Decentering Rushdie
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Cosmopolitanism and the Indian Novel in English

Pranav Jani
To my family and friends, forging homes across worlds

To Howard Zinn, who redefined home
Acknowledgments ix

Introduction Looking Back 1

Chapter 1 The Multiple Cosmopolitanisms of the Indian Novel in English 14

Chapter 2 Dawn of Freedom: Namak-Halaal Cosmopolitanisms in A Time to Be Happy and The Coffer Dams 54

Chapter 3 Twilight Years: Women, Nation, and Interiority in The Day in Shadow and Clear Light of Day 98

Chapter 4 After Midnight: Class and Nation in Midnight’s Children and Rich Like Us 141

Chapter 5 “Naaley. Tomorrow.” Suffering and Redemption in The God of Small Things 191

Conclusion Looking Ahead 233

Notes 245
Works Cited 256
Index 268
“To understand me,” says the protagonist of *Midnight’s Children* rather pompously, “you’ll have to swallow a world.” And so it is with books.

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Finally, I also dedicate this book to the memory of Howard Zinn. He transformed so many of us through his conviction, demonstrated in A People’s History of the United States, that it is the struggle of ordinary people that makes possible extraordinary change.
Postcolonial Indian literary and cinematic texts, like many others around the world, have often concerned themselves with the question of “looking back.” The processes of postcolonial capitalist modernity—urbanization, industrialization, globalization—have pushed and pulled Indians from villages to cities, from the nation to the wider world (and back), creating a wide spectrum of experiences ranging from forced expulsion to voluntary emigration. In this light, many different kinds of texts, whether produced from within India or by artists linked to India through various cultural and ethnic ties, have sought to represent and define postcolonial subjects in relation to what they and many of those in their audiences have left behind. Of course, postcolonial migrations have only continued the move-
ment and dispersion of South Asians already underway for centuries; the negotiation between “the home” and “the world,” as Rabindranath Tagore famously described it, has been in full swing all along.¹ But political independence from Britain in 1947 added a crucial element: Indian artists and intellectuals since then have imagined “home” in a changed material context, one shaped by the policies, institutions, and ideological maneuvers of a nation-state claiming to be run by the people for the people. Postcolonial intellectuals and artists, within the nation or in the diaspora, have been shaped and constituted by these historical and ideological contexts. Postcolonial narratives of looking back, likewise, have often referred explicitly to the nation in the process of telling their stories about individuals, communities, and the prospects of freedom.

It goes without saying that different texts look back in various ways and for divergent purposes. Consider the two quotations cited above. There is a world of difference between the “home” that is imagined by Mehboob Khan’s Mother India (1957), the classic Bollywood production that ties home to land and nation through the figure of a hardworking peasant mother/goddess (Radha), and the “imaginary homelands” of Salman Rushdie, the writer of magical-realist novels, whose fictional depictions of India are hardly concerned with rural life or beholden to “national progress.” Mother India, a nationalist text par excellence, devotes all of its narrative energies—structure, characterization, voice, plot, music, symbolism—to persuading its viewers that the path to rural uplift runs through the policies of industrial development being pursued by Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister of India from 1947 until his death in 1964. At the heart of the movie is Radha’s song “O Jaane-vaale,” illustrating her attempts to persuade her in-text audience—peasants fleeing famine and poverty—to return to their land/mother/nation. The close-up shots of Radha’s dirt- and sweat-stained face aim to deliver the message directly to the various members of its real audience, too—whether they are peasants, urbanites, or NRIs (“Non-Resident Indians”), whether they are Jaane-vaale (“those who are going”) or those who have already left.

The quotation from Rushdie, in contrast, is from a 1982 essay that argues for the productive potential of those who have left, whether “exiles or emigrants or expatriates.” In Rushdie’s fiction and nonfiction, the in-betweenness that produces “imaginary homelands” has a positive value, for it is precisely the space from which the (emigrant) novelist does her/his work. The essay anticipates Rushdie’s oft-cited comment on his novel The Satanic Verses (1988), prescribing a vision for (postcolonial) literature: it “celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation
that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs. It rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the Pure” (“In Good Faith” 394). The difference between *Mother India* and Rushdie’s work, then, appears to be that the one is nationalist, privileges linearity and didacticism, and is oriented toward fixed notions of home, while the other, valuing border-crossing and indeterminacy on all levels, demonstrates a “new cosmopolitanism” that, as Timothy Brennan puts it, is “at home in the world.” Rushdie’s lampooning of *Mother India* in his novel *The Moor’s Last Sigh* (1995) underlines, as it were, the differences between these two modes of relating to the nation, between nationalism and cosmopolitanism.

Let’s pause for a moment to recognize the larger significance of juxtaposing these different orientations toward the nation. By and large, a “cosmopolitan” position such as Rushdie’s is commonly recognized as “postcolonial,” a term that has become associated with postnational and postmodern ways of seeing. However, like much else that is not produced for English-language audiences, and like much else from the early decades of the Indian nation-state, the representations of Indian life in nation-oriented texts such as *Mother India* have not been worked into contemporary theories of postcoloniality. The “hybridity” and cosmopolitanism of a director such as Mehboob Khan—a Gujarati Muslim who left his village for Bombay to become a pioneer in late colonial and early postcolonial Indian cinema—are scarcely considered. Indeed, literary texts and criticism in the vernacular languages are given no real status in Anglo-American Postcolonial Studies; preposterously, we can become scholars of non-Western literature without knowing or studying non-Western languages. These are the sorts of critical aporias that resonate beneath Harish Trivedi’s claim, made in 1996 but still poignant today, that “[p]ost-colonial discourse as at present globally constituted hardly begins to address either the post-colonial situation in India or its post-colonial literature except perhaps in some incidental and tangential ways” (243). How would our concepts of postcoloniality change if we included a larger group of post-independence works in our considerations? What are the consequences of implicitly excluding texts that may not be immediately accessible to Western readers?

*Decentering Rushdie* draws out the limitations of postcolonial discourse by examining alternative representations of postcolonial society. However, I remain as interested in points of convergence and continuity between celebrated and marginalized texts as in their points of divergence. For the inclusion of the latter group of texts illuminates the former in new
ways; hidden aspects of “Imaginary Homelands” emerge when we read it against “O Jaane-vaale.” Despite Rushdie’s overall project in the essay to establish migrancy as an Archimedean site from which to view the nation, the cited passage exudes a nostalgia for India that is distinctly modernist and mournful rather than postmodernist and celebratory. As in a palimpsest, to use one of Rushdie’s favorite metaphors, the nation both constitutes and emerges from beneath Rushdie’s postnational scripts. Creativity and imagination are grounded upon a fundamental loss that cannot be overcome: “we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost [. . . ] we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind.” “Looking back” is thus heroic and necessary—writers must do it “even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt.” But “profound uncertainties” are triggered by the recognition of alienation.

Indeed, the passage problematizes efforts to interpret it strictly within the paradigms of postmodernist epistemology. First, Rushdie’s allusion to the Abrahamic tale of Lot’s wife—who is turned into a pillar of salt for looking back, against God’s orders, to her home, the burning city of Sodom—challenges the notion that “looking back” is inherently reactionary or conservative, and that only “rootlessness” leads to greater understanding. Rather, by placing the writer in the position of Lot’s wife, Rushdie associates looking back with three of his favorite tropes: the writer’s courage in defying authority, the risky but necessary processes of mutation and metamorphosis, and, in terms of the allusion itself, the need to reinterpret and rethink the injunctions of (scriptural) tradition. The modernist sense of a lost wholeness is further generated, second, when Rushdie uncharacteristically asserts the materiality of the body over artistic volition, emphasizing that even heroic acts of “looking back” are insufficient given the emigrant writer’s “physical alienation” from the nation. By emphasizing the expatriate writer’s inability to reclaim the “actual” India and by counterposing this real, tangible India to “Indias of the mind,” Rushdie implies not only that reclamation and representation may be possible for writers situated within India but also that perhaps the “fictions” created by displaced writers are, in the last instance, derivative and inferior. The postmodernist notion that there are no originals but only copies appears very strongly in much of Rushdie’s work but is not apparent here. This mourning for India’s “actual cities and villages” acknowledges, at a deep symbolic level, the logic of Radha’s argument about the home/nation and the need to return: “These towns are yours, these streets and settlements are all yours / Where are you going, leaving all of these
behind?” The geographies of home in “O Jaane-vaale” and in the passage from “Imaginary Homelands” are thus strikingly similar—though they are admittedly articulated from different times, in different languages and genres, and, ultimately, with different orientations toward the nation.8

Reading texts from across the postindependence period together in this way opens up new ways of considering postcolonial literature and culture. On the one hand, we find that even known quantities such as Rushdie exceed “Rushdie”—the sign that functions as shorthand for the idea that the postcolonial and the postmodern are one and the same. On the other hand, paying attention to marginalized texts—often realist, nation-oriented texts from before the 1980s—reveals that they are also more complex than they may appear at first glance. Mother India, for instance, diligently strives to corral within the framework of the nation Radha’s narrative of steadfastness in the face of poverty. The core story is told in flashback through the memories of an aged Radha, asked to preside over the ceremonial opening of a dam in the town that sprouted up after the jaane-vaale heeded her call and came back. But the brief return to the narrative present at the end of the film is insufficient to eradicate the overwhelming sense of tragedy that constitutes the bulk of the plot, which ends with Radha deliberately shooting her eldest son dead after he abducts a young woman from the village. Whereas Radha is depicted as heroic for choosing to be the mother and protector of the village/nation at the expense of her own son’s life, the camera does not allow us to look away from her pain, dwelling on her face before returning us to the postcolonial present of tractors and dams and electrification. From Radha’s perspective, the water that gushes forth from the dam is full of blood: there is no easy closure here.

Plan of the Book

Informed by an understanding of the complexities of postcolonial (Indian) literature and film as they have developed over time, Decentering Rushdie aims to illuminate the multiplicity of postcolonial representations of Indian society and identity as they are expressed within a specific genre of writing: the Indian novel in English. I am particularly interested in drawing out the genre’s “multiple cosmopolitanisms”—its various articulations of elite/middle-class subjectivity and cosmopolitan identity.9 On one level, Indian English novels across the board often foreground cosmopolitan-elite characters and voices in their depictions of postcolonial life, meditating
on their relationship to the postcolonial nation and its people. On another, since the very use of English by Indian novelists is embedded with their middle-class status, the production and consumption of the Indian English novel generate cosmopolitan spaces, in which authors who are linked to both India and the West communicate with other English speakers, whether they are Indian elites or foreign readers. The novels themselves can be read as manifestations of cosmopolitan practice: their diverse and multiple explorations of Indian life from an elite standpoint are at once self-representations and communiqués, demanding that their English-educated readers also reflect on their own identities and relationships to the nation (especially if they are Indian, too) and consider the difficulties and complexities of “looking back” to the nation from a cosmopolitan-elite perch.

But the cosmopolitan identities forged by Indian English novels across the postcolonial period are far from unitary. Decentering Rushdie demonstrates that the genre is much more heterogeneous in terms of its narrative strategies, its orientation toward the nation, and its ideological positions than is usually allowed for by the critical paradigms that dominate the field. I read seven Indian novels in English published from across the first five decades after decolonization—including three texts by Nayantara Sahgal, a prolific writer whose virtual invisibility in Anglo-American Postcolonial Studies exemplifies the limited nature of our literary canon. Juxtaposing well-known and little-read novels and/or novelists, I take up Sahgal’s A Time to Be Happy (1958), Kamala Markandaya’s The Coff er Dams (1969), Sahgal’s The Day in Shadow (1971), Anita Desai’s Clear Light of Day (1980), Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children (1980), Sahgal’s Rich Like Us (1985), and Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things (1997). All of these novels are attentive to questions of class position and identity formation, especially as produced by categories of nation, gender, class, and/or sexuality. However, they take up different orientations toward the nation, make use of different aesthetics and narrative strategies, and/or articulate different ideological positions in identifying postcolonial problems and resolutions (if any). The fact that all but one of these texts are by women—a direct consequence, in fact, of highlighting early postcolonial novels—allows us to extend observations about the ideological and aesthetic diversity of the Indian English novel to postcolonial women’s writing as well.

