics and history on everyday life. However, the tone is resolute, never self-pitying. Within historiography, the narrative of women's organizing has been assigned not to the arena of political discourse where it might have been included in the analysis of the development of the Indian state, but to that of social history which, until recently, has been a neglected area of Indian history.

CONCLUSIONS

In part one, we have undertaken a brief but detailed overview of the theoretical frameworks that paved the way to what we call postcolonial feminist studies today, as attempts to dismantle the presumption of universal and absolute truths, challenging canonical ideas. Notions of knowledge, power and sexuality discussed by these theories have helped us to understand the implications of the

¹⁰⁰ See novels such as Dina Mehta's *And Some Take a Lover* (1992), about Mahatma Gandhi's mercy mission to Niakhali; or Nina Sibal's *Yatra* (1987), about sikh history; and Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers* (1999), Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* (1998), and Meena Arora Nayak's *About Daddy* (2000), all about the partition of 1947.

novels chosen. As academic mainstreams may not be absolute --they change over time-- academic reproduction involves the processes of incorporation of that which was formerly the Other. We hope to have clarified, then, the different approaches academics have towards postcolonial studies and the controversy over which position History is being written from. In the analysis of the selected narratives, we have used a wide-range of feminist, postcolonial and subaltern theories, as a framework. These theories have helped to expose the patriarchal and racist implications in the world depicted by the novelists. Thus, this theoretical framework has helped in avoiding a simplistic, reductionist explication of the texts.

For this purpose, we considered essential to include a study of how Subaltern Studies as a discipline has emerged in the last two decades and its incidence in literature. There has been a boom of novels in which the authors give voice to the ordinary, showing in the ordinary all the turbulence of passion, pain and anger in order to transcend from the personal to the political and claim a space in History. Questions of agency have been discussed from Guha to Spivak, trying to make a clear picture of the History written from below, the important role of the subalterns and the strategies used to provide them with their own voice. We have also discussed how the Third Wave feminism emerged and made a survey of the different communities that rebelled against the middle-class white feminist, as they were doubly marginalized not only in relation to their gender but

also because of their ethnicity. Attempts to challenge and change the stultification of convention have occurred through the introduction of these women's claims and practices within the academy and politics. Later, we concentrated on Women's Studies in India and its manifestations in order to locate the novels that are the focus of our analyses into a specific political agenda. Here, the situation is complex, as we have seen how women and other oppressed people have been organizing themselves to struggle for justice, and at the same time the powers of oppression and exploitation by globalizing their arena of operation have created new instruments for hegemony.

We have faced an obstacle when applying a feminist critical approach/feminist theories to analyse the novels of these Indian women writers. Since feminist theories have been mainly formulated in the West based on a Euro-American social reality, there is a latent fear that Western models of feminism might be indiscriminately imposed. For instance, Madhu Kishwar has expressed her views, saying that "feminism, as appropriate and defined by the West, has too often become a tool of cultural imperialism. The definitions, the terminology, the assumptions, even the issues, the forms of struggle and institutions are exported from West to East, and too often we are expected to be the echo of what are assumed to be more advanced women's movements in the West" (1999: 277). Keeping this idea in mind, we have tried to create a flexible theoretical framework using those aspects of feminist theory which are applicable, and using Indian

activists and academics as much as possible, instead of applying in this study any particular rigid feminist ideology. Thus, an insight into women's movements in India and the appearance of the Subaltern Studies Group have helped the transformative relationship between those subjected to the pre-established absolutist rules and those in power, as a means of taking a stand against the institutions and thereby empowering those considered as subaltern.

In the second part of this dissertation, we have focused on the thematic analysis of the two novels chosen, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, by Githa Hariharan, and *The God of Small Things*, by Arundhati Roy. The questioning and recalculation of the male-dominated society by Indian women authors have assumed great significance. Hariharan's story is the story of three women –Mayamma, Sita and Devi-- whose lives are linked by unfulfilled desires and unhappy marriages. Other women who touch Devi's life share the legacy of betrayal, rejection, oppression (the unseen presence of her mother-in-law –Parvatiamma--, her grandmother's maid –Gauri--, and her cousin –Uma). These stories counterpoint and interrogate the ideal moulds of a Gandhari or a Damayanti, myths that are later subverted by Devi in order to build her own individuality. On the other hand, Roy's story delineates a politics of desire that is vitally linked to the politics of voice. Her novel offers an initial typology of women who either conformed to the pre-established rules –Mammachi--; or others who, without as much as questioning it,

simply went on to do what they wanted to –such as Baby Kochamma--; and those who questioned the logic of patriarchal society, such as Ammu.

An analysis of the working of power structures –Family, State and Religion—have helped us to understand the various institutions that shape women's existence. As part of a necessary task of fairly evaluating the works of both Hariharan and Roy, we aimed at exploring the fictional depiction of the awareness of the various forces marginalizing Indian subalterns and the determined refusal to accept those forces as unalterable. This analysis has been followed by an examination of the variations within the over-all pattern that emerge from the different kinds of repressive forces depicted, the protagonists' individual methods of dealing with these forces, and the authors' different and similar attitudes to the same complex problem of establishing female selfhood. *The Thousand Faces of Night* was selected because it shows different types of female repression and different possible escapes in the search for female selfhood in a brahminical Tamil community. On the other hand, *The God of Small Things* was chosen to complete the study required for a comprehensive picture of the evolving consciousness of contemporary Indian women. This novel highlights the inviolable code of morality and female sexuality, thus focusing on the Christian and/or communist community of Kerala, and the consequences for other subalterns: Dalits and children.

We have analyzed the female protagonists' quest towards liberation, from childhood till adulthood. These characters escape the social constraints due to their impossibility to integrate themselves into the existing social order. Their rendering makes all this consequential by giving voice to their nameless, subterranean desires and frustrations, thus legitimizing the agonies rooted so deep in such lives. Even though these characters' agonies seem to arise out of domestic issues, their cause rests on deeper ones. We have argued that although the female *bildungsroman*, generally speaking, tends to favor plot ending that define women according to their romantic lives, thereby supporting a domestic ideology that advocates marriage as the only proper ideal for women, the female heroes of Hariharan's and Roy's novels resist this ideology by transforming romance plot conventions within specific stories, rejecting motherhood and marriage as ultimate goals, and by proposing androgyny as a potentially liberating concept –as Virginia Woolf famously claimed in *A Room of One's Own*. Both Hariharan and Roy clearly take up the project of writing beyond the *bildungsroman* marriage plot, structuring their overall narratives to emphasize the female characters' aim to develop as an individual rather than as a wife. In this way, Devi and Rahel remain childless, get divorced and return to their mothers' place, recuperating their stories –as well as the other women's that surrounded them since childhood-- in order to understand their present lives and be able to propose a reformed future.

During the process of mapping the development of the female protagonists' subjectivity, we hope to have clarified how the State and Religion – framed in an oppressive caste system—influence the functions of the Family structure. We have analyzed how the religious communities (in our case, Brahmins and Christians) are governed by manipulated laws, which cover rights within marriage and inheritance. These personal laws –discriminative against women-- have been traditionally defended as part of ancient religious tradition, although we have exposed how many critics argue that they were codified into their current forms only in the colonial period. Religion has been considered to be a patriarchal construct, which many women have resisted. We have hoped to make clear that caste and religious communities are more powerful in women's lives than even gender, which functions in India as an added consequence in this polarized situation. The continuous climate of violence against the Dalits, and the presumably superiority of the Brahmins strengthen patriarchal controls within the community. Women's link with caste is made through the family, thus, women are crucial to the process by which culture is transmitted. Hariharan's and Roy's transformative projects rest on the fact that their female protagonists do not conform to the rules made by the andocentric community.

Family, caste and community are the key elements of patriarchal social organization in India, according to Dietrich. We have analyzed this issue from the perspective of the three 'Big' power structures, i.e. the Family, Religion and the

State. We hope to have proved how these authors' agenda help in putting pressure on the state to yield to women's demands. As women in India have organized for change, these women authors are providing room for self-expression. In mythical terms, the dominant feminine prototype is usually the chaste, patient, self-denying, long suffering wife --Sita-- supported by other figures like Savitri or Gandhari. However, local manifestations of power become universal in these women's effort to give voice to the traditionally represented communities (women, Dalits, and children, mainly). In their novels, binomies disappear, then, to put an end to hierarchic oppositions, as they justify subordination. These are novels, in general, about the desire to de-colonize the past through the re-telling of private stories; a history of oppositions (dominant/subaltern) that are being transgressed.

The control that patriarchy and caste/class division wield on human beings should be theorized and interpreted within a specific framework. We hope to have accomplished the goal of proving how these power structures work in the South India portrayed in these novels, and not only how the subalterns are affected but also their strategies to survive the horror and transcend the norm by means of revisionism and new alternatives. The female protagonists who appear in these novels are not characterized and defined simply in terms of their victim status. The ambivalence resulted from the clash of voices in these characters' mental and emotional states and their perplexities and dilemmas are a conscious rupture with

all oppressive traditions of all cultures and religions. These authors reinterpret History and, using new symbols, they shape new myths, and adopt new perspectives. The canon is then subverted and new versions of History can be found when re-visioning power structures, as they are neither fixed nor unambiguous, and no longer portrait a stereotyped image of the exotic India, thereby demystifying colonial discourses about it.

The two novels we have analyzed seek to reconstitute the local and traditional outside a very conscious awareness of historical change and present political realities. Through the means of telling concrete personal stories, not only do they transcend from the private to the public, but also from the local to the universal in varying degrees. While the global project of colonization has created the universal other, culturally specific power hierarchies too have created the other within different contexts –be it the Dalits, the children, the women. The consolidation of these discriminatory pre-colonial hierarchies under the regime of colonization and globalisation is one reality we live with today, while the deepening of violence against them in contemporary times is another. Organized violence by the dominant castes against the Dalits in India, systematic silencing of the women by fundamentalist organizations, and child abuse, are disturbing evidence of the growing intolerance in highly aggressive, competitive, masculinized, militarized societies. The exoticism about it is mere coincidence as that is the natural world that surround these writers (they both remain in Delhi,

although they are from South Indian origin), so there is authenticity in their writing: description of nature and how the power structures work when shaping women's subjecthood.

Both Hariharan and Roy propose memory as the only means for liberation, that is, silence becomes speech through action; such resistance is located by Sunder (1993) within the scene of cultural production itself. Linking the personal with the political has been the starting point of the women's movement. Ketu H. Katrak explains that in literary representations of 'the personal as political,' postcolonial women writers explore the personal dimensions of history rather than overt concerns with political leadership and nation-states as in the work of their male counterparts. This does not make women writers' concerns any less political; rather, from a feminist standpoint of recognizing the personal, even the intimate and bodily as part of a broader sociopolitical context, postcolonial women writers enable a re-conceptualization of politics (234).

As we have seen above, although Hariharan and Roy talk about what is familiar to them --life in Southern India-- they transcend from the private to the public, as they do from the local to the universal, following the argument that literature is political. They denounce double standards of morality and moral hypocrisy in the constraints of a patriarchal ideology, something that is universally oppressing the powerless. We have seen how the State and society in general make rules and define boundaries, supported by religious beliefs and

traditions. However, many of these laws are continuously transgressed. Since there is a multiplicity of borders and border-crossings within, we have argued that the authors' common project is to unveil who are allowed to transgress more than others, and which are the rules that are (not) acceptably transgressed more often. Both authors have explored an earlier generation of women who dared to transgress the rules that govern desire, and the consequent social punishment that led to suffering and penance; and a new generation of women who –even in an andocentric community— challenge the established absolutist norm in order to build their own individuality.

Women have been traditionally considered the chief preservers of tradition, however, the regulations and customs that uniform women's roles within the family, and the community in general, are transgressed thanks to these female characters' discontents and revolutions. Our purpose has been, then, to provide a valuable glimpse of India in transition through a study of the women characters' response to change in their lives and in the lives of those around them and their quest for selfhood. We have attempted with this study to throw into bold relief questions of woman's identity, self-fulfillment and sexuality constrained in a caste system; how the characters cope with change in their lives and with the rival pulls of tradition and modernity in their search for identity, independence, fulfillment and love whether within marriage or outside it. The exclusive concern with individual despair and private turmoil in both the novels results in their success to

reach out to others in a more inclusive vision. In the two writers' representation of the evolving female subjects, their individual journeys towards self-realization reflect the collective. They propose a transformative vision in their novels: images of passive victimhood loom together with the stray instances of intervention in patriarchal discourse/religious traditions/laws depicted. Thus, there is a sustained process of empowerment envisioned by these women writers. Their novels come to grips with several social, political, cultural, and moral issues. These include their persistent concern with social change, the complex relation between tradition and modernity, and the changing status of women in Indian society.

The most daring transgression both authors offer is that of the caste system, with its superstitions about purity and pollution. We have seen how society crushes the individual mercilessly if he or she pursues her private ethic to realize his or her dreams of happiness. Every wholesome and fulfilling relationship, like the one we find between Ammu and Velutha in *The God of Small Things*, is savagely crushed by the so-called guardians of social justice. On the other hand, in *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Devi's individualistic notions of marriage conflict as well with the traditions that Brahminism promulgates. Her family believes in marriage as the ultimate goal of a woman's life, and she surrenders her individuality and selfhood to traditional social conventions till she decides to follow her own path. The politics of desire is closely looked into by these authors, which leads towards either frustration or rebellion.

Hariharan and Roy show how Indian women have become alienated from their own bodies, thanks to the notion that a woman's body is meant for her husband and not for herself. The female body has been looked upon by patriarchy as a threat. As Manu said, it may bring a bad name, contaminate future generations and hence it is to be handled strictly, sternly. Like other estates – according to misogynist ideologies—a woman's body too should be owned by a man, one who would control it and take all decisions regarding it. The female body has been a site of feminist struggle for autonomy. These authors uphold personhood and reject the stronghold of social norms that the State and Religion impose on the family structure, whereby familial relationships are defined in terms of duties and responsibilities. The whole social-structure of family revolves around the woman who must abnegate herself for familial happiness. The new definition of a virtuous woman, and the sympathetic portrayal of premarital and extramarital sex show that women are becoming more conscious of their sexual needs and their fulfillment.

To conclude, this whole dissertation has been an attempt to trace the development of the female subjectivity as exposed by two contemporary Indian women authors. We have analyzed how power and hierarchy permeate everything in the interface among members of the family, those who judge and those who are judged. However, we hope to have exposed as well the ways these authors empower silenced groups through the power of the word, des-

empowering –thus-- those dominant and superordinate, and not the subalterns. There are no easy or permanent answers to the complexities of power structures; incorporation and assimilation may be possible forms of change and insertion into society. However, these authors seem to propose the opposite: a detachment from the community in order to create an androgyny ideal, a utopian state where the accomplishment of desires is a positive step towards liberation from a dominant andocentric castist ideology, rejecting the society that constructs gender and caste differences. Within the context of women's –and subalterns' in general– movements that threaten the social, religious and familial institutions and the environment instruments they promote, we have hoped to prove that Githa Hariharan and Arundhati Roy seem to be demystifying the links between power structures, cultural practices and gender relations.

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Reunido el Tribunal integrado por los abajo firmantes en el día de la fecha, para Juzgar la Tesis Doctoral de D./D^a Antonia Navarro Tejero Titulada The Fiction of Arundhati Roy and Githa Hariharan: Another World is Possible acordó otorgarle la calificación de LOBBRESALIENTE CUM LAUDE

Huelva, 10 de Julio de 2003

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THE FICTION OF ARUNDHATI ROY AND GITHA HARIHARAN:
ANOTHER WORLD IS POSSIBLE

Antonia Navarro Tejero

Resumen en español de la Tesis Doctoral presentada bajo la dirección de la
Dra. Dña. María del Pilar Cuder Domínguez.

Huelva, marzo 2003.

El esfuerzo realizado por varias generaciones de escritores y escritoras indios/as ha conocido gran notoriedad a partir de la publicación de *Midnight's Children* de Salman Rushdie. Con esto, la novela india escrita en inglés ha sido finalmente aceptada como un intento literario digno. Aun así, los estudios críticos sobre mujeres escritoras de la India son insuficientes, aún cuando están recibiendo una crítica más detallada en los últimos años, especialmente a partir de la concesión del Booker Prize a Arundhati Roy por su novela *The God of Small Things*. Las escritoras indias están reclamando el reconocimiento merecido y los premios literarios que están recibiendo son una prueba de ello. El control que el patriarcado y la división de castas imponen en el ser humano debería ser teorizado e interpretado en un marco específico. Nuestro propósito con la presente tesis doctoral es el de incluir a esas autoras en este marco esperanzador para reivindicar su papel como escritoras significativas dentro de un panorama literario tradicionalmente patriarcal en el que se asume la superioridad de la experiencia masculina. Este tipo de escritura ha sido tradicionalmente devaluada por razones patriarcales, ya que esta ideología asume la superioridad de la experiencia masculina.

El origen de este prejuicio -el cual proponemos desmontar- viene del hecho de que la mayoría de estas autoras escriben sobre el cerrado espacio doméstico y la percepción de las mujeres desde esta posición. Como consecuencia, se asume que la calidad de sus trabajos se sitúa automáticamente por debajo de sus análogos masculinos, los cuales tratan temas de 'más peso'. A la vez, estas escritoras indias son víctimas de un segundo prejuicio, esta vez con respecto a las

escritoras regionales, ya que el dominio del inglés se ha visto relacionado con una clase intelectual y educada e incluso con poder económico. La impresión general es que estas escritoras y sus trabajos pertenecen a una clase alta, desligada de la realidad experimentada en la India. Como ejemplo podemos ver que el tema de la frustración de la mujer ama de casa y sus traumas psicológicos, sobre los que trata una gran parte de esta producción literaria, se consideran superficiales en comparación con la descripción de la vida de las mujeres de clase baja oprimidas y reprimidas que se describen en las obras de Mahasweta Devi –una autora regional que escribe en bengalí– entre otras.

Con el propósito de romper con este estereotipo, hemos elegido dos novelas en inglés escritas por dos autoras contemporáneas indias: *The Thousand Faces of Night* de Gita Hariharan (1992) –ganadora del premio Commonwealth a la mejor primera obra, y la novela *The God of Small Things* de Arundhati Roy –ganadora del Booker Prize en 1997. Githa Hariharan representa la realidad de una sección muy importante dentro de la población femenina de la India: la mujer enmarcada en unas estrictas reglas brahmínicas en un ambiente de clase alta, y Arundhati Roy por su parte nos muestra en su novela las consecuencias fatales de una relación sexual entre miembros que provienen de diferentes castas dentro una comunidad cristiana y comunista supuestamente al margen de esta división social.

La evaluación de dichas novelas y de sus autoras no puede ser meramente textual, ya que inevitablemente requiere un análisis contextual. Así, el propósito general de este trabajo es el de estudiar y analizar las intersecciones de género,

casta e historia en las narrativas escritas en inglés por mujeres indias. Ambas novelas centran sus objetivos en resaltar la necesidad de subvertir la norma. Nuestro propósito es aclarar, exponer y analizar las similares y diferentes vías por las que estas dos autoras consiguen en sus narraciones el propósito común de crear nuevas posibilidades, redefiniendo la subjetividad femenina en la coyuntura crítica de casta y género con el objetivo de encontrar una voz propia.

En la primera parte, hemos llevado a cabo una revisión breve pero detallada de las teorías que abrieron camino a lo que llamamos feminismo postcolonial hoy en día, y que sirvieron para dismantelar las presunciones de verdades universales y absolutas. Las nociones de conocimiento, poder y sexualidad discutidas por estas teorías nos han ayudado a entender las implicaciones de las novelas escogidas para este estudio. Ya que las corrientes académicas principales tampoco son absolutas, la reproducción académica conlleva un proceso de incorporación de lo que ha sido tradicionalmente reconocido como el Otro. Esperamos haber aclarado los diferentes planteamientos académicos con respecto a los estudios postcoloniales y a la controversia provocada sobre en qué posición se ha estado escribiendo la Historia. En el análisis de las narraciones escogidas, hemos utilizado una amplia variedad de teorías feministas, postcoloniales y estudios del subalterno. Estas teorías han ayudado a exponer las implicaciones del patriarcado y de la casta descritas en las novelas. Y por ello, este marco teórico ha ayudado a evitar una explicación simplista y reduccionista de los textos.

Con este propósito, consideramos esencial incluir un repaso de cómo los estudios del subalterno, como disciplina, han surgido en las últimas dos décadas y de su incidencia en la literatura. Se ha experimentado un auge de novelas en las cuales las escritoras dan voz a lo cotidiano, mostrando en ello todas las turbulencias de la pasión, el dolor y el enfado con la intención de trascender de lo personal a lo político y reclamar un espacio en la Historia. Desde Guha hasta Spivak se han discutido cuestiones de representación, ofreciendo una visión general de la Historia escrita desde abajo, el papel importante de los subalternos y las estrategias utilizadas para otorgarles una voz propia. También hemos discutido cómo la tercera ola del feminismo ha surgido y hemos hecho un recorrido por las diferentes corrientes que se rebelaron contra las feministas blancas de clase media. Este grupo de feministas de la tercera ola denuncian su doble marginación (por género y etnia).

A partir de esta corriente han surgido intentos de desafiar y cambiar la anulación de las convenciones con la incorporación de prácticas feministas dentro de lo académico y lo político. Aquí la situación se hace compleja, ya que hemos visto cómo estas mujeres y otros grupos oprimidos se han organizado para luchar por la justicia a la vez que son víctimas de los poderes de opresión y explotación de la globalización de su terreno de operaciones. Nos hemos encontrado con un obstáculo al aplicar una crítica feminista en el análisis de las novelas. Existe el temor de que se impongan modelos occidentales indiscriminadamente, ya que las teorías feministas se han formulado principalmente en occidente basadas en una realidad social europea-americana. Con este argumento en mente, hemos

intentado crear un marco teórico flexible, utilizando activistas y académicas de la India en la medida de lo posible, en vez de aplicar a este estudio una ideología feminista rígida. Por ello, hemos hecho un recorrido a lo largo de los movimientos de mujeres en la India y la aparición de los estudios del subalterno que han ofrecido una relación transformadora entre aquellos sujetos a las reglas absolutistas preestablecidas y aquellos en posiciones de poder como instrumento de resistencia hacia estas instituciones, para así dar poder a los subalternos.

El replanteamiento de una sociedad androcéntrica ha asumido gran importancia en la literatura producida por mujeres indias. La historia de Hariharan se basa en la vida de tres mujeres -- Mayamma, Sita and Devi -- unidas por la experiencia común de matrimonios frustrados. Otras mujeres que afectan a la vida de la protagonista también comparten el legado de la traición, el rechazo, la opresión (la presencia figurativa de la suegra -Parvatiamma--, la asistenta de su abuela -Gauri--, y su prima -Uma). Estas historias sirven de contrapunto y cuestionan los modelos ideales de Gandhari y Damayanti, mitos que son subvertidos por Devi, quien los utiliza para crear su propia individualidad. Por otro lado, la historia de Roy señala la política del deseo unida a una política de la voz. Su novela ofrece una tipología inicial de mujeres que o bien se conformaron con las reglas preestablecidas -Mammachi--; u otras que, sin cuestionar dichas reglas, simplemente hicieron lo que quisieron, como Baby Kochamma--; y aquellas que cuestionan la lógica de una sociedad patriarcal, como Ammu.

Es importante aclarar que ambas autoras proceden del sur de la India --Roy creció en Kerala y Hariharan en el estado vecino de Tamil Nadu. Además las

novelas se desarrollan en diferentes ciudades del sur de la India. A lo largo del presente análisis descubriremos el objetivo principal de las autoras, reinterpretar y rescribir la historia, en cuyo proceso, historia e historias se entremezclan. Contar historias, es decir, crear historias es por sí mismo un acto de producción de nuevas identidades, y esas historias necesitan de transformación bajo el punto de vista de ambas autoras. Desde este ángulo, la familia y el linaje se hace relevante, y los personajes femeninos de estas novelas toman su posición con respecto a estos asuntos.

Githa Hariharan y Arundhati Roy están comprometidas en diferentes niveles con reformas sociales, lo que hace de ellas escritoras activistas ya que son sensibles a cuestiones de género y casta. No son demagogas ni prescriptivas y ofrecen alternativas en vez de victimizar a los oprimidos. En relación al uso de la mitología, Hariharan lo utiliza de manera más sistemática, remodelando su tradición rica, para subvertir el mensaje didáctico. Por otra parte, Roy utiliza los mitos de una manera irónica criticando directamente su manipulación comercial.

Las autoras ofrecen una mezcla ecléctica de fantasía, memoria y realidad. Hariharan y Roy tienen un sentido del poder que les permite que sus narraciones sean oídas (la interpretación de la historia por la narradora, las historias personales de mujeres, las exploraciones del subconsciente). Edward Said dijo que "culture and the aesthetic forms it contains derive from historical experience" (*Culture and Imperialism*, xxii), y aunque están determinadas por su ideología, clase o economía histórica, viven en la historia de sus sociedades, dando forma a la

misma y viéndose influenciadas a su vez por ella, y en cierta medida por las experiencias sociales.

Siguiendo el razonamiento de Said, podemos asegurar que tanto Hariharan como Roy están, no sólo dando forma a la historia de sus sociedades, sino también siendo moldeadas por ella, ya que ambas se centran en temas de género y casta en sus propias comunidades (una hindú y otra cristiana) y a su vez la moldean ofreciendo una re-escritura de las historias claves de manera subversiva para denunciar públicamente la corrupción y doble moralidad de dicha sociedad. De esta manera, trascienden de lo local a lo universal para finalmente descubrir el significado del ser humano.

La memoria juega un papel principal, ya que es utilizada como instrumento de denuncia de prácticas culturales que reprimen a la mujer y le imponen una división de castas, o como instrumento de reclamo a una identidad cultural perdida. Hemos elegido estas novelas porque en ninguna de ellas se sugiere que lo moderno sea lo positivo y lo tradicional lo negativo, o vice versa. Los antagonistas conviven proyectando una viva imagen de la realidad de la India, con su naturaleza ambigua, donde progreso y retroceso aparecen simultáneamente. Además estas autoras ofrecen en sus novelas, roles femeninos nada convencionales y límites que son continuamente transgredidos. Asimismo, las historias míticas juegan un papel muy importante como manera de construir un futuro diferente, ya que no son repetidas, sino re-interpretadas de una manera transformadora, mezclándolas con un exquisito realismo mágico.

Lo que estas autoras tienen en común es su intención de crear un futuro a través de la re-lectura de una historia pasada, no revelada y de cuentos mitológicos que permanecen en el inconsciente debido a su naturaleza didáctica. Ambas autoras veneran su propia tradición pero su re-escritura no carece de crítica. Las dos obras analizadas se cierran con un final prometedor en un estado utópico, con una serie de personajes que, a pesar de haber sido excluidos del grupo central, han luchado por la consecución de su individualidad. Ambas autoras ofrecen la memoria como instrumento de recuperación de su identidad. Podemos encontrar mujeres, tanto sumisas como rebeldes, que en su mayoría transgreden la norma en algún momento de sus vidas. Además, ambas ofrecen la educación formal como alternativa al matrimonio. Tratan temas asociados con la desigualdad social que sufren ciertas comunidades y su imposibilidad para manifestarse públicamente.

Hariharan y Roy ponen en entredicho el concepto absolutista de la verdad, ofreciendo a los lectores una versión alternativa de la historia. Hariharan usa la subversión de la mitología con la intención de crear una identidad femenina libre de convencionalismos. Por otro lado, Roy usa la re-escritura de la historia con la intención de facilitar al subalterno una voz propia, creando así sucesos posiblemente alejados de toda manipulación. Aunque sus estrategias difieren, les une un propósito común, ambas tienden a dismantlar las concepciones universales de verdad absoluta, para liberar al individuo de una moral impuesta.

El presente estudio está organizado en dos partes principales. En la primera parte hacemos un sondeo descriptivo de las teorías, que nos ofrece un amplio

espectro de la situación actual de los estudios de género y de casta enmarcados a su vez en los estudios postcoloniales sobre el subalterno. La segunda parte está dividida en tres capítulos principales. En el primero, analizamos el proceso de la subjetividad femenina y el uso que estas autoras hacen del *bildungsroman*. El segundo ofrece una descripción de las fuerzas represoras que afectan a los subalternos en la sociedad india contemporánea: la represión y marginalización de las mujeres afectadas por la institución tradicional religiosa, los códigos impuestos sobre la sexualidad femenina en relaciones (extra) matrimoniales, y la doble moralidad del estado gobernante. El último capítulo cuestiona la validez de la imposición de esas restricciones. Las resoluciones de estas mujeres conforman una re-definición de sus vidas, satisfaciendo el objetivo político principal, ya que no están preocupadas simplemente por documentar la realidad, sino también por utilizar sus novelas como medio de exploración de una nueva realidad y proyección sutil de los valores, proponiendo desafíos, replanteamientos y redefiniciones.

The Thousand Faces of Night y *The God of Small Things* critican las estructuras occidentales del conocimiento y del poder –y sus ideas sobre la filosofía y la historia– así como también cuestionan las estructuras de poder patriarcal. El tema de la tensión provocada entre lo novedoso y lo tradicional encubierto aparece en ambas novelas. Por lo general, el *bildungsroman* femenino tiende a favorecer un argumento dirigido hacia una definición de mujer de acuerdo con una vida romántica, apoyando la idea de que el matrimonio es el único ideal para ella. Así, al final de estas novelas, las heroínas se casan, lo cual significa que se han

integrado en el orden social existente. Como contraste, Hariharan y Roy comparten el proyecto de escribir más allá del tema del matrimonio en el *bildungsroman*, favoreciendo una narrativa que enfatiza el desarrollo de los personajes femeninos como individuos y no como esposas. Las protagonistas -- tanto Devi como Rahel-- permanecen sin descendencia, llegando a un entendimiento con las historias de sus propias madres para comprender sus vidas presentes. Así, el programa de reforma se centra en la idea de que estas autoras, aun no pudiendo conseguir una ruptura con su herencia cultural, subvierten el sexismo implícito en ella, entre otras maldades.

Otra técnica utilizada por estas autoras incluye un constante giro del presente al pasado y así la memoria juega un papel muy importante como medio de reconstrucción de la identidad, puesto que estas autoras describen personajes a los que se les ha negado el acceso a la historia. El tono crítico de estas historias es confesional, y están narradas en primera persona. La revisión del pasado se lleva a cabo a través de una lente política y el uso de múltiples formas narrativas --el uso de mitos, poesía, etc.-- es otra técnica importante. Estas novelas se centran en cuestiones como el sentimiento de inadaptación, la creación de un modelo femenino positivo, la re-escritura de la mitología, la re-lectura de la historia, el uso de un vocabulario en lengua vernácula, y el rechazo a crear argumentos altamente sentimentales.

Muchos escritores como Salman Rushdie, Vikram Chandra, Amitav Ghosh, y Shashi Tharoor comparten con estas autoras el interés por la revisión de la historia, quizá con la intención de elevar el concepto de identidad cultural india.

Una crítica contemporánea del pasado se ha llevado a cabo, no sólo revisando mitos diversos sino también cuestionando la autenticidad de las historias producidas bajo un patronaje masculino que está en el poder. Hariharan y Roy se centran en la idea de la simultaneidad de opresiones como acto fundamental a la experiencia social y política de marginalidad y los fundamentos de la política feminista y las historias de racismo e imperialismo. El estado hegemónico --con la familia como microcosmo-- ha jugado un papel principal dirigiendo la rutina diaria y las luchas por la supervivencia. Finalmente, ambas autoras muestran sus diferencias, conflictos, y contradicciones internas de los personajes y el sistema que las oprime, subrayando las interrelaciones complejas entre miembros de una familia, así como las diferentes versiones de una misma historia.

Mohanty sugiere que algunos textos feministas recientes ven a la mujer del Tercer Mundo como un sujeto monolítico. Esta teórica habla sobre la diferencia entre 'mujer' (un concepto cultural e ideológico construido a través de discursos categóricos) y 'mujeres' (sujetos reales de una historia colectiva). Esta conexión entre mujeres como sujetos históricos y la representación de la mujer producida por los discursos hegemónicos es una relación arbitraria en un contexto histórico y cultural concreto. Algunas escritoras feministas colonizan el material y la heterogeneidad histórica de la vida de las mujeres en el Tercer Mundo, produciendo y representando así un concepto simple de esta mujer, una imagen que aparece arbitrariamente construida pero que conlleva la autorización discurso paternalista occidental (1985: 197). Esto conlleva un esencialismo basado en su género, es decir, se asume que son mujeres sexualmente cohibidas, ignorantes,

pobres, analfabetas, atadas a la tradición, religiosas, domesticadas, orientadas a la familia, víctimas, etc. Esta implicación se ve contrastada con la propia representación de la mujer occidental, educada, moderna, con control de su propio cuerpo y sexualidad, y con libertad para tomar sus propias decisiones (199-200).

Como hemos explicado más arriba, la historia ha sido tradicionalmente escrita por la elite, normalmente masculina y blanca. Se están escribiendo historias contra-hegemónicas por autoras provenientes de ex-colonias. Cuando se revisan las estructuras de poder, se subvierte el canon y surgen nuevas versiones de una misma historia. Así, lo personal se convierte en político y la historia no muestra más una imagen estereotipada de la india exótica, desmitificando, en consecuencia, los discursos coloniales.

Si no tenemos en cuenta la situación histórica y política concreta, corremos el riesgo de asumir que los hombres y las mujeres están constituidas como sujetos sexuales-políticos antes de su entrada en las relaciones sociales. Estas novelas se centran en el significado de la memoria y del testimonio. Las cuestiones de identidad son cruciales en el *bildungsroman*, y las dos protagonistas (Rahel en *GST* y Devi en *TFN*) experimentan una búsqueda hacia su identidad, tratando de encontrar respuestas en el pasado de sus familias. Ellas regresan a su tierra natal en la India, sintiendo la ambivalencia que resulta del choque de voces, lo que les provoca estados emocionales y mentales de perplejidad. Sólo cuando recuperan la historia de su madre, su conflicto interno de inseguridad e indecisión se convierte en comprensión y liberación. El regreso hacia lo materno va paralelo con la vuelta

al país natal para encontrar las raíces, una cultura híbrida en la actualidad. Ambos personajes femeninos utilizan la memoria como instrumento de liberación. India se convierte en la metáfora de una tierra renovada, un espacio híbrido.

Un exhaustivo análisis del funcionamiento de las estructuras de poder – familia, religión y estado – nos ha ayudado a entender las instituciones varias que ejercen influencia sobre la existencia de las mujeres. Como parte de una justa evaluación de estas autoras, hemos intentado explorar la descripción ficcional de la concienciación de las diversas fuerzas que marginalizan a los subalternos indios y el rechazo de aceptar dichas fuerzas como inalterables. A este estudio le ha seguido un análisis de las variantes dentro del patrón general que surge de los diferentes tipos de fuerzas represoras, los métodos individuales para tratar dichas fuerzas y las actitudes de estas autoras a la hora de abarcar la compleja tarea de establecer una subjetividad femenina. Hemos elegido *The Thousand Faces of Night* porque muestra diferentes formas de represión y diferentes posibles escapes en la búsqueda de la identidad femenina dentro de una comunidad brahmínica y tamil. Por otro lado, elegimos *The God of Small Things* para completar el necesario estudio de una conciencia de la mujer india contemporánea. Esta novela enfatiza los códigos inviolables de moralidad y sexualidad femenina, centrándose en una comunidad cristiana y a la vez marxista en Kerala, y las consecuencias con respecto a otros subalternos, tales como los intocables y los niños.

Hemos analizado la búsqueda femenina hacia la liberación, desde la niñez hasta la madurez. Estos personajes se escapan de las restricciones sociales debido a su imposibilidad para integrarse en el orden social existente. Incluso cuando la

agonía de estos personajes parece surgir de cuestiones domésticas, sus causas son profundas. Hemos argumentado que aunque el *bildungsroman* femenino tiende a definir a la mujer de acuerdo con el ideal de matrimonio, las novelas de Hariharan y Roy se oponen a dicha ideología y transforman esta convención rechazando la maternidad y el matrimonio como fines absolutos y proponiendo un ser andrógino como concepto de liberación.

Al describir el desarrollo de la subjetividad de las protagonistas, esperamos haber aclarado cómo el estado y la religión –enmarcados en un sistema opresivo de castas– ejercen influencia en la función de la institución de la familia. Hemos analizado cómo las comunidades religiosas (en nuestro caso, brahmines y cristianos) están gobernadas por leyes manipuladas que cubren los derechos dentro del matrimonio y la herencia. Estas leyes personales –que son discriminatorias contra las mujeres– han venido siendo defendidas como parte de tradiciones religiosas antiguas, aunque hemos expuesto cómo muchas críticas han demostrado que dicha interpretación fue codificada durante el período colonial. La religión ha estado considerada como una construcción patriarcal, la cual muchas mujeres han ofrecido resistencia. Esperamos haber aclarado que las comunidades de casta son más poderosas en la vida de las mujeres que las cuestiones de género, ya que este último funciona en la India como una consecuencia añadida a esta situación. El continuo clima de violencia hacia los intocables y la presunta superioridad de los brahmines, refuerzan el control patriarcal dentro de la comunidad. La unión de las mujeres con su casta se establece a través de relaciones familiares, así las mujeres son un elemento esencial

en la transmisión de la cultura. Los proyectos reformadores de ambas autoras residen en el hecho de que las protagonistas no se conforman con las reglas establecidas por la comunidad androcéntrica.

Según Dietrich, la familia la casta y la comunidad son parte de la organización patriarcal en la India. Nosotros hemos analizado este asunto desde la perspectiva de las tres grandes estructuras de poder la familia, la religión y el estado. En términos míticos, el prototipo dominante femenino es la casta, paciente y sufridora esposa Sita, apoyada por otras figuras como Savitri o Gandhari. Aun así, manifestaciones locales de poder se hacen universales en el esfuerzo de estas mujeres por dar voz a comunidades tradicionalmente representadas por otras personas, sin una voz propia. En estas novelas, los binomios desaparecen, para poner fin a oposiciones jerárquicas que justifican la subordinación. Estas son novelas sobre el deseo de descolonizar el pasado a través de la reescritura de historias personales, historias de oposición entre dominante y subalterno que están siendo subvertidas.

El control que el patriarcado y la división de castas ejercen sobre los seres humanos, debe contar con una teoría e interpretación específica. Esperamos haber cumplido el objetivo de probar cómo estas estructuras de poder funcionan en el sur de la India, y no sólo de cómo el subalterno se ve afectado sino también de sus estrategias para sobrevivir al horror y trascender la norma por medio del revisionismo y de nuevas alternativas. Las protagonistas que aparecen en estas novelas no están caracterizadas y definidas simplemente en términos de su estado como víctima. La ambivalencia que resulta del choque de voces en los estados

emocionales y mentales de estos personajes y sus perplejidades y dilemas, son una ruptura consciente con las tradiciones opresivas. Estas autoras reinterpretan la historia, y usando nuevos símbolos moldean los mitos y adoptan nuevas perspectivas. Así se subvierte el canon y podemos encontrar nuevas versiones de una misma historia cuando revisamos las estructuras de poder, ya que no carecen de ambigüedad, dejando de representar una imagen estereotipada de una India exótica, desmitificando así los discursos coloniales sobre la misma.

Las dos novelas objeto de nuestro estudio buscan reconstituir lo local y lo tradicional fuera de una conciencia de cambio histórico y de una realidad de ámbito político. A través de la escritura de historias personales no sólo trascienden de lo privado a lo público sino también de lo local a lo universal. Mientras que el proyecto global de colonialismo ha creado la figura del Otro universal, ciertas jerarquías locales han conformado también diferentes contextos de disidencia. La consolidación de estas jerarquías discriminatorias bajo un régimen de colonización y globalización, es una realidad en la que vivimos hoy en día. Mientras que la violencia, cada vez más profunda, es otro problema contemporáneo. Una violencia organizada de las castas dominantes hacia los intocables en la India, el sistemático silenciamiento de las mujeres por organizaciones fundamentalistas y el abuso infantil, son evidencias que demuestran el crecimiento de la intolerancia en sociedades altamente agresivas y masculinizadas.

Tanto Hariharan como Roy proponen la memoria como el único medio de liberación, ya que el silencio se transforma en habla por medio de los actos dentro

de la escena de producción cultural. El interés por unir lo personal con lo político ha sido el punto de partida para los movimientos de mujeres. Ketu H. Katrak explica que en las representaciones literarias de lo personal como político, las escritoras postcoloniales exploran dimensiones personales de la historia, lo que no las hace menos políticas puesto que se reconoce que el cuerpo forma parte de un contexto sociopolítico, y así las escritoras postcoloniales permiten una reconceptualización de la política (234).

Como hemos visto, aunque Hariharan and Roy hablen sobre lo que es familiar –la vida en el sur de la India– trascienden de lo privado a lo público, así como de lo local a lo universal, siguiendo el argumento de que la literatura es política. Denuncian la doble moralidad y la hipocresía moral en la construcción de la ideología patriarcal, algo que universalmente oprime a los que están oprimidos. Hemos visto como el estado y la sociedad en general hace reglas y define límites apoyado por creencias religiosas y tradiciones. Aun así, muchas de estas leyes se transgreden continuamente. Ya que existe una multiplicidad de límites y transgresiones, hemos argumentado el proyecto de ambas autoras como un intento de desvelar a quienes se les permite transgredir más que a otros y cuáles son las reglas que se permiten transgredir más que otras. Ambas autoras exploran una generación anterior de mujeres que se atrevieron a transgredir las reglas que gobiernan el deseo y el consecuente castigo social que conlleva sufrimiento, y una nueva generación de mujeres que desafían la norma absolutista para construir su propia individualidad.

Se ha considerado tradicionalmente a las mujeres como el colectivo que mantiene la tradición. A pesar de esto, se transgreden las regulaciones y costumbres que uniforman los roles femeninos dentro de la familia y la comunidad en general gracias al descontento y rebelión de dichas mujeres. Nuestro propósito ha sido el de aportar una visión de la India en transición a través de un estudio de la respuesta que estas mujeres ofrecen como cambio en sus vidas y en aquellas que las rodean. Hemos tratado con este estudio de lanzar cuestiones sobre la identidad femenina dentro del sistema de castas, cómo estos personajes abordan el cambio en sus vidas con la atracción de la tradición y la modernidad en la búsqueda de su identidad, independencia y sentimientos de autorrealización. En la visión transformadora de sus novelas, las imágenes de victimización pasiva aparecen junto a ejemplos de intervención en los discursos patriarcales/de tradición religiosa/leyes estatales. Y así existe un importante proceso de otorgación de poder por parte de estas escritoras. Sus novelas se unen a diferentes cuestiones sociales, políticas, culturales y morales. Estas incluyen su preocupación persistente por el cambio social, las complejas relaciones entre tradición y modernidad y el estado de la mujer que se está desarrollando en la India.

La transgresión más atrevida ha sido la del sistema de castas, debido a sus supersticiones de pureza y contaminación. Hemos visto cómo la sociedad oprime al individuo sin piedad si éste lucha por el cumplimiento de la satisfacción personal. La relación de plena satisfacción ofrecida por los personajes Ammu y Velutha en *The God of Small Things*, es destruida salvajemente por los veladores de

la justicia social, irónicamente. En *The Thousand Faces of Night*, las nociones individualistas sobre el matrimonio chocan con los roles que el Brahminismo propone. Su familia cree en el matrimonio como último objetivo en la vida y la protagonista se somete a esta convención social hasta que decide seguir su propio camino. La política del deseo es un tema que ambas autoras exploran y que conlleva frustración y rebelión al mismo tiempo.

Hariharan y Roy muestran cómo el cuerpo de la mujer se ve alienado gracias a la noción de que su cuerpo está hecho para su marido y no para ella misma. El cuerpo femenino ha sido considerado una amenaza para la ideología patriarcal, y como Manu dijo, hay que controlarlo estrictamente porque contiene generaciones futuras, ya que debe ser controlado como cualquier otra propiedad. La lucha feminista ha reclamado la autonomía del cuerpo y estas autoras rechazan las normas sociales que el estado y la religión imponen en la institución de la familia, la cual es definida en términos de obligaciones. La totalidad de la estructura social familiar gira en torno a la idea de que la mujer debe someterse a los deseos de la familia. Sin embargo, la nueva definición de la mujer propone una conciencia de las necesidades sexuales personales y su satisfacción.

Para concluir, esta tesis ha sido un intento de trazar el desarrollo de la subjetividad femenina tal y como es vista por dos escritoras indias contemporáneas. Hemos analizado cómo el poder y la jerarquía se filtran en las relaciones interfamiliares, en aquellos que juzgan y aquellos que son juzgados. Asimismo, esperamos haber expuesto las estrategias de estas autoras para dar poder a los grupos silenciados a través de la palabra, quitando poder a los que

dominan y no a los subalternos. No existen respuestas fáciles o permanentes para explicar la complejidad de las estructuras de poder. Aun así, estas autoras proponen rechazar la sociedad para crear un ideal andrógino, un estado utópico donde la realización de los deseos es un paso hacia la liberación de la ideología castista y misógina, rechazando la idea de la construcción social de diferencias por género y casta. Dentro del contexto general de los movimientos de mujeres y otros subalternos que desafían y amenazan la estabilidad social, religiosa y familiar y el ambiente que promueven, esperamos haber probado que Githa Hariharan y Arundhati Roy intentan desmitificar los lazos entre las estructuras de poder, prácticas culturales y relaciones genéricas.



Reunido el Tribunal integrado por los abajo firmantes
 en el día de la fecha, para Juzgar la Tesis Doctoral de
 D./D^a Antonia Navarro Tejero
 Titulada The Fiction of Arundhati Roy and
S. The Hariharan: Another World is Possible
 acordó otorgarle la calificación de SOBRESALIENTE
CUM LAUDE

Huelva, 10 de Julio de 2003

El Vocal
Alida Carbonell

El Presidente

El Vocal
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El Secretario

El Vocal
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El Doctorando

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