

Introduction

This thesis focuses on the representation of the local and regional identities and histories, in some select Indian English writers' novels. It intends to show how some Indian English novelists foreground local histories and peripheral identities in their fictional narratives. This aesthetic preference for the local and the peripheral is conditioned by these writers' understanding that the nation-state and its centre fail to conceive the realities of the regional margins or peripheries. I have chosen four Indian English writers for the study – Amit Chaudhuri, Arundhati Roy, Siddhartha Deb and Mamang Dai. The fictional narratives of these four writers highlight the issue of the centre's failure to properly represent the problems of the Indian nation-state's scattered regions and peripheries. They show that because of the pluralities existing in the cultural and political space of the nation-state's diverse regions, the centre fails to apprehend their peculiar realities. Their novels emphasize the futility of the idea of a homogeneous nation-state and the concept of a horizontal cultural space which unites the people of a particular geographical and political entity. In the context of India, the co-existence of regional and national loyalties always remains an impossible dream. In my thesis I have tried to show that this impossibility demands an alternative discourse of history in literary texts, where the valorized representation of the nationally significant events and characters can be countered by a new focus on private, small and untold histories. My thesis deals with the reviving and retelling of marginalized histories and lost narratives in the novels of Chaudhuri, Roy, Deb and Dai. The novels of these four writers represent such acts of retrieval and reconstruction as dependent on the local praxis and performance. They show that the resistant voices of the local and marginal cultures enable them to create an alternative mode of producing their own history, to counter the hegemonic suppression of the centre. I intend to establish the point that literature which is centred on the dominant ideology and the nation-state dynamics engages with larger political events, and the alternative narrative of small histories and resistant cultures focuses on everyday life of the common man in the backdrop of local and marginal spaces. My thesis tries to analyse the novels of Amit Chaudhuri, Arundhati Roy, Siddhartha Deb and Mamang Dai in the light of their focus on small and erased histories as opposed to official histories, their critique of the idea of nationhood, and their

engagement with local knowledges and the quotidian space. I have selected the novels of these four writers for examining whether it is possible for a so-called third-world novelist with the legacy of postcoloniality, to create an alternative narrative of the local, the peripheral and the quotidian. The novelists that I have selected for the study do not produce the narratives of the nation; they are rather engaged with the representation of smaller localities, ordinary man's lost and repressed histories, and the everyday as a site of exploration into socio-political forces which affect ordinary lives in the local space. They address the private and the political at the same time, without trying to make any conscious division between the two. They are aware of the fact that an individual's private history often intersects with the public history or larger socio-political events, and as a consequence an apparently apolitical text may also very naturally contain political undertones.

The theoretical framework of my thesis is primarily based on the postcolonial critique of nationhood, the theory of revisionist histories, and the critical theories of the everyday, which I am elaborately discussing in the relevant chapters. The critique of the idea that the nation-state creates a metaphor of participation or a common sentiment among its members, the marginal people's practice of writing alternative histories, the production of resistant cultures and the everyday as the explorer of the local space – these are the key concepts of my thesis. The failure of the metaphor of participation, on which the idea of the nation-state is grounded, is the basic premise of my thesis. The boundary between the nation-state's centre and the margins makes it impossible that any homogeneous political entity may emerge and some common sentiment may be created. My thesis takes into account the criticism of the nation-state by the critics like Homi Bhabha and Partha Chatterjee. Another theoretical ground of my thesis is revisionist historiography which rejects the dominant or official historiography of the centre. I am particularly drawing on Jacques Derrida's appeal for turning to the spectres of history in *Specters of Marx*, to engage with the reconstruction of submerged narratives and identities. My thesis also foregrounds the idea that histories written from the margins have the intervening power to disrupt the official history or the dominant historiography of the nation. This idea is largely borrowed from the theory of subaltern historiography, particularly Ranajit Guha's privileging of the small or peripheral voices of history. There are "small voices which are drowned in the noise of statist commands" (Guha 3). These