In reading such texts together, enabled by a historicist method, my analysis interrogates theoretical assumptions about postcoloniality and cosmopolitanism that associate these terms with postnational perspectives,
magical realism, and postmodernist epistemology—that reduce “postcolonial (Indian) literature,” in short, to “Rushdie.” Drawing out the multiple cosmopolitanisms of the postcolonial Indian English novel and explaining their conditions of emergence serves to decenter “Rushdie” by 1) revealing the specific contexts in which Anglophone, postmodern, postnational novels have come to define the category of “Postcolonial Literature”; 2) recovering the nation-oriented texts and authors from the early decades of postcolonial India that have been effectively set aside; and then 3) rereading contemporary writing through the lens of this earlier literature and bringing it back into a larger literary history. In the process, Decentering Rushdie offers a methodology of reading that is attentive to broad shifts in the Indian English novel over time even as it draws attention to the limits of periodization and categorization.

On one level, thus, I describe a general movement from novels that associate themselves with the national project, however critically, to those that explicitly turn away from it—and I suggest that this shift occurs in the aftermath of Indira Gandhi’s Emergency (1975–77). In the early decades of independence, Indian English novels often exhibited and encouraged in their audiences what I call “namak-halaal cosmopolitanism,” a cosmopolitanism that remained “true to its salt” in that it was oriented toward and committed to the nation as a potentially emancipatory space. In the context of an intellectual environment, from the 1930s to the 1960s, that was charged by the cultural and political radicalism of the All-India Progressive Writers’ Association and the Indian Peoples’ Theater Association, this “namak-halaal cosmopolitanism” expressed a worldliness and rejection of parochialism that was, at the same time, “salt of the earth.” It is only after the Emergency and the crackdown on democracy and popular struggle conducted by Nehru’s daughter, under the aegis of “secularism” and “socialism” no less, that we see English-novelists look away from the nation as a potential site for fulfilling the promises of decolonization. The ongoing inequalities in postcolonial India since then, brought about by the neoliberal strategies of development, communalist politics, and heightened militarism that were engendered in the early 1980s, have only served to deepen the postnational turn among Indian novelists working in English.

The transition from namak-halaal to postnational orientations that I describe corresponds to Neil Lazarus’s characterization of postcolonial Anglophone fiction from sub-Saharan Africa as it moved from the time of “great expectations” of the early independence years to “the mourning after” from the 1970s on (Resistance 1–26). It is from observing these
same trends that K. Anthony Appiah calls postcolonial Anglophone novels of the 1970s and 1980s the “novels of delegitimation”—rejecting “not only the Western imperium but the nationalist project of the national bourgeoisie” (“Is the Post” 353). While I show that most early postcolonial Indian English novels are less naïve about the problems of mainstream nationalism than Appiah suggests, he describes accurately the turn away from the nation that becomes prominent in Anglophone postcolonial fiction in later decades. Indeed, what Appiah depicts as a corresponding turn away from realism also fits with my discussion about the emergence of psychological realism and metafictional texts in the Indian English novel—although, once again, my readings problematize such strict pairings of aesthetics, ideology, and orientation.

Rather than directly assigning “realism” to early, *namak-halaal* texts and “magical realism” to postnational ones, I find it more useful to think about how changing orientations toward the nation relate to broad shifts in the narrative projects of the Indian English novel. *Namak-halaal* novels are marked by “concordant” relations between the implied author, the narrator, and the implied audience, aiming to produce in the reader a sense of ethical and activist commitment to the nation as a site of potential emancipation, to the *truth* of oppression and resistance. Postnational works, however, tend to turn away from coherence and the *telos* of the nation through narrative strategies that produce discordant relationships and disrupt processes of knowing. Both strategies seek to develop a critical consciousness, but *namak-halaal* texts point to the need for solidarity, whereas postnational ones question its possibility. In the former, agency (for characters and for the readers) emerges out of the ability to identify the processes of hegemony and dominance, and then to manipulate subject positions effectively in order to forge spaces for change. In the latter, subjectification and the processes of hegemony are confronted through a paradoxical move: History and Power are portrayed as so overwhelming and transcendent that only the solitary, migrant, protagonist/storyteller/writer can have agency. As *namak-halaal* texts are far less recognized in Postcolonial Studies, most of the book is devoted to drawing out the presence of this alternative articulation of cosmopolitanism, one that pursues “the empowering effects of constructing a coherent identity” (Parry 42–43). I do not simply valorize such texts but bring them more clearly into discussions about postcoloniality and cosmopolitanism.

Chapter 1 builds the case for this diachronic narrative, establishing the historical and ideological contexts that influenced middle-class intellectuals and writers, and tracing shifts from *namak-halaal* to postnational
orientations and strategies. The chronological organization of chapters 2 through 5 duly supports this narrative. However, I am not simply interested in plotting literary developments on the map of history or in reading Anglophone novels as mere mouthpieces for expressing the ideology of a globalized elite. Rather, I operate through a Marxist critical methodology that refrains from overdetermining the relationship between cosmopolitan-elite location, political ideology, and narrative strategies. I track the dynamic and dialectical interplay between historical contexts and literary forms, between class position and cosmopolitan identity, between general orientations and specific ideologies as they develop over time. Therefore, my close readings of the novels themselves complicate the diachronic narrative and produce a more synchronic narrative of the genre—revealing both sharp differences between texts sharing a common orientation to the nation and commonalities between texts published across the divide of the Emergency. Each chapter explores the specific and relatively unique narrative strategies by which Indian English novelists have represented postcolonial life, mapping out the various configurations of nation, cosmopolitan location, ideology, and narrative. In the process, I sequentially take up pertinent theoretical questions around modernity, identity, gender, class, and political criticism, revealing that a broader and more inclusive understanding of the field of postcolonial cultural production forces us to develop more nuanced categories of analysis than those currently on offer.

In chapters 2, 3, and 4, I juxtapose a more celebrated novelist and/or novel with a text by Sahgal, whose namak-halaal and nationalist visions provide a backdrop against which we can gauge developments in the genre—not to speak of those within Sahgal’s own writing. Let me take a moment to explain the prominence of Sahgal in this book. I am certainly interested in foregrounding Sahgal’s work for the way that she has attempted to negotiate, for over five decades now, the relationship between historical and political questions and those of gender, sexuality, and family. Methodologically, furthermore, the steady presence of Sahgal throughout the book is valuable because it allows me to develop more precisely the diachronic and synchronic narratives. First, her novels provide a counternarrative to the one implicit in limiting the postcolonial to “Rushdie.” The early texts of Sahgal, one of Nehru’s nieces, show the prominence of namak-halaal writing—and her consistent commitment to the nation even after the Emergency confirms that the turn towards magical realism and the postnational was not absolute. Second, the aesthetic and ideological shifts that do occur in Sahgal over time reveal that changes in historical and intellectual contexts leave their mark in differentiated ways. The map
we draw of the Indian English novel, then, cannot simply show the domi-
nant trajectories but must account for detours, countermovements, and
literary innovations other than magical realism.

Chapter 2 explores the sharp ideological differences around Nehru-
vian modernity and notions of elite responsibility in Sahgal’s *A Time to
Be Happy* and Markandaya’s *The Coffer Dams*—even though I mark the
texts as sharing a *namak-halaal* orientation toward the nation and being
concerned with similar problems of postcolonial, middle-class subjectivity.
I differentiate, thus, the “orientation” that emerges in a given historical
moment, analogous to Raymond Williams’s “structures of feeling,” from
the more directed term “ideology,” the worldview that can be derived
from the way that a text organizes its themes, dramatic tensions, and reso-
lutions. The euphoria of decolonization in Sahgal is contested and tem-
pered by the sober critique of postcolonial capitalism in Markandaya.
Furthermore, their very different representations of cross-cultural identity
formation question the usefulness of the category of “hybridity” except as
a very general description of the complexity that haunts all identities.

Chapter 3 interrogates the intersections of gender, nation, and narra-
tion in two *namak-halaal* texts emerging from the tumultuous 1970s. I
juxtapose Sahgal’s social-realist *The Day in Shadow* with Desai’s psycho-
logical-realist *Clear Light of Day*, examining how these women-centered
texts experiment with interiority and voice. Contesting narrow, gendered
oppositions between “political novels” and “psychological novels” as well
as theories that automatically counterpose nationalism and feminism, I
describe how each text offers “feminist resolutions to the national ques-
tion,” interrogating their female protagonists’ experiences of oppression
in postcolonial society even while seeking to reconstruct gender-egalitarian
models of nation and family.¹³

Chapter 4 seeks to complicate our understanding of the post-Emer-
gency novel in a number of ways. Evaluating the class politics of *Mid-
night’s Children* and Sahgal’s *Rich Like Us*, I demonstrate that these novels
converge in elite-centered representations of Indian postcoloniality despite
crucial differences in terms of national orientation and narrative form.
In fact, not only does this chapter question the radical oppositionality of
postmodern, postnational novels, but it shows how more recent *namak-
halaal* texts also engage with metafictional forms. On the flip side, the
clear presence of a national longing in *Midnight’s Children* suggests its
organic links with *namak-halaal* novels, past and present. The newness of
*Midnight’s Children* can be better particularized, I contend, when its
commonalities with very different novels are not ignored. Even as we can
trace, through these three chapters, the broad movement toward metacritical narratives, the development of interior voices, and the shift away from the nation and the subaltern, we can also see that neither historical location nor class position nor cosmopolitan cultural identity overdetermines these narratives in any linear or simple way.

My study of Roy’s *The God of Small Things* in chapter 5, in a sense, ties together many of the aspects of the book in its attempt to pursue an antideterministic strategy of Marxist literary criticism. Against leftist critics who have denigrated the novel as “bourgeois” and “romantic anti-capitalist,” I suggest that its narrative strategies, its representations of elites and subalterns, its dialectic of suffering and redemption, and its fierce commitments to concepts such as truth and justice in the age of neoliberal globalization hearken back to early postcolonial texts’ *namak-halaal* orientation. Marking the novel as “anti-Communist” takes us away from recognizing that Roy’s postmodern aesthetics and cosmopolitan-elite subject position do not translate into a postmodernist epistemology and elitist politics. By reading this magical-realist, post-Emergency novel as *namak-halaal*, even though it is penned by a fierce critic of postcolonial modernity and mainstream nationalism, I challenge not only deterministic tendencies in Postcolonial Studies but also the temptation, in analyses such as mine, to interpret form as a sign of ideology or epistemology, to make middle-class subjectivity itself the final arbiter of literary interpretation, to judge the politics of a text by its reception, or to produce a periodizing narrative that is inattentive to detours from the larger trajectory. All in all, *Decentering Rushdie* seeks new ways of conceptualizing postcoloniality and cosmopolitanism so that we can better speak to the complex and uneven relations of orientation, ideology, and aesthetics in postcolonial literature and culture.14

“Rushdie” Versus Rushdie

*Decentering Rushdie* comes neither to bury Rushdie nor to praise him. Paradoxically, indeed, I have developed a greater appreciation for Rushdie’s fiction, especially the novels from *Midnight’s Children* to *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, over the same period in which his explicit political positions have moved away from my own. Since early 2001, when I completed the dissertation that became the basis for this book, Rushdie’s political trajectory has been decidedly rightwards. His defense of the U.S. war in Afghanistan in 2001, his support for the Iraq war in 2003, his inability and/or
unwillingness to separate, in the public sphere, his secular-liberal ideas from the right wing’s open Islamophobia—all of these have alienated me from Rushdie’s opinions as a commentator on public affairs. Rushdie’s quiet acceptance of knighthood from Queen Elizabeth II in 2007 evoked feelings of both betrayal and amusement: could this really be the author whose early fiction brilliantly mocked the figure of the chamcha, the sycophantic Indian? And yet, each revision of Decentering Rushdie has moved toward what I consider to be a more nuanced approach to Rushdie, one that is more firmly aware of the Anglo-American academic and pedagogical contexts in which I find myself.

In a word, I have found it important to integrate my scholarly assessments of Rushdie with my pedagogical practice, for teaching Rushdie’s fiction to undergraduates in the United States has been an overwhelmingly positive experience. Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, I have faced a set of difficult questions as a South Asian American professor, openly socialist and antiwar, teaching about postcolonial and world literature in Staten Island and central Ohio. How do I negotiate the fact that I physically embody the Other of the “war on terror” with the need to do right by my students, regardless of their knowledge of the themes being covered or their political positions on them? How do I maintain a democratic classroom environment while teaching critical thinking—especially when dealing with texts and approaches that put forward very different worldviews from the ones inundating the mainstream media? In both private and public institutions, I have found that even the basic forms of multiculturalism and international awareness, for all their limitations, have had a transformative potential on students open to learning more about the world. Rushdie’s fiction has proved to be incredibly valuable in this regard, as a tool for opening up critical and democratic discussions—for conveying something important about the value of art, about the politics of narrative, and about the importance of speaking truth to power.

And so I have attempted to convey in this book the sense that Rushdie’s move away from his resolute anti-imperialism of the 1980s has been a great loss for those opposed to war and empire—and that this is a phenomenon to be thought through carefully for what it teaches us about history, politics, and literature. For whatever Rushdie’s current ideas and however problematic his canonization, his novels, especially the early ones, remain crucial contributions to the political and pedagogical projects of Postcolonial Studies as we enter the second decade of the twenty-first century. This applies just as well to the postmodernist standpoints that I have critiqued in this book, not to speak of my debates with Marxists and
other critics of empire. As my inbox continues to log case after case of colleges and universities unfairly denying tenure to or refusing to extend the contracts of professors in Postcolonial Studies, Middle Eastern Studies, and related areas, it seems more important than ever to keep a clear understanding of our basic commonalities even in the midst of healthy and rigorous debates about literature, culture, theory, and politics. *Decentering Rushdie* operates, therefore, with due respect for what Rushdie has achieved and for the progressive visions and desires that motivate various theories of cosmopolitanism, postnationalism, and postcoloniality—even as I argue that there is much more to postcolonial literature and thought, especially around the question of the nation, than what has been presented to us under the sign “Rushdie.”
I had the honor, in December 2004, of speaking at a conference in Tunisia commemorating the work of Edward Said, the celebrated Palestinian-American scholar who had passed away in the previous year. As is well known, Said was a prolific and insightful writer, and *Orientalism* (1978) laid the groundwork for the development of Anglo-American Postcolonial Studies as a field. But it was clear, at the Tunisia conference, that Said was much more than a famous academic. The scholars, writers, and activists attending from around the world were interested in contextualizing Said’s work on literature and theory in terms of his writings on politics and history and global events such as the occupations of Palestine and Iraq. Yasser Arafat and Abu Ghraib were as much in the air, in other words, as *Orientalism* and *Out of Place*. Every scholar seemed to be an activist, too: the chair of my session had worked closely with the leadership of the African National Congress in the anti-apartheid struggle, and one of my co-panelists had been imprisoned by General August Pinochet in Chile. The

*conclusion*

**Looking Ahead**

In dark times an intellectual is very often looked to by members of his or her nationality to represent, speak out for, and testify to the sufferings of that nationality [ . . . ] For the intellectual the task, I believe, is explicitly to universalize the crisis, to give greater human scope to what a particular race or nation suffered, to associate that experience with the suffering of others.


I’d say the biggest indictment of all is that we are still a country, a culture, a society which continues to nurture and practice the notion of untouchability. While our economists number-crunch and boast about the growth rate, a million people—human scavengers—earn their living carrying several kilos of other people’s shit on their heads every day. And if they didn’t carry shit on their heads they would starve to death. Some f***ing superpower this.

pleasant and unassuming academic couple I met one day turned out to be leaders of mass, secular organizations that participated in overthrowing the Shah of Iran in 1979. As if this were not enough, the conference sessions were packed with hundreds of students, eager to hear about Said and to engage in discussions about his work—and all this in English, presumably their third language. Upon learning the purpose of my visit, the taxi driver who picked me up from the airport conveyed to me, as I put my high school French lessons to use, the widespread respect and admiration that the Arab world had for Said.

Academics die every day, but Said stands out because he embodied the intellectual that he describes in the quotation above. Attentive to the Palestinian nation and its people, with whom he shared racial, ethnic, and historic roots, Said was able “to represent, speak out for, and testify to the sufferings of [his] nationality.” Closely linked to global audiences, at the same time, through his academic training and position at Columbia University, he took the opportunity “to universalize the crisis, to give greater human scope” to Palestinian suffering. Said expressed, in other words, the very basic principles of namak-halaal cosmopolitanism that I have described throughout Decentering Rushdie, a cosmopolitanism that remains “true to its salt” even as it opposes parochialism and yokes itself to other nations and peoples. The tremendous sense of internationalism and solidarity in this position emerges from the notion that the intellectual ought to “associate that experience [of a nation’s suffering] with the suffering of others.” I particularly appreciate the materialist and historicist basis on which Said constructs these global others: they are capable of empathy because they, too, know what it is to suffer.

The notion that the intellectual can and should translate between worlds in this way is quite far from Gayatri Spivak’s trenchant critique of attempts to represent subaltern suffering in statements such as the following: “The ventriloquism of the speaking subaltern is the left intellectual’s stock-in-trade” (Critique 255). The sincere effort of the intellectual to speak truth to power in Said becomes, in Spivak’s formulation, an exercise in bad faith, a trick learned in the process of career-building and self-legitimation. But is insincerity and opportunism really constitutive of all intellectual efforts to bear witness to suffering and oppression? Said’s framework opens a space for the possibility of representation despite its many pitfalls—thereby positioning itself against contemporary theories about the inherently limited nature of nation-oriented discourse (e.g., Homi Bhabha), the Eurocentrism of historiography and universalisms (e.g., Dipesh Chakrabarty), and Foucauldian paradigms of knowledge/
power that limit our ability to understand others (e.g., Said’s own Orientalism).1

Tracking the Postnational Turn

All postcolonial Indian novels in English, one can argue, are thrust into the position of speaking on behalf of the nation and its people given the contexts in which they are produced, distributed, and consumed. Many of the cosmopolitan and elite writers of the genre, whether based in India or not, deliberately take on the “task”—as Said calls it—of representing the nation and its history; those who do not are often read as “native informants” anyway. But after the publication of Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children in 1980, Indian English novels tended to problematize the decolonized nation itself in their representations of postcolonial suffering, focusing on the problems of narrating history rather than on history itself. While India and Indianness continued to be central to Indian English novels of the 1980s and 1990s such as Amitav Ghosh’s The Shadow Lines (1988), Shashi Tharoor’s The Great Indian Novel (1988), Vikram Chandra’s Red Earth and Pouring Rain (1995), Rushdie’s The Moor’s Last Sigh (1995), and Rohinton Mistry’s A Fine Balance (1995), such texts tended to identify continuing problems of hierarchy and oppression in India with the nation-state and nationalism as such. In Decentering Rushdie, I have suggested that this “postnational” turn was a common response of left/progressive Indian English writers to the crisis of the nation-state that culminated in the Emergency of 1975–77 and developments in its aftermath, including the fragmentation of the Indian polity and rise of communalism, the transition from Nehruvian state capitalism to neoliberal economics, and, on the flip side, the Indian middle classes’ increasing access to the West in terms of commodities, culture, and physical relocation. These Indian events were part of larger, global transitions after the economic downturn of the early 1970s, engendering the failures of decolonized nation-states.

As I suggested in the first chapter, however, the specificity of the postnational turn in the Indian English novel has been lost in light of the theoretical paradigms that dominate Anglo-American Postcolonial Studies. Itself a product of the early 1980s, the field quickly aligned itself with postmodernism and developed ways of thinking about representation, the nation, power/resistance, and history in which postnational orientations were seen as being inherently progressive in relation to national thinking.
Even worse, from the perspective of literary criticism, it canonized the postmodern, postnational texts of the 1980s and 1990s and made them—especially *Midnight's Children* and *The Satanic Verses*—the mark of “the” postcolonial. “Postcoloniality” was now a mode of knowledge, and cosmopolitan intellectuals’ task was not to represent national and popular suffering but to point to the problems of national thinking and the impossibility and violence of representation. Migrancy, exile, hybridity, transnationalism—these are the tropes that Postcolonial Studies, ironically, has universalized in its unitary conceptualizations of the nation, the cosmopolitan intellectual, and postcoloniality itself. As a corrective, *Decentering Rushdie* historicizes and particularizes the postnational turn in both literature and theory by revealing the presence of *namak-halaal* cosmopolitanisms that dominated the Indian English novel before the 1980s. Novels of the Nehruvian era, like literary and artistic movements during the anti-colonial struggle, set out to embrace the very “task of the intellectual” that Said describes—representing national and local spaces as sites for postcolonial regeneration even when they sharply criticized the existing nation and reflected on the difficulties that emerge when English-educated elites attempt to speak for all Indians. The dominant tropes for *namak-halaal* writings have been the struggle to achieve “the ordinariness of living” (Sahgal), fusion (Markandaya, Sahgal), wholeness (Desai), and “shared rage” (Roy). Concordant relations between the implied author, narrator, and implied reader are key to establishing a *namak-halaal* cosmopolitanism and the ethical commitments to the nation. Rather than positioning themselves as nonteleological, these *namak-halaal* texts freely admit their goal and direction: to confront injustice and inequality, to image a more egalitarian nation and world, and to direct their elite readers toward critical self-reflection in this regard.

By “decentering Rushdie,” I aim to expand our theoretical categories of postcoloniality and cosmopolitanism in order that we may more fully grasp the heterogeneity of the genre and postcolonial cultural production in general. This means, however, challenging the urge to simplify and valorize *namak-halaal* texts over postnational ones. My readings of novels by Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Arundhati Roy, Rushdie, and Nayantara Sahgal complicate the broad shift from *namak-halaal* to postnational cosmopolitanisms by debunking rigid, deterministic associations of three kinds: history with literature, orientation with political ideology, and either of these with literary form. I contrast the representations of modernity and subjectivity in two *namak-halaal* texts (chapter 2), pursue the development of interiority and characterization in two feminist, *namak-
halaal texts (chapter 3), pair together post-Emergency novels with very different perspectives on the nation in terms of their class politics (chapter 4), and read a contemporary, magical realist text as namak-halaal (chapter 5). In this way, the ideological and narrative analyses of Decentering Rushdie portray a map of postcolonial cosmopolitan writing that reveals the shift from namak-halaal to postnational visions over time even as it traces the intricate web of elements—ideological, thematic, and aesthetic—that connects them organically. The selection of multiple novels by Sahgal, whose writings span the entire postcolonial period, is meant to offer a small version of the book’s larger project; we can see how her texts change even as they remain steadily namak-halaal (and nationalist) in their orientation. Indeed, what stands out about Sahgal is not her representative quality but her uniqueness in terms of the explicit attention she pays to the dialectical relationship between individuals and their sociopolitical situations. Decentering Rushdie argues for her necessary presence in discussions about the Indian English novel.

The fact that the texts I have selected and read as namak-halaal are all written by women is more than a coincidence, even though I did not set out to write a book about “postcolonial women’s writing” per se. I do not mean to imply that there is a necessary link between national orientation and women’s writing: one could easily find namak-halaal texts by male writers (e.g., Khushwant Singh’s Train to Pakistan [1956], Bhabani Bhattacharya’s Shadow from Ladakh [1966]). Nevertheless, the selected novels and authors, paired together, stand out for me in terms of what they reveal about the diversity of the postcolonial Indian English over time—including the richness of their narratives, the close attention they pay to questions of elite/subaltern voice and characterization, their concerns with postcolonial inequalities, and the diversity of their approaches to the nation. More specifically, as I have found, turning toward novels from the 1950s and 1960s itself means highlighting novels by women, and it is significant that so many of these, often raising critical questions about unequal gender relations and the continuing hold of traditional attitudes, are unwilling to write off the nation. While postcolonial theory has long insisted on the opposition between a reactionary, sexist nationalism and women’s freedom—no doubt because mainstream nationalism has been notorious in orienting around a normative male subject—these novels by women and featuring female protagonists have sought to create gender-equalitarian spaces within the nation, continuing to see it as the terrain for future emancipation. Decentering Rushdie, from this point of view, chronicles the development of a powerful set of female protagonists across different
novels by women, whose implied and real authors have them take up the
tasks of the intellectual as described by Said.

Decentering Rushdie’s attempt to complicate the categories of nation-
alism and national orientation as inherently reactionary and of cosmo-
politanism as inherently radical and progressive is, potentially, its most
important contribution. The pre-Emergency, namak-halaal texts I read in
the first two chapters, for instance, do not hold onto the nation for reac-
tionary purposes but—seeking to fulfill Gandhian and Nehruvian ideals of
“wiping every tear from every eye” (Nehru, “Tryst” 4)—exhort their cos-
mopolitan-elite characters and implied audiences to construct subaltern-
friendly models of India. On the flip side, postnational positions, explicitly
radical in outlook, can become either Western-oriented or, succumbing to
the global marketing of India today, slip into modes that, paradoxically,
fetishize and romanticize the nation. We come to recognize that namak-
halaal and postnational orientations ought not to be regarded, a priori, as
either inherently radical or conservative. As I suggested at the end of the
previous chapter, critics need to maintain a flexibility in our conceptions
of political affiliation in order to properly read the meaning behind a given
novel’s or author’s concerns. The following illustration of a complicated
interaction between Roy and Rushdie demonstrates the need for a meth-
odological openness to the texts and authors themselves before making
political judgments.

“Some f***ing superpower this.”

In their joint interview with Charlie Rose on August 14, 1997, the eve of
India’s fiftieth anniversary, Rushdie and Roy provide a snapshot of two
positions that are available to contemporary Indian intellectuals and artists
as they negotiate their relationships to the nation and the world. Rushdie
is clearly positioned as the dominant voice in the interview—The God of
Small Things has not yet won the Booker and Roy’s major political essays
are a few years away. Rushdie is chummy with Rose throughout, often
treating Roy in patronizing ways when not cutting her off in mid-sentence.
But he becomes increasingly annoyed as Roy continues to raise questions
about his pronouncements regarding India, the Indian middle class, and
Indian writing. This leads to complicated developments. Rushdie’s cel-
èbrated postnational cynicism easily slips into a mainstream nationalist
discourse that is complicit with Rose’s romanticization of India—even
though Rushdie is firmly situated outside India. On the other hand, Roy
constantly rejects the suggestion that the growing wealth of Indian elites represents Indian progress and critiques the nation—but she makes this criticism by rhetorically affirming her location within and commitment to the national space.

Upon being asked about the future of India in light of internal separatist strife and continuing tensions with Pakistan, Rushdie contends:

I don’t think there was ever a moment when I thought [India] would split [. . . ] It just does exist. It just is there, does exist, and it ain’t gonna break up [. . . ] Maybe the opposite is going to happen [. . . ] Anti-Partition, un-Partition, by which I don’t really mean political unity. The oldest object I possess, given to me when I was born, is a block of silver on which is engraved the map of undivided India, the real India [. . . ] If I was looking optimistically, 50 years from now, maybe we would see Partition as a blip. (Interview with Charlie Rose)

The ideals that Rushdie expresses represent, at once, a desire for the end of nationalist rivalries and a tautological faith in the unity of the Indian nation: it will never split because it “just is there.” National borders mean little for this postnational intellectual, but his position is derived from a deeply Indian notion of subjectivity, one that is secured in almost a religious manner through the sacred, silver block, a talisman marked with the nation and handed down through the family. The perspective seems to evoke a powerful namak-halaal narrative, one that is specifically tied to a secular Muslim family’s faith in the Indian nation in the late colonial period (Rushdie was born, like Saleem Sinai, in 1947).

Roy’s response to this comment, however, draws out how disaffiliated Rushdie’s view is from the sociopolitical realities of India in 1997:

Actually [. . . ] I would love to feel the way you feel, because it’s the right way to feel, and many of us do wish that this barrier didn’t exist between India and Pakistan. But what I think is that . . . maybe it’s just a perspective from living there and seeing what happens . . . the fact is that what is happening is peculiar. One the one hand you have this internet culture [. . . ] and on the other hand you have tribalism [. . . ] (Interview with Charlie Rose; ellipses represent pauses in Roy’s speech)

Trying not to appear uncharitable toward Rushdie’s desire for a larger unity, Roy nevertheless marks his feeling as one that comes from not “living there and seeing what happens.” We are reminded strongly of
Bim’s repudiation of Bakul’s NRI visions of India in Clear Light of Day. Migrancy/exile is rewritten here as a space of unknowing, in which memories of the nation—however powerful—are reified to such an extent that they posit the nation as an inherently unified entity. Rather than simply gesturing to the nation as an idea, Roy engages it by discussing the contradictions within it, the class divisions and the contrast between global thinking and “tribalism.” And when the reporter Barbara Crossette jumps into the conversation from its margins in order to gloss “tribalism” as a despicable subaltern attitude, Roy asserts that she is in fact talking about middle-class elites and politicians who hold right-wing ideas about religious, class, and caste difference.

This dynamic continues throughout the interview, with Rushdie, Rose, and Crossette continually highlighting India’s uniqueness as a hybrid nation with “larger-than-life characters” (Crossette) and a perfect “cornucopia” for any novelist (Rushdie), and Roy emphasizing that India is not all that special—that “there are things about India that are just like everywhere else.” Frustrated with Roy, Rushdie makes a stark differentiation between her project and his own:

What I’m saying is this: India allowed me to become the writer that I have become, that I could not have become otherwise. I mean, I know that this is a book [pointing to Roy’s novel] about small things, and intimacies, and details, and so on and, you know, good for it. But I’m saying that there is this other project which excited me which has to do with taking on the whole damn thing, you know, and that’s what I’ve wanted to do and tried to do [. . .]

No longer allowed to play the native informant as he usually does, Rushdie is forced to particularize his views about India as those emanating from a specific ideological position as well as—as a result of India’s shameful ban of The Satanic Verses—his physical distance from the nation. The surface distinction made here between Rushdie and Roy—nation/fragment, big things/small things—might seem to posit Roy as representing the real postmodernist and postnational position and Rushdie as exemplifying namak-halaal and nationalist cosmopolitanism. But it is in fact Roy’s attention to the conditions of Indian life, to the stories of loss hidden behind the image of the nation as cornucopia, that marks her as being situated within the space of India on many levels. It is Roy’s materialist critique of postcoloniality, resisting both the transnational dismissal of the nation and the expatriate’s abstract longing for it, that produces her subaltern-centered version
of namak-halaal cosmopolitanism. In this Roy is very much taking up the tasks of the intellectual as outlined by Said.

Roy, indeed, consistently operates from within such nation-oriented paradigms. Certainly, the criticism of Indian postcoloniality in the second epigraph above positions ongoing caste oppression in direct opposition to nationalist mythologies: a million people have to choose between “carry[ing] shit on their heads” and “starv[ing] to death” even while the national and global media trumpet India’s economic growth rate and its advancement as a “superpower” (“It’s Outright War”). But Roy’s consistent use of the first-person plural—“we are still a country,” “our economists”—and her engagement throughout the interview with specific Indian questions, aim to transform the nation by reimagining and reclaiming it from within. As Roy asserts on a more personal note in another interview with Tehelka, national orientation and nationalism ought not to be conflated: “I don’t have a nationalistic bone in my body. It’s just not my instinct. Yet it’s inconceivable for me to not be [in India], because it’s everything that I love [. . . ] I’m just a full desi—full-time desi in that way. I just feel, where else can you be?” (“Success”).

“Who dared lose heart when there was work to be done?”

Namak-halaal cosmopolitan writers always resituate themselves thus, in the middle of the very sites of suffering that they critique—and hope to change. While this orientation and ethics emerges from a variety of ideological positions, novels and other texts penned in this mode seek to draw the implied audience into asking questions that, demanding a response, aim to move us into critical thought and action. Both namak-halaal and postnational novels in English depict gender inequality, caste oppression, elite brutality, poverty, corruption, and the end of the grand promises that had been made to Indians at the “dawn of freedom” in 1947. But it is only the namak-halaal texts that seek a path leading away from that devastation—one that emerges from within the national space itself. The concept of namak-halaal writing ought not to be restricted to postcolonial India. The powerful spoken-word poem “First Writing Since” (2001) by the Palestinian-American Suheir Hammad, capturing her feeling as a Muslim and a New Yorker immediately after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, powerfully portrays the “dialectic of suffering and redemption” (Ndebele 54) discussed in chapter 5. Toward the end of her piece, for instance, Hammad writes/says: “anyone reading this is breathing, maybe
hurting / but breathing for sure” (3). The lines invoke, simultaneously, the pain that the speaker and implied audience are feeling, as well as the ability to withstand that pain. But by grounding the possibility of hope and agency in the implied and real audiences’ acts of breathing, the poem seeks to make us realize our own role in changing the world—the real world lying outside the text. The speaker of the poem can do nothing without the reader/listener; their fates are intertwined.

The passage that concludes *Prison and Chocolate Cake* (1952), Sahgal’s early memoir, seeks to create the same relationship with its implied audience as Hammad’s poem in order to find respite in a similar moment of crisis and tragedy. Sahgal reports on her feelings after witnessing the cremation of M. K. Gandhi, killed by a Hindu fanatic on January 31, 1948. Though too young to have participated in any of the anticolonial agitations—“that had been the work of a different generation”—Sahgal feels the loss on both a visceral and a historiographical level: “It was as if the continuity of a long process begun before my birth had suddenly snapped like a dry twig, leaving me entirely without a sense of direction” (233). We can discern the mainstream nationalist discourse that lies beneath Sahgal’s words and the elite-centered models of leadership that her sorrow about Gandhi conveys—but also the desire to respond to subaltern suffering. In short, we can comprehend the power of the *namak-halaal* narrative, an aspect of postcolonial cosmopolitan-elite writing that deserves to be factored into discussions about postcoloniality.

The lines that end Sahgal’s book are a testament to the hope that generations of postcolonial cosmopolitanisms have sought in the struggle to reclaim promises that were broken:

> With an effort I roused myself from my imaginings [. . . ] Were my values so fragile [. . . ] that I could so easily lose courage when he was no longer there? [. . . ] He had come to disturb [people] profoundly, to jolt them out of indifference, to awaken them to one another’s suffering, and in so doing to make them reach for the stars. Those stars still beckoned luminously [. . . ] Who among us dared lose heart when there was this work to be done? The curtain had rung down over a great drama, but another one was about to begin. Gandhi was dead but India would live on in his children. (*Prison* 233–44)

The gap between “Gandhi’s children” and “Midnight’s children” describes the difference between Sahgal’s *namak-halaal* position and Rushdie’s postnational orientation. Clearly, all *namak-halaal* novelists would not espouse
such a hagiographical representation of Gandhi—and Sahgal, too, moves away from such a stark nationalism in much of her more mature work.

Yet, the idea that there is “work to be done” is exactly the tone with which Said describes the “task” of the intellectual. What will the Indian English writer do today, when—to borrow a phrase from Langston Hughes—India is “in vogue” in the West?4 Far be it from me to assign a “task,” but I have hoped to offer a methodology that can keep us aware of the various experiments that are already underway. First, the first decade of the new century seems to have re-established, in various ways, that a global hierarchy of nation-states continues to underpin the world system, and that struggles for democracy and self-determination in the postcolonial world continue to express themselves on the terrain of the nation. The diagnosis/prognosis of many on the Left that we have now entered a postnational, decentered phase of world capitalism has been refuted, in my view, by the return of a form of territorial imperialism in the U.S. occupations of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003); by the current global recession, grounded in the failure of the U.S. housing market; and by the various, nation-oriented rebellions against this state of affairs, whether by state actors (Hugo Chavez in Venezuela) or movements of various sorts (Iraqis, Palestinians, Sri Lankan Tamils, Kashmiris, Guatemalans). We may want to examine how postcolonial fictional and theoretical texts, too, are reimagining the nation in these changing contexts.

It may be possible to identify, broadly speaking, a new interest in realism and materialist representations of history in South Asian fiction—even as the lessons of metafiction and the investigations of transnational relations are not lost. Amitav Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace* (2000) and his new series beginning with *Sea of Poppies* (2008); Tariq Ali’s now-completed quartet of novels on Islamic/Western interactions; Kamila Shamsie’s *Kartography* (2002); and Amit Chaudhuri’s *Freedom Song* (1998)—such texts pay attention to the problems of historiography and memory without reducing the nation to either an inexplicable site of chaos or a backdrop for elite dilemmas. The stories in Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Interpreter of Maladies* (2000), similarly, are dedicated to exploring the loss involved in transnational migration, rather than its alleged transcendence of national concerns. The realism and even naturalism of Arvind Adiga’s *The White Tiger* (2008), privileging a subaltern character even while treating Indians in general with a Naipaulian disgust, raises important questions about ideology and narrative. And through all this we have the steady and reliable Sahgal, exploring the heterogeneity of the Gandhian movement in *Lesser Breeds* (2003) through the eyes of a young Muslim English professor—
skeptical of nonviolent tactics and, with his background of poverty, alienated by the Anglicized ways of the (nationalist) cosmopolitans around him.

Pierre Bourdieu has written that artists and “cultural producers” have the unique power of presenting to their audiences, in a concrete form, their “more or less confused, vague, unformulated [. . .] experiences of the natural and social world” (qtd. in Lazarus, *Nationalism* 142). However, much as Paolo Freire has said about teachers, Bourdieu maintains a distinction between the subject position and ideology/practice of individual artists by emphasizing that “they may put this power in the service of the dominant” or “in the logic of their struggle within the field of social power, they may put their power at the service of the dominated” (142). In this uncertain moment, when racism against South Asians in the West increases even while *mehndi* “tattoos” and *bindis* proliferate as never before, when new global markets allow an Indian middle class to prosper stupendously but also force thousands of farmers to commit suicide, Indian English writers have a wide range of perspectives to choose from—as they always have. We need to develop models of postcoloniality and cosmopolitanism that will be attentive to new formations and the return of old ones. *Decentering Rushdie* has aimed to put forward a critical methodology that acknowledges literature’s ability to reimagine its past, present, and future—even while tracing the historical and ideological contexts that shape and limit those imaginings.
Introduction

1. Tagore, *Ghare Baire* (1915, Bengali), was published in England as *The Home and the World* in 1919—the same year in which Tagore renounced his knighthood to protest the massacre at Jallianwala Bagh.
8. Akhmatova’s “Lot’s Wife” (1922, Russian) constructs a remarkably similar map of memory and space in asserting the value of looking back.
9. Throughout this book, I use “subjectivity” and “subject position” to signify how capitalist society constructs individuals in an *objective* sense, that is, through the state, through institutions, and through structural hierarchies of class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, national status, and so on. The Foucauldian and Althusserian concepts of “subjects” as those who are “subjected” to society are being invoked here, but without the extremely limited space for agency that is implied by those theories. “Identity” is a symptom of subjectivity as it is expressed on the level of the individual—but it is not concomitant with pure volition or agency. Rather, following Patrick Hogan’s useful formulation in *Empire and Poetic Voice* and elsewhere, identity itself represents a dynamic and dialectical movement between “categorial identity” (how we think of ourselves through the categories society mandates) and “practical identity” (what we do and learn to do in day-to-day life). Hogan’s recognition of both social constructions of identity and its dynamic aspects can be integrated with classical Marxist theories about the relationship between capitalist structures, the workings of ideology and consciousness, and the possibilities of change and transformation. See chapter 6 of Anjali Prabhu’s *Hybridity* for a nuanced discussion of identity in relation to concepts of totality.
Notes to Chapter 1


11. I thank my anonymous reviewers for this formulation.

12. This terminology is taken from narrative theory. The “implied author” is the intelligence that we derive from the text, the one who organizes the relationship between the narrator and characters, the plot, the setting, the themes, the resolutions, and so forth. As a function of the text, the implied author is distinct from the real, or “flesh-and-blood,” author. The “implied audience,” alternatively called the “ideal audience” or “authorial audience,” refers to the reader(s) that the text imagines for itself, a structural position that is more limited than the flesh-and-blood reader (who could be anyone). “Concordant” relations between the elements of the narrative do not imply a lack of irony or drama or humor; they merely describe a text whose overall effort is to put the elements together and to move toward cohesion. “Discordant” relations actively force the reader to pull things together—and often highlight the impossibility of doing so.

13. This phrase alludes to P. Chatterjee’s influential essay, “The Nationalist Resolution to the Women’s Question.”

14. Two recent texts offer a useful comparison. See B. Ghosh, *When Borne Across*, for astute readings of post-Emergency texts that disentangle their global celebrity status from their literary and political achievements. *When Borne Across* tests on a very different concept of cosmopolitanism from mine—employing the category “cosmopolitics,” minimizing the contribution of pre-Emergency writers, and assuming that cosmopolitan identity itself produces progressive or radical postnational politics. Another approach can be seen in T. Khair, *Babu Fictions*, a Marxist account that finds Indian English novels, early and contemporary, as so many expressions of the alienation of Westernized, elite, urban, high-caste Indians.

15. See Rushdie’s *Step Across This Line* and his 2005 interview with Bill O’Reilly of Fox News.

Chapter 1

1. See http://www.themanbookerprize.com/news/stories/1099. Rushdie’s global celebrity can be attributed to the controversy around *The Satanic Verses*, but as the popularity of *Midnight’s Children* shows, it is incorrect to suggest that Rushdie was unknown until the fatwa (e.g., Dabashi 172).

2. This is not to suggest that Said, Anderson, or Guha can be neatly aligned with the various postmodernisms of theorists such as Derrida, Foucault, Baudrilliard, and Lyotard. Said’s humanism and defense of national liberation, Anderson’s Marxist paradigm in investigating the modality of the nation, and Guha’s materialist approach to questions of subaltern subjectivity and consciousness do not allow for the complete rejection of Enlightenment legacies. That said, the tensions in these texts between materialist and poststructuralist methods of understanding consciousness have often been deemphasized. Little is made of the difference between Anderson’s “imagined nations” and Rushdie’s “imaginary homelands.”

3. See Meenakshi Mukherjee, “Interrogating Post-Colonialism.”

4. I explain this term further below.

5. Aldama and Markels offer provocative discussions of the limits and the possibilities of literature and art.
6. Compare Rushdie’s portrayals of Islam in *Step Across This Line* with Ali’s in *The Clash of Fundamentalisms* for two very different positions on 9/11 and its aftermath, both from secular intellectuals with South Asian and Muslim backgrounds.

7. See A. Ahmad, *In Theory*, chapter 7, and *Lineages of the Present*, chapter 5, for unique discussions on Indian literature. G. Kumar and K. Kumar argue for the inclusion of what they call “native voices” in locating a “new tradition” of postcolonial writing and theory.


9. Meenakshi Mukherjee warns fellow Indian intellectuals about the “trendy label” that “catapults us into the center-stage of an international academic arena” when, as scholars of “Commonwealth Literature” they had been “furtive creatures, lurking in the margins of English Departments” (“Interrogating” 7).

10. For a discussion of state capitalism in the Soviet Union, see Arnove et al. The links between the Soviet Union, China, and Communist parties in the global South are complex, but “while [Russian and Chinese] tactics may have been different, their strategy was ultimately geared toward the same end—consolidating strong national states, with top-down, bureaucratic regimes in control. In other words, they tried to remake Asia in their own image” (N. Rao, Introduction 28).

11. See Jani and Sreenivas for a brief overview of the elite/subaltern dynamic during the anticolonial struggle in British India.

12. The phrase even had a nickname: TINA.

13. Debates around Stalinist “socialist realism” haunt studies of the PWA. See Gopal’s discussion about the Communist Party of India’s relationship to the PWA, as well as the explicit attempts of Anand, as a founding member, to assert the PWA’s support for political heterogeneity. Contrast with others’ description of the PWA as a front group for the Communist Party (e.g., Hogan, *Colonialism* 265).

14. Many contemporary theorists think otherwise. See Bhabha, Spivak, Chakrabarty, Appadurai, P. Chatterjee, and Ismail, for instance, for their different critiques of nationalism. My views align more with those of Lazarus, A. Ahmad, Chrisman, Sivanandan, Said, and Brennan.

15. See Tarlo and B. Chandra, *In the Name of Democracy*, for studies that situate the Emergency more centrally. Whereas Tarlo offers a critique of the Emergency through the eyes of subalterns victimized by it, Chandra attempts to analyze how it arose in relationship to the “Total Revolution” movement around Jayaprakash Narayan.


17. Hogan uses “competence,” a term from Noam Chomsky’s theories of language, to describe the process by which an individual outside of a given community can become intimately linked to it, restructuring her/his “practical identity” (*Empire* 245).


19. We see the same ambiguities and hesitations in Said’s theoretical treatments of the category of “exile” in “Reflections on Exile.”

20. See, for instance, Hogan’s discussion of Atia Hosain (*Colonialism* 265–72).

21. Compare with Rushdie’s comment: “English literature has its Indian branch [. . .] This literature is also Indian literature. There is no incompatibility here” (“Commonwealth” 65).

22. Paranjape allows that the Emergency was a “major exception” to this general lack of commitment because it “threatened [. . .] bourgeois freedoms” for the first time (“Inside and Outside” 216).
Notes to Chapter 2

23. Chapter 1 of Cheah, Inhuman Conditions, reveals his unique blend of historicism with a Derridean critique of humanism.
24. See Steingass, p. 1427. Namak-halaal is “Faithful, loyal, true,” while namak-haraam is “Untrue to salt eaten together, i.e. ungrateful, faithless, perfidious, disloyal; disobedient; evil, wicked.”
25. Lelyveld and Devji provide broader contexts for S. A. Khan’s thoughts on the rebellion and modernity. Thanks to Shahzad Bashir, Stephen Dale, Priya Gopal, and David Lelyveld for their communications and references on this topic.
26. See also Pliny, Natural History, 31.41. Thanks to Dan Seward for this reference.
27. Thanks to V. Sreenivasa for the Kannada proverbs in this section.
28. Thanks to Vandana Jani for this proverb.
30. Even the film Namak-Halaal can now be reread. Beneath its dogged commitment to reactionary paradigms of class, gender, and sexuality, the film registers a deep political and moral conflict. Arjun is caught between being faithful to Raja, as he has been instructed to do, and being loyal to his “rural” and “Indian” values by confronting his boss’s Westernized, womanizing ways. Amitabh Bachchan also performed in an older film, Namak-Haraam (1973), in which “loyalty” once again drives the dramatic tension. The son of a factory boss (Bachchan) must decide whether to crush a workers’ strike—and break his friendship with his childhood friend, the union leader (Rajesh Khanna).
31. See S. Roy, especially the Introduction.
32. Recent work being done on secularism points to a more promising end, neither embracing nor rejecting the Nehruvian legacy out of hand. See Needham and Sunder Rajan.

Chapter 2

2. The “national-popular” is a much-debated concept. As Hall explains, the national-popular is a site of contestation that can be directed toward progressive or reactionary ends (439). See Pearmain’s explanation and application of the term.
3. “Disavowing Decolonization” is the title of the second chapter in Neil Lazarus’s Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Postcolonial World, featuring a comprehensive study of this orientation in postcolonial theory.
4. The “constitutionalist” bent and communal orientation of the Ceylon National Congress provides a counterexample as an anticolonial nationalism that remained fairly detached from popular pressures. See Russell and A. Wilson.
5. Harris argues in The End of the Third World that the discourses of populism and internationalism in mainstream nationalism were responses to the socioeconomic necessities of new nation-states. Leaders of the Non-Alignment Movement such as Nehru could legitimately claim, in the aftermath of independence, that they represented the united voice of working and poor masses of the world who had been robbed by the rich, imperialist countries. But their “vision of an independent state and of the creation of a national power” had “much appeal for those likely to inherit what the foreigners left behind—whether land, business or official positions” (Harris 177).
6. This aside from Khushwant Singh’s obvious nationalism as expressed in his essays and work outside of fiction.
7. See Menon and Bhasin.

8. Bhatnagar approvingly reads all of Sahgal’s texts, in fact, as being Gandhian, considering her cosmopolitan proclivities and her emphasis on women’s equality to be simply an internal critique of it (e.g., Political 107–18). But Sahgal’s secularism and acceptance of nontraditional cultural practices is more in line with Nehru’s departure from Gandhian traditionalism and religiosity.

9. Such reclamation of lost space is central to my reading of The God of Small Things in chapter 5. See Sinha on the centrality of such clubs to British rule in terms of fashioning ideals of racial and national identity. George Orwell’s Burmese Days (1936) portrays debates among the British about the exclusiveness of the clubs after the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in 1919.

10. Less central than Harish and Girish but memorable nonetheless is the businessman Sir Harilal Mathur, who was knighted in 1942 for donating 6 lakhs of rupees (Rs. 600,000) to the war effort. At one point, this “black Englishman,” as the English call him, donates a large sum to the Sharanpur Club for the building of a swimming pool—one that Indians could not use. “No doubt,” our narrator adds, “it pleased him to contribute to a cause that excluded [Indians], even though it excluded him too” (A Time 159).


13. Bhattacharya’s Shadow directly addresses the conflict between steel towns and rural India. For a historical perspective on Nehruvian steel towns, see S. Roy, chapter 4.

14. Cohn employs these terms to study the British use of South Asian languages in consolidating power.

15. See Trotsky, History of the Russian Revolution: “The privilege of historic backwardness [sic]—and such a privilege exists—permits, or rather compels, the adoption of whatever is ready in advance of a specified date, skipping a whole set of intermediary stages” (26–27).

Chapter 3

1. Indira Gandhi herself was assassinated by one of her Sikh bodyguards in 1984, a victim of the communalism that she had helped invoke.

2. For accounts of this period I have relied primarily on Bose and Jalal, R. Gopal, Jalal, and Vanaik.

3. The economic success of the Green Revolution—due to a combination of high-yield seeds, fertilizers, and irrigation methods based on tube-wells and widespread electrification—vastly increased grain production and staved off the severity of 1960s food shortages. But the Green Revolution also “exacerbated social tensions everywhere in the subcontinent” since only wealthy farmers could keep affording new crops, poorer peasants were drawn into wage labor, and high crop yields were offset by crop instability (Stein 387). See Vandana Shiva, The Violence of the Green Revolution.

4. By “state capitalism” I mean the direct use of the state in capitalist accumulation, not only the protection of capitalist interests through laws, police, foreign policy, and so on. “State capitalism” is often mistaken for “socialism.” In fact, given the weakness of the Indian bourgeoisie after independence, it was “the industrialists themselves [who]
favored a larger, direct role for the State in many of their activities” in the early years of Indian planning (Vaidyanathan 16).

5. See both Tarlo and Perry on Emergency violence and resistance. From a different angle, B. Chandra in *In the Name of Democracy* does not exonerate the Emergency and the excesses carried out “in the name of democracy,” but also points to the right-wing tendencies of the JP movement. M. Keith Booker goes much further, defending the Emergency and criticizing Rushdie’s negative representation of it in *Midnight’s Children* (305–7).

6. Like many texts critical of the Emergency, Sahgal’s could be published only after it ended. Upon returning to power in 1980, Indira Gandhi immediately revoked Sahgal’s status as ambassador to Italy.

7. Highlights include the Naxalist uprising in rural Bengal (1967); the Shahada movement of landless laborers in Maharashtra (1972–73); the Chipko movement against deforestation in Uttar Pradesh (1973); the student-based Nav Nirman movement in Gujarat (1972–74); the massive, twenty-day, all-India Railways strike (1974); and the Bihar movement for “Total Revolution,” headed by J. P. Narayan (1974–75).

8. See Jayawardena and West for nuanced studies of the relationship between women’s movements and nationalist movements. P. Bose also demonstrates the usefulness of the category of “feminist-nationalism.”

9. This was not unique in and of itself, as women built the feminist movement of the 1920s and participated in the nationalist and radical struggles leading up to independence. See R. Kumar, *History of Doing*, Kannabiran and Lalitha, and Stree Shakti Sanghatana. The leadership of women often shifted the ideological orientation of specific struggles from traditional to radical approaches (R. Kumar, *History* 101–2).


11. In 1977–78 a vigorous campaign centered in Delhi won important legal reforms against dowry deaths. In 1979–80 mass anger against the Supreme Court’s acquittal of three policemen who had raped a teenage girl in their custody in Mathura made rape a public issue. It forced the Supreme Court to reverse its decision and support the passage of antirape laws. In the 1980s and 1990s, feminists took up a variety of issues including denial of inheritance, misuse of contraceptives and sex-determination tests, sati, forced prostitution, undernourishment and excessive childbearing, inadequate divorce rights, and child marriage.

12. The nationalist movement had similarly provided women writers in the regional languages a larger arena for their practice (Natarajan 12).

13. It is worth emphasizing that while all but the wealthiest women bore the unequal burden of housework, child-rearing, and family obligations, it is mainly elite, middle-class women who experienced the severe cloistering in the home that many novels portray. See Agarwal; R. Kumar, “Family and Factory”; and Mukul Mukherjee.

14. See readings of *The Day in Shadow* in Bhatnagar (both works), Iyengar, and Jain (both works), and analyses of *Clear Light of Day* in Afzal-Khan, Banerjee, and Dhawan.

15. See Phelan on the ethics of character narration.

16. Following Abbott, I distinguish between free indirect style and interior monologue on the basis of how long it is sustained. Like Abbott, I realize that the terms may overlap at some point (70–72, 192).

17. “Reporting, interpreting, evaluating” is Phelan’s more readable gloss of classical narrative theory’s categories of “reporting, reading, regarding” (50).

18. *Relationship* is a published collection of love letters that Sahgal exchanged with E. N. Mangat Rai in the aftermath of her divorce from Gautam Sahgal, apparently an irrepressible Panjabi businessman very much like Som. See Harish and S. Narayan.
19. Divorce under the Hindu Code Bill ostensibly existed to give equal rights to women, but the restrictions imposed by both the law and societal custom actually made a husband’s divorce of his wife far more common (Parashar 115–19). Indeed, women had not even received absolute property and inheritance rights by the 1950s, which exacerbated their economic dependence (118).

20. Ignoring this “Christian” element, Khair misreads Raj’s discourse about national emasculation as a sign of the text’s affiliation with Hindu-fundamentalist paradigms (190).

21. Nehru held progressive views on women’s equality, but the nationalist movement as a whole could be quite reactionary. While women’s equality was official Congress policy, women themselves were treated as separate and inferior, which even led to a (failed) call for a separate women’s Congress (Forbes 142–43). Gandhi’s own position on women’s equality was quite problematic, as he called on women to emulate Sita, the mythic, ideal wife (Forbes 129) and claimed that women were more suited for nonviolence because of their spirit of self-sacrifice (Jayawardena 97).

22. Afzal-Khan consistently takes this position.

23. Compare with Parekh’s reading of Bim and Tara.

24. The NRI is the “Non-Resident Indian,” an official designation for those who are Indian by race, ethnicity, or birth but who live abroad. It has a negative cultural reference (“Not Really Indian,” “Not Reliable Indian”) that I’m Ironically accessing here (since I am myself an NRI).


26. Amitav Ghosh’s The Shadow Lines, similarly, divides the novel into two parts—“Going Away” and “Coming Home”—in order to employ this powerful rubric for investigating cosmopolitanism and nationalism.

27. There are undoubtedly instances in the context of Western prejudice and racism in which a member of a non-Western diaspora might emphasize the positives as opposed to the negatives of his or her country. But the sort of representation that Bakul offers is not only a poor response to Orientalism (which also cites the Bhagavad-Gita and Taj Mahal) but also the mark of someone who has little to say about day-to-day Indian life in the first place.

28. I thank the graduate students in my spring 2008 seminar on postcolonial women’s writing for providing a rich intellectual forum for my thoughts on the conclusion of Clear Light of Day.

29. Later articles such as “The Virtuous Woman” (The Tribune, 24 December 1988) are a bit more inventive, speaking of “re-writing” the myths of passive heroines such as Sita and Savitri in the “search for identity and emancipation” (Point of View 33).

30. The left/progressive discourse that marks Indira Gandhi’s speeches gives a sense of the ideological complexity of the times.

Chapter 4

1. In terms of plot, the Emergency is referred to only toward the end of Midnight’s Children. But its impact on the first-person narrator, retelling the story after the Emergency, makes it central to the text on multiple levels.


3. See Jani, review article on Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial.
5. See Guha, “Nationalism.”
7. Some readers, like Robbins, have mistakenly read this novel as a cosmopolitan critique of nationalism because of its unrelenting opposition to the specific form of Hindu-communal nationalism that emerged in the Bengali Swadeshi movement of the early twentieth century (*Feeling Global* 161–63). But Said, whose model of cosmopolitanism Robbins finds attractive, places Tagore first on his list of cosmopolitan-elites who supported national liberation while being critical of existing nationalist formations (Lazarus, *Nationalism* 141).
8. See Eagleton, “Nationalism: Irony and Commitment.”
9. Contrast this model with Kincaid’s lines about tourism from *A Small Place*. The first line of the passage I am considering sounds like an idealist vision of borders—“Every native of every place is a potential tourist, and every tourist is a native of somewhere” (18)—but is actually about situating border-crossing within specific spaces. This dimension is furthered by the end of the passage: “But some natives—most natives in the world—cannot go anywhere. They are too poor [. . . ] They are too poor to escape the reality of their lives” (19).
10. This trajectory also parallels the changing fortunes of the “Third World” as a political idea. See Prashad and Harris.
11. Contrast my view of Rushdie’s turn away from the nation with Hogan’s discussion of Rushdie and Gandhism in “Midnight’s Children.” Also see Rege, who argues that this novel gave Indian writers “the courage to tell their own stories as Indian stories” and to “be ironic and ambivalent about their relationship to the nation state” (274).
12. See P. Chatterjee’s implicit critique of universalism itself in “Community in the East.”
13. The U.S. war on Afghanistan in 2001, for instance, was launched by George W. Bush and backed by liberal groups such as the Feminist Majority.
14. Thanks to Leo Coleman for his comments on my reading of Padma.
15. While the Sanskrit word *pankaj*, a synonym for *padma* (“lotus”), etymologically means “born in the mud,” neither *padma* nor *lakshmi* has such a meaning.
17. See Tharoor, *India: From Midnight to Millennium* and *The Elephant, the Tiger, and the Cell Phone*.
18. This is a reference to the shadowy production of the Maruti car by Sanjay Gandhi, Indira Gandhi’s son. According to the report of the Maruti Commission (31 May 1979), every transaction having to do with the car was influenced by governmental pressure (R. Gopal 83–86).
20. S. Sarkar, *Modern India*, is the classic text here; compare with B. Chandra, *Nationalism and Colonialism*.
21. There is more than a little romanticization of the British working class here, particularly in relation to the World War II bombing of London. Compare with the similar representation of the London bombing in A. Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines*.
22. The larger context is important, as Marxism itself (in this period, in which the Soviet Union supported Indira Gandhi) is represented as little more than book knowledge. Ravi, Sonali’s ex-boyfriend, was a great reader of *The Communist Manifesto* while in
school in England but, for most of the novel, becomes merely a tool for the Emergency when in India.

23. Sita was married to the god-king Ram, which is also the name of Rose’s husband. Sita provides the Hindu-scriptural model for the “good woman” that is often championed by conservative Hindus and critiqued by feminists.


25. The Indian Communists’ position, which Lenin opposed, can be characterized by the following letter they sent to the British Communists on August 9, 1920—just two days after the Second Congress (July 19–Aug. 7)—requesting that they send organizers and agitators to “take the leadership of the masses away from the nationalist politicians and passive resisters and [ . . . ] organize the Indian workers on class lines for political freedom and economic and social liberation” (Persits 174). The massive Non Co-Operation movement led by those “passive resisters” exploded in September, launching a new era of rebellion in the anticolonial struggle.

26. In Inhuman Conditions, Cheah cites The Communist Manifesto against Lenin’s theses defending anti-imperialist national liberation struggles in order to oppose Marx and Lenin on the national question (26–29). See Lewis for an opposing view. In “Karl Marx, Eurocentrism, and the 1857 Revolt in British India,” I contend that the Revolt started to shift Marx’s ideas about anticolonial struggle, a movement that led him to theoretically and practically rally around Irish national self-determination in the late 1860s.

Chapter 5

1. Cited in “EMS Attacks Literary Content of Arundhati Roy’s Novel.” The Rediff piece reports on, and presumably translates, an article that E. M. S. published in Deshabhimani, the CPI(M)’s Malayali newspaper. The audience for the article, in other words, would be a CPI(M)-friendly one that 1) has a direct interest in Roy’s portrayals (The God of Small Things is set in a town in Kerala), and 2) is susceptible to cultural-nationalist critiques of “the West” and English-language texts given the politics of language and location in postcolonial India.

2. I call Frontline CPI(M)-friendly not only because it has regularly featured articles and columns by CPI(M) leaders and intellectuals but also because even its journalistic articles—usually very thorough—rarely interrogate CPI(M) policies and positions.

3. See the Web page of the Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save the Narmada Movement) at http://www.narmada.org.

4. Frontline favorably covered Roy’s work with Dalit literacy and writing workshops in the late 1990s and has continued to publish articles by and about Roy. For instance, see R. M. Nair on Roy’s support of Dalit literary programs, and “A Novel Gesture.”

5. See N. Rao, “Politics of Genre,” on the popularity of The God of Small Things as a “safe” text in the Western academy versus the virtual avoidance of Roy’s hard-hitting essays.

6. A. Ahmad seeks to differentiate between his critique of the novel’s political ideology and his reading of the novel as fiction, but the distinction between the two is lost throughout.

7. See my discussion in the conclusion of Charlie Rose’s interview with Rushdie and Roy on 14 August 1997.

8. Head’s metaphor for the effects of postcolonial development is exceedingly poi-
gnant to me, as my seventeen-year-old cousin, Tapan Malay Dave, was crushed to death by a rampaging truck on a highway in India in June 2001.

9. A. Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace* (2000) provides an intriguing comparison, for it too aims to chart out spaces for survival, resilience, and rebellion in the midst of cataloguing the atrocities of colonialism and failed anticolonial struggles.

10. Wilson’s article appears in *Liberation*, a publication of CPI (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation, a party that is critical of the CPI(M). While this political context is important to consider, the paper is so deeply engaged with the novel on a textual level that it deserves consideration on literary-critical grounds.

11. “Dalit,” meaning “the oppressed,” is how politically conscious members of the group often known as “untouchables” and “harijans” have referred to themselves since the 1960s and 1970s.

12. This is not to minimize the impact of Sophie Mol’s death on the children; we are told that “The Loss of Sophie Mol grew robust and alive. Like a fruit in season. Every season” (*The God of Small Things* 17).

13. Rahel’s feelings of loss and confusion at Sophie Mol’s funeral can be reread in this light, for it is only after Estha sees Velutha’s broken body 300 pages later (“blood spilled from his skull like a secret” [*The God of Small Things* 303]) that we understand what Rahel saw when her fantasy painter fell (“dark blood spilling from his skull like a secret” [8]).

14. The twins are born during the India–China war of 1962—which some historians regard as the beginning of the demise of Nehruvian India.

15. Paravans are the specific Dalit caste group identified in the novel.

16. “The Greater Common Good,” similarly, reports that it is difficult to find facts and figures about how many were displaced in past development projects, but its function is to invert the truths that it finds: “where there’s no press, no NBA, no court case, there are no records. The displaced leave no trail at all” (52).

17. E. M. S. Namboodiripad claims that “the two most effective means” in literature for diverting people from “surging forward against capitalism” are the valorization of sexual deviance and anti-Communist politics, and Roy’s text contains both (“EMS Attacks”). There is little to distinguish E. M. S.’s concern for the rise of “literature that in recent years has been tickling the senses and exerted a bad influence on the younger generation” (“EMS Attacks”) from the position of Sabu Thomas, the conservative Syrian Christian lawyer who tried to sue Roy because “the sexual deeds described in the book will corrupt readers’ minds” (qtd. in Sreedharan).

18. Herman’s essay, written in spring 2008 for my graduate seminar, is unpublished. I reference the essay when citing Herman, but refer to quotations from Nixon’s and Said’s original work directly.

19. A. Ahmad remarks that “Naxalite” becomes “somewhat of an all-purpose term in Roy’s fiction,” the mark of the “truly revolutionary” (“Reading” 104). The fleeting references to Naxalites are significant in that they signify a *Left* voice that challenged the CPI(M) in the 1960s and 1970s.

20. Omvedt also misreads Roy’s work as an expression of the postmodernist rejection of development: from “an Enlightenment faith in progress and rational human planning, we have come to a post-modernist questioning of development itself” (“Dams and Bombs-I”). But Omvedt’s leftist championing of development is not sufficiently critical of it as *capitalist* development.


22. See the debate between Patnaik and S. Sarkar/T. Sarkar.
Notes to Conclusion

24. See especially chapter 1, “Rebellious Aesthetic Acts,” which aims to specify the change that “magical realism” can and cannot effect in the real world.

Conclusion

1. Said reads Karl Marx’s writings on India to show that nineteenth-century European writers on Asia were Orientalist despite differences in ideology (Orientalism 153–57). See A. Ahmad, In Theory, chapter 6, and Jani, “Karl Marx,” for alternative views on Marx’s India articles.
2. The entire interview can be viewed at http://www.youtube.com.
3. See chapter 3.
4. In “When the Negro Was in Vogue,” Hughes reflects back on the 1920s and the phenomenon of whites enjoying the work of Black jazz musicians—in segregated Harlem clubs.
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264


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Ali, Tariq, 179, 183, 243, 247n6
Anand, Mulk Raj, 59; and M. K. Gandhi, 42; and Progressive Writers’ Association, 34–35, 41–42, 247n13; *Untouchable*, 42, 73
Appadurai, Arjun, 157–58, 247n14
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Bhabha, Homi, 86–87, 169, 234, 247n14. See also hybridity; identity
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Bose, Brinda, 210–13, 227
Bose, Purnima, 103, 250n8
capitalist modernity: and cosmopolitanism, 26–27, 37–38, 43, 74–81, 245n9; and the environment, 215–20; and the postcolonial world, 30–37, 57, 98–101; as state capitalism, 30–31, 35, 235, 247n10, 249n4, 252n4. See also cosmopolitanism; postcolonial development, representations of
Chandra, Biplab, 32, 247n14, 248n1, 250n5, 252n19
Chatterjee, Partha, “The Nationalist Resolution to the Women’s Question,” 103–4, 246n13; critique of postnationalism, 158, 247n14, 252n12
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Clear Light of Day (Desai), 6, 10, 98, 101–2, 108–11, 121–40, 194–95, 240, 250n14, 251n28; contexts of, 104–8; family/nation, violence of, 127–33; feminist narrative strategies of, 108–11; NRI nationalism, critique of, 121–27; as political novel, 101–2; and tradition, return to, 137–40. See also Desai, Anita


Cohn, Bernard, 249n14

Communism: and anticolonial struggle, 189, 253n25; contemporary intellectuals and, 220, 224, 228–32 passim; and the Emergency, 140, 252n22, 254n19; The God of Small Things, CPI(M)’s critique of, 191–94, 209, 254n17; Midnight’s Children and, 153; and post-Emergency movements, 223–24; Roy on, 202–4, 220–23, 225–26, 229; Sahgal on, 117, 135, 145–46, 252n22. See also Marxism

cosmopolitanism, 37–52: “cosmopolitics,” 39, 246n14; gendered, 121–27; and hybridity, 81–94; in Indian (English) writing, 37–44; nationalism, as antagonistic to, 21, 44, 57–58; 252n7; and middle-class subjectivity, 26–27, 37–38, 43, 74–81; multiplicity of, 5–11, 38. See also capitalist modernity; namak-halaal cosmopolitanism; nationalism

Davidson, Basil, 32, 74

Das, Veena, 35

Day in Shadow, The (Sahgal), 6, 10, 98, 101–2, 108–21, 133–40, 175, 195, 250n14; contexts of, 104–8; feminist narrative strategies of, 108–13; nationalism in, 117–21, 133–35, 175; political consciousness, representations of, 113–17; as political novel, 101–2; tradition, return to, 135–37. See also Sahgal, Nayantara

Desai, Anita, 6, 10, 105, 134, 140, 194, 236; Clear Light of Day, 108–11, 121–40. See also Clear Light of Day

Deshpande, Shashi, The Dark Holds No Terrors, 106

Ellison, Ralph, Invisible Man, 206–7

Emecheta, Buchi, The Joys of Motherhood, 102, 171

Emergency, the, 35–36, 43–44, 98–99, 141–42, 151, 183, 247n22, 250n5, 250n6, 252n19, 252n22; Ghosh on, 170–71; Indian English novel, shifts in, 7–11, 20–21, 25, 36, 235–37; in Midnight’s Children, 153, 156–57, 166–74, 251n1; in Rich Like Us, 174–75, 178–85; Sahgal and Rushdie on, 141–43; Sahgal and, 100, 108, 117–20, 136; and postnational turn, 50–52; and shifts in the Indian English novel, and women’s movements, 104–6. See also Gandhi, Indira

English, writing in. See under Indian literatures

Faiz, Faiz Ahmad, 33; “Dawn of Freedom,” 60, 62–63, 101

Fanon, Frantz, 15; on colonized intellectual, 75–77; on nationalism/internationalism, 189

feminist nationalism. See postcolonial women’s writing; women

film, 2, 27, 34, 150, 157, 227, 245n4; Mother India, 1–5; Namak-Halaal, 45, 248n30; Namak-Haraam, 248n30; Xala, 150

Forbes, Geraldine, 105, 250n10, 251n21 free indirect style, 68–69, 85, 89–91, 109–110, 113, 115, 123, 180, 215, 246n12

Gandhi, Indira, 7, 20, 35–36, 98–101, 150, 249n1, 250n6, 251n30, 252n18,
252n22; in *Midnight’s Children*, 153, 72, 175, 178; in *Rich Like Us*, 183; in Sahgal’s nonfiction, 100, 108, 150. *See also* Emergency, the

Gandhi, Leela, 37, 39, 42, 59, 61

Gandhi, M. K.: as cosmopolitan, 58, 67; and Anand, 42; as ideological influence on writers, 60–61, 142, 195; 249n8, 252n11 (*see also* Sahgal, Nayantara); in “Tryst with Destiny,” 55, 141, 238; Roy, alternatives to, 201, 238; and Salt Satyagraha, 48–49; and women, 251n21. *See also* Nehru, Jawaharlal; nationalism


Ghosh, Bishnupriya, 36, 246n14, 247n18 globalization. *See* capitalist modernity; postcolonial development, representations of

Gopal, Priyamvada, 248n25; “‘Curious Ironies,’” 58–61; *Literary Radicalism in India*, 23, 33–35, 41, 247n8, 247n13; Postcolonial Studies after Iraq, 158


Guha, Ranajit, 15, 143–44, 246n2; bourgeois nationalism, critique of, 150, 187, 248n1; Benedict Anderson, critique of, 34–35, 252n5; subaltern narratives, recovering, 185, 197, 252n4; subalternity and anticolonial nationalism in early *Subaltern Studies*, 143–44. *See also* subalternity

Habib, Irfan, 48

Hall, Stuart, 56, 248n2

Hammad, Suheir, “First Writing Since,” 241–42

Hardiman, David, 48

Head, Bessie, “The Wind and a Boy,” 191, 195–96, 253n8


Hogan, Patrick, *Colonialism and Cultural Identity*, 247n13, 247n20; *Empire and Poetic Voice*, 66, 89, 245n9, 247n17

Hughes, Langston, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” 33; “When the Negro Was in Vogue,” 243, 255n4

hybridity: as celebrated category, 2–3, 19, 50–51; *The Coffer Dams*, alternatives to, 86–94; and elite contexts, 35–36; and totality, 245n9

identity, 5, 9–11; and “competence,” 89–91, 247n17; constructions of colonial, 249n9; cosmopolitanism, class, and, 20–27 *passim*, 37–44 *passim*; *namak-halaal* orientation and, 8, 49; and subjectivity, 245n9; voice and regaining, 86–94, 110–16, 120–27, 127–33, 206–8, 230–31, 251n9. *See also* interiority; narrative strategies; subalternity
ideology, 8–11, 20–1, 136–37, 174, 193, 196; and orientation, 40, 46. See also Marxism: aesthetics
India, anticolonial struggle in. See Gandhi, M. K.; Guha, Ranajit; nationalism
Indian literatures: and “bilingualism,” 41–43; colonialism’s influence on, 40–41; Indian writing in English, dominance of, 23–25, 35–36; diversity of, 3, 21, 53; cosmopolitan-elite production of, 5–6, 27–28, 42–44; elites and Englishness, 37–38, 57–58, 70–71, 74–79, 233–34, 249n10; and namak-halal cosmopolitanism, 40; Progressive Writers’ Association and, 33–34, 58–59; Rushdie’s changing perspectives on, 14, 16–18, 23–24; and women’s writing, 105–7 intellectuals, 233–44. See also cosmopolitanism
interiority, 10–11, 68, 154, 236; free indirect style and, 109; politics of, 85, 101–2, 106–7, 176, 207; and women’s voices, 110–16; 121–27, 138, 198–201. See also narrative strategies internationalism, 38; and anticolonial nationalism, 54–57, 186–90, 248n5; liberal versions of, 76, 146, 149–50. See also Marxism: nationalism
Iraq, 11, 158, 188–89, 202–3, 228, 233, 243 Jain, Jasbir, 177, 179, 250n14
Jalal, Ayesha, 249n2
Jayawardena, Kumari, 121, 250n8, 251n21
Joyce, James, “A Little Cloud,” 251n25
Jussawala, Adil, 42–44
Kattrak, Ketu, 107–8
Khair, Tabish, 28, 159, 246n14, 251n20
Khan, Sayyid Ahmad, 45, 248n25
Krishnaswamy, Revathi, 23, 31, 245n7, 247n8
Kumar, Radha, 105, 107, 250n9, 250n13
Kuransky, Michael, 46–49
Lahiri, Jhumpa, 243
Lelyveld, David, 248n25
Lenin, V. I.: on anti-imperialism, 189; and Indian Communists, 189–90, 253n25; and Marx on anticolonial nationalism, 253n26
Macaulay, Lord Thomas Babbington, “Minute on Indian Education,” 52, 76–77
magical realism. See under realism
Maira, Sunaina, 173
Manto, Saadat Hasan, 34, 252n16
Markandaya, Kamala, 6, 10, 43, 60–61; The Coffer Dams, 81–97; A Handful of Rice, 81; Nectar in a Sieve, 59, 61. See also Coffer Dams, The Marx, Karl, 29–30, 253n26, 255n1
Marxism: and aesthetics, 9–11, 21–20, 25–29, 193–96, 220–32 passim (see also narrative strategies; realism); and middle-class subjectivity, 42–44,
Index

245n9; and subalternity, 143–45, 251n3

Midnight’s Children (Rushdie), 6, 10–11, 36, 52, 100–101, 151–74, 186–87, 246n10; and Booker victory, 14–15, 20–21, 50, 59, 235–36; compared with The God of Small Things, 193–95; as elite-centered, 141–44, 151, 171–74, 179, 186–87; gender and narrative in, 159–66; nation as palimpsest in, 100–101, 142, 184, 252n11; postnational narrative strategies in, 151–59, 169–74; subaltern agency in, 166–69. See also Rushdie, Salman

Mehta, Rama, Inside the Haveli, 106

migrancy, 1–2, 7, 37–38, 123–27, 149, 159, 173, 240–41. See also cosmopolitanism

Mistry, Rohinton: A Fine Balance, 36, 50, 235; Such a Long Journey, 252n16

modernity. See under capitalist modernity; postcolonial development, representations of

Morrison, Toni, Sula, 213

Mother India (Khan), 1–3, 5

Mukherjee, Meenakshi: “Interrogating Postcolonialism,” 246n3, 247n9; Perishable Empire, 51, 194; Twice-born Fiction, 68


See also cosmopolitanism

Narayan, R. K., 59, 61
	narrative strategies, 113, 246n12, 250n17; concordant/discordant, 8, 146, 236, 246n12. See also free indirect style; implied audience; implied author

nationalism: cosmopolitanism, as antagonistic to, 21, 44, 57–58; 252n7; as reactionary, 21, 55, 57–58, 143; and radical possibilities, 32–35; and subaltern agency, 34–35, 143–44; feminist nationalism and women’s writing, 102–10; as heterogeneous, 34–35, 186–90; as imagined community, 15, 55; and internationalism, 186–90; and namak-halaal orientation, 60–63, 194–95, 233, 241; and nation-state, 32, 74; and “national-popular,” 56–57; as site of cross-class alliance, 31, 48–49, 58–60; “NRI nationalism,” 51, 123–25, 239–40, 251n24; Rushdie and, 1–5, 17–18, 155–56, 173–74, 238–41; in postnational writing, 51–2, 100–101, 151–59, 238–41; postnational turn and failures of, 31–32, 35–37, 235–36

Ndebele, Njabulo: “The Rediscovery of the Ordinary,” 116, 196, 204–5, 209, 241. See also subalternity


Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Devil on the Cross, 171, 195

9/11: and Postcolonial Studies, 12, 158; and Rushdie, 22, 247fn6

Nixon, Rob, 216–20; 254n18

Nussbaum, Martha, 44

Palestine, 217, 233–34, 241

Omvedt, Gail, 254n20

Orwell, George: Animal Farm, 52–53; Burmese Days, 249n9; Rushdie and, 53

272
Paranjape, Marakand, 14, 42–44, 115, 117, 140, 247n22


Phelan, Jim, 154, 250n15, 250n17

postcolonial cultural production: restoring diversity of 1–5, 19–22, 53. See also Indian literature; Postcolonial Studies


postcolonial pastoral. See under God of Small Things, The

Postcolonial Studies: cosmopolitanism and postcoloniality as limited concepts, 3, 6, 8, 11, 13, 44; historicism and “postcoloniality,” 20–22, 26, 140, 194–95, 235, 240–44; “hybridity” in, 86–87; postmodern theory and, 15–16, 19, 24, 235–36; migrancy in, 37–38; nationalism and, 21, 55, 57–58, 187–88; Said and, 233–35; “subalternity” in, 143–45; women and nation in, 102–4. See also postcolonial development, representations of

postcolonial women’s writing, 6, 102–10, 139–40, 237–38; cosmopolitanism and gender, 121–27; the family in, 111–15, 127–33, 197–98; gender and class in, 198–201; in India, 101–2, 105–8; and interiority, 101–2, 106–7, 110–16, 121–27, 138; narrating public/private spheres, 108–10; and “political novel,” genre of, 101–2, 253n5; representations of rape and sexual violence, 61, 86, 93–95, 182, 197–98, 200, 212, 225; and tradition, 107–8, 133–40. See also sexuality, representations of

postmodernism: aesthetics versus epistemology, 11, 193–96, 202–4, 205–7, 228–30, 254n20; and Midnight’s Children, 153–55, 159–60; and modernism, 4–5, 75; and oppositional politics, 10, 188, 212; the postcolonial and, 3, 4, 7, 15–16, 87, 143, 157–59, 235–36; the telos of, 51, 154, 171, 186

postnational cosmopolitanism. See cosmopolitanism; namak-halaal cosmopolitanism

Prabhu, Anjali, 245n9

Prashad, Vijay, 35, 252n10

Progressive Writers’ Association (PWA): and anticolonial nationalism, 7, 34–35, 58, 62; Communist influence in, 247n13; cosmopolitan origins of, 41

Rao, Raja, Kantha pura, 41, 59, 73

Rao, Mukunda, 24

Rao, Nagesh, 35, 247n10, 253n5

realism: contemporary critique of, 31, 160, 165–66; and irony, 96; magical realism and namak-halaal orientation, 193–96 passim, 255n24; magical realism and “Rushdie,” 2, 6–8; multiple forms of postcolonial, 6–7, 52–53; new forms of, 243; and psychology, 8, 10, 43, 101, 106–7, 110; as sign of the political, 210; shifts in modes of, 8–10, 24, 31, 33; social-realism, complexity of, 5, 85, 113, 131; “socialist” realism, 28–29, 247n13. See also interiority; Marxism: aesthetics, narrative strategies

Rich Like Us (Sahgal), 6, 10, 36, 174–185, 186–87; compared with The God of Small Things, 230–31; compared with A Time to Be Happy, 120, 249n11; cosmopolitanism and poverty, 183–85; as namak-halaal but elite-centered, 141–44, 172, 174–75,
186–87; narrative strategies and subaltern resistance in, 175–79; subaltern voices, spectrum of, 179–85. See also Emergency, the; Sahgal, Nayantara

Robbins, Bruce, 44, 247n18, 252n7


Roy, M. N., 189

Roy, Ram Mohun, 37

Roy, Srirupa, 245n4, 248n31, 249n13


Sahgal, Nayantara, 6, 9–10, 22, 33, 105, 116, 140, 236–37; The Day in Shadow, 108–21, 133–40; From Fear Set Free, 151; Gandhian/Nehruvian influences on, 64–69, 74–75, 78–81, 117–21, 146–49, 174, 178–79, 183, 242–43; 249n8; Indira Gandhi’s Emergency and Style, 100, 250n6; as namak-halal and nationalist, 59–63; Point of View, 134; Prison and Chocolate Cake, 145–49, 150–51; Relationship, 116, 250n18; Rich Like Us, 174–85; A Time to Be Happy, 66–81. See also Day in Shadow, The; Rich Like Us; Time to Be Happy, A

Said, Edward, 15, 233–35, 246n2, 247n14, 252n7; Culture and Imperialism, 18; Orientalism, 15, 235, 255n1; “Reflections on Exile,” 247n19; Representations of the Intellectual, 233–43 passim; The World, the Text, and the Critic, 39; “Yeats and Decolonization,” 216–17, 220

Salih, Tayeb: Season of Migration to the North, 33, 41

salt: history and symbolism of, 46–49; in language, 45, 47–48; pillars of, 1, 4–5, 245n1; redefining loyalties, 45–46, Salt Satyagraha, 48–49

Sangari, Kumkum, 188

Sarkar, Tanika, 104, 248n1, 254n22

Sarkar, Sumit, 248n1, 252n6, 252n20, 254n22

Scott, Helen, 21, 25–26, 31–32

Sembene, Ousmane, Xala, 150

sexuality, representations of: as “bourgeois decadence,” 191, 254n17; as emancipatory space, 92, 210; as contradictory sign of modernity, 211–15; as site of modern violence, 61, 86, 93–95, 113–15, 127–33, 182, 197–98, 200, 212, 225; and “trysts,” 54–57, 61, 62. See also postcolonial women’s writing

Shiva, Vandana, 164, 249n3

Singh, Khushwant, Train to Pakistan, 40, 60–62, 237, 248n6

Sivanandan, Tamara, 33, 41, 247n14

Spanish Civil War, 42, 145–47

Spivak, Gayatri, 15; and the postnational: 157, 234, 247n14; and the subaltern: 143–44, 204, 234, 252n4

Sreenivas, Mythili, 103–4, 247n11

subalternity: and early Subaltern Studies, 143–45, 251n3; and anticolonial nationalism, presence in, 34–35, 54–57, 252n5; and bourgeois nationalism, critique of, 150, 187, 248n1; and “rediscovery of the ordinary,” 116, 196, 204–5, 209, 236, 241; and sexuality (see sexuality, representations of); and Spivak, 143–44, 204,
Index

234; subaltern narratives, recovery of (Markandaya, Roy, and early Sahgal), 71–73, 81–84, 86–94, 185, 197, 199–201, 207–8, 219, 228–32, 252n4; subaltern voices, representations of (Rushdie and later Sahgal), 144–45, 166–73, 175–85

Tagore, Rabindranath, *The Home and the World*, 2, 145, 245n1; 252n7; references to, 3, 103, 145–46

Tarlo, Emma, 35, 99, 247n15; 247n16; 250n5

Tharoor, Shashi: *The Great Indian Novel*, 36, 50, 235; and India: 56, 173–74, 252n17

“Third World,” 35, 248n5, 252 n10. See also postcolonial development, representations of

Tharu, Susie, 41, 106

*Time to Be Happy*, A (Sahgal), 6, 10, 33, 54, 59, 60–63, 66–81, 100; comparisons with: *The Coffer Dams*, 63–66, 94–97; *The Day in Shadow*, 119–20; *The God of Small Things*, 208; *Rich Like Us*, 177; colonialism and racism, critique of, 69–71; cosmopolitanism and poverty, 71–73; early postcolonial contexts of, 59–63; narrative strategies of, 66–73; Nehruvian resolutions in, 73–81. See also Sahgal, Nayantara

Trivedi, Harish, 3

Trotzky, Leon, 28–29, 90, 249n15. See also Marxism: aesthetics

“Tryst with Destiny” (Nehru), 54–57, 69, 14, 238; comparison with “Dawn of Freedom” (Faiz), 60–62; contrast with Indian realities, 99, 101. See also Nehru, Jawaharlal

Vanaik, Achin, 105, 224, 249n3

Viswanathan, Gauri, 37, 77

women: gender and narrative, 93–95, 110–16, 121–27, 159–66, 198–201; and *namak-halaal* writing, 6, 139–40, 237–38; and nation, 10, 102–10, 117–21, 250n8, 251n2; Nehru, Gandhi, and, 120–21, 251n21; and 1970s movements, 104–8. See also postcolonial women’s writing

Williams, Raymond, 10, 26

Zinn, Howard, 206