small voices which are suppressed under the dominant historiography need to be revived. The reclamation of the past is a significant aspect of postcolonial theory and my thesis deals with this aspect to show how the marginal people struggle to retain their culture and identities in the face of the centre's politics of appropriation and homogenization. The resistance to hegemonic forces, the act of sticking to the roots, the struggle for creating counter-narratives and minority voices are certain issues that my thesis addresses. Moreover, the Marxist theories of the everyday, particularly that of Walter Benjamin, Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau are foregrounded to analyse how the everyday, which is usually distinguished from the institutionalized and specialized activities of man, can serve as a useful site of social critique. The formalized practices of capitalism can be detected through exploring the usually ignored site of the everyday. As the basic theoretical ground of my thesis is the study of resistant impulses which lie embedded in the local and marginal spaces of the nation-state, the Marxist theories of the everyday have helped me to examine how these spaces produce their counter-narratives to the centre's hegemonic suppression.

There are many writers who reject the idea that those who have the experience of postcoloniality write only about the nation and produce national-narratives. Moreover, there are critics who have written about the contemporary Indian English writers' shifting interest in local and marginal realities. Aijaz Ahmad (1992) says that nationalism is not the only mode of representation for a postcolonial writer. Arjun Appadurai (1995) defines the strategies of producing local knowledges. Meenakshi Mukherjee (2000) says that the recent Indian English writers lack the anxiety of Indianness, and they are not guided by the typical postcolonial burden of writing about nation and nationhood. Amit Chaudhuri (2001) criticizes the West's consideration of India as a historical void outside the experience of colonialism. Priyamvada Gopal (2002) talks about a new historical consciousness in the recent Indian English writers; according to her, it is a consciousness centred on more immediate and local realities. Ranajit Guha (2002) criticizes academic history's lack of interest in everyday life and emphasizes the portrayal of man's everyday contentment and misery in literature. Joseph A. Amato (2002) talks about the alternative ways of writing the history of the local space, with a particular focus on the changing present. Jon Mee (2003) refers to the emergence of a gradual scepticism in Indian English writing regarding the idea of nationhood. Bishnupriya Ghosh (2004) refers to the

production of subaltern subjects and the restoration of submerged knowledges as a significant aspect of contemporary Indian English novel. Rajeswari Sundar Rajan (2011) points out, that nation has not remained an unproblematic narrative material in the recent Indian English novels.

In “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism” Jameson argues that in the third-world texts, “even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic – necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: *the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third world culture and society*” (69). Aijaz Ahmad criticizes Jameson’s binaries of the first-world and the third-world. He in *In Theory* states that Jameson’s proposition about third-world literature’s exclusive focus on national narratives is primarily based on a three world theory. The basic premise of Jameson’s argument is that the first-world is capitalistic, the second-world is socialistic, and the third-world suffers from colonialism and imperialism. Ahmad comments that Jameson has categorized the first and the second-world in terms of production, whereas the third-world has been defined in terms of the experience of colonialism and imperialism alone – purely in terms of an experience of “externally inserted phenomena” (100). He argues that it is not logical to establish the premise that only the first-world is exclusively capitalistic, because a “third-world” country, “India of today has all the characteristics of a capitalist country” (100). Ahmad rejects Jameson’s proposition that in the third-world an individual has a choice only between nationalism and a global American postmodern culture. He considers socialism as a powerful resistant impulse which is not restricted to the second-world alone. He says that national allegory is not the only mode of literary representation in a country with the experience of colonialism or imperialism. Ahmad refers to Urdu literature as an example where national-narrative never emerges as the primary thematic concern, although during the time of independence the nation became a significant ideological problematic in Indian literature. Urdu literature, however, represents a critical realism which is to “be conducted in the perspective of an even more comprehensive, multi-faceted critique of ourselves: our class structures, our familial ideologies, our management of bodies and sexualities, our idealisms, our silences” (118). Whereas Ahmad defines Urdu literature as an example of the rejection of national-narrative, in my thesis I have tried to show how

some contemporary Indian English novelists deliberately avoid writing about the experience of postcoloniality or about the desire to belong to the larger political entity of the nation: they write about smaller localities and untold histories of ordinary man.

It is also important to see how some writers consider postcolonial writing as something exotic in contrast to Ahmad's rejection of the idea that "third-world" writing exists. Graham Huggan in *The Post-Colonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* examines some crucial processes in which the postcolonial writing is produced, marketed and accessed – in a sense he deals with the material conditions of the production and consumption of postcolonial writings. He views postcolonial literature as a cultural commodity. Huggan argues that despite their oppositional stance, the postcolonial writers have become a part of the capitalistic process. Huggan quotes Kwame Anthony Appiah's comment, given in *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* that these writers operate as latter-day culture brokers, mediating world capitalism at the periphery. While examining the postcolonial mode of production and consumption, Huggan addresses the issue of the Western consumption of non-Western or third-world postcolonial literary products. He particularly defines Rushdie's image of India as "an exotic spectacle" (xi). Huggan analyses the critical reception of three of the most commercially successful Indian English novels, of the last two decades of the twentieth century: Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. He argues that these writers have capitalized on the exotic appeal of their novels. Like Jameson, Huggan also states that the third-world literary works are political in different ways. Huggan thinks that the writers like Arundhati Roy and Salman Rushdie rehearse a "continuing history of imperialist perception of an 'othered' India" (81). They present India as an available spectacle. Huggan sees recent Indian English literature as an object of capitalist consumption. He, however, fails to see that the writers like Arundhati Roy criticize the models of imperialist exploitation, and rather than commodifying her novel for global consumption Roy tries to create a counter-narrative in various ways. Istvan Adorjan, in an article titled "New Cosmopolitanism: Altered Spaces in a Postcolonial Perspectives" states that a postcolonial writer does not have a choice between turning to the nation question and becoming a part of a capitalistic project. He says: "A considerable amount of what generally passes for postcolonial literature – theory and fiction alike – seems to be

embroiled in the conflictual matrix of national (or even postcolonial) versus cosmopolitan (but also metropolitan) cultures of an irreducible multiplicity versus a clearly identifiable ‘third-world’ cultural agenda” (191). Both Huggan and Adorjan have viewed Indian English writing as well as postcolonial writing from a very limited perspective. Such perspectives are rejected by many critics including Bishnupriya Ghosh, who discern diverse thematic and aesthetic orientations in the contemporary postcolonial writers and have identified their ability to produce alternative narratives of resistance. In *When Borne Across: Literary Cosmopolitics in the Contemporary Indian Novel* Ghosh defines the new South-Asian writers as “cosmopolitical” writers, who are part of a progressive discursive formation. She comments:

It is a formation that shares, I will argue, a social imaginary of sorts: of democratic self rule and of contingent cosmopolitics. Its political articulation is dispersed, defined by the dispersed nature of the common enemy, globalism. And it is constituted by the local struggles of artists, writers, historians, activists, ethnographers and filmmakers, among others, who move toward imagining new models of collective life and agency. (5)

Ghosh’s group of cosmopolitical writers includes Salman Rushdie, Vikram Chandra, Amitav Ghosh, Upamanyu Chatterjee and Arundhati Roy. Another significant thing about Ghosh’s categorization of cosmopolitical writers is that she refuses to put them under the label of “post-*Midnight’s Children* writers”, because such labelling would decrease the political and ethical resonance of the South-Asian cosmopolitical writing. Ghosh examines some localizing strategies in the writing of the cosmopolitical writers, through which they privilege local contexts. She also addresses the issues of the “cosmopolitical production of the subaltern subjects and lives by way of an epistemological restoration of recessive knowledges” (10). Ghosh says that the lost narratives of the marginal or subaltern community attain particular ethical charge in the cosmopolitical writers’ criticism of rising national chauvinism. The cosmopolitical writers revive the erased histories of the subaltern people and the communities from the margins. Ghosh particularly observes that in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* there is a “politics of the local” (11). Ghosh’s evaluation of the cosmopolitical writers

like Arundhati Roy from the perspective of localizing praxis and reviving of the recessive knowledges signifies the emergence of an alternative narrative in contemporary Indian English writing. Moreover, Ghosh points out that “the practice of everyday life” is a chosen subject in Arundhati Roy’s novel: she mentions that Roy deliberately “devotes a whole chapter in *The God of Small Things* to the experience of being caught at a traffic light” (65). Ghosh feels that Arundhati Roy consciously privileges the everyday and the intimate over larger political and social exchanges. She comments that in Roy’s *The God of Small Things* “Insignificant people, stories and events are always seen in relations to greater plenitude” (109). Ghosh’s definition of cosmopolitical writers as producers of local knowledges, as historians of submerged and lost histories can appropriately be applied not only to Arundhati Roy but also to Amit Chaudhuri, Siddhartha Deb and Mamang Dai. These four writers show no postcolonial anxiety about nationhood, do not use their postcolonial status as an object of global consumerist politics – although Huggan has labelled Arundhati Roy as a writer who makes India an object of exoticism or a global spectacle. On the contrary, they are engaged with writing about smaller localities, quotidian realities, with re-invigorating of lost narratives. In the words of Bishnupriya Ghosh they revive recessive knowledges in their novels through various narrative strategies.

When there is a discussion of local subjects and local knowledges, Arjun Appadurai’s essay “Production of Locality” is worth mentioning. In this essay Appadurai analyses the position of locality in the context of global cultural flows. He defines locality as a “phenomenological quality” which expresses itself in certain kinds of agency, sociality and reproducibility (208). Appadurai says that local knowledge “is actually the knowledge of how to produce and reproduce locality under conditions of anxiety and entropy, social war and flux, ecological uncertainty and cosmic volatility, and the always present quirkness of kinsmen, enemies, spirits and quirks of all sorts” (210). Appadurai specifically mentions an ethnic group which lives in the rainforests of Brazil and Venezuela – the Yanomami tribe. The Yanomami tribe is involved in specific acts of localization, like village building. He argues that the Yanomami tribe may not be able to counter the harsh hegemonic practices of the Brazilian nation-state in equal terms, yet in the process of localizing activities they become able to produce contexts where their practices acquire meaning and historical potential. So Appadurai concludes that

locality-producing activities are not only context driven but also context generative. Appadurai's notion of localizing activities, their context generative and historical potential can be applied to the novels of the four writers under discussion. Appadurai also talks about the formation of "neighbourhood" which helps to produce a counter-narrative to the dominant discourse of power. He says:

The production of a neighbourhood is inherently colonizing, in the sense that it involves the assertion of socially (often ritually) organized power over places and settings which are viewed as potentially chaotic or rebellious....In this sense, the production of a neighbourhood is inherently an exercise of power over some sort of hostile or recalcitrant environment, which may take the form of another neighbourhood....Neighbourhoods are contexts in the sense that they provide the frame or setting within which various kinds of human action (productive, reproductive, interpretive, performative) can be initiated and conducted meaningfully....From another point of view, a neighbourhood is a context, or a set of contexts, within which meaningful social action can be both generated and interpreted. (213)

Appadurai thus defines "neighbourhood" as a context in which locality can be produced. He points out the challenges in producing locality and local knowledges, but considers the processes involved in the production of locality as meaningful. Appadurai's concept of locality-producing contexts and local neighbourhood can be applied to the representation of the local and the peripheral in Chaudhuri, Roy, Deb and Dai's novels.

Another significant writer associated with the issue of the alternative ways of writing history, of writing about the local space is Joseph A. Amato. Amato in *Rethinking Home: A Case for Writing about Local History* says that in an age of national and international forces having all power and prominence, he is trying to "foster a passion for the local, for reviving those particular people, places and events past that don't demand but nevertheless need our careful attention" (1). He examines how industrial, commercial and democratic forces in the contemporary civilization have transformed the local landscape. Man's familiar surrounding has entered a stage of transformation. So the act of rewriting local and regional history, of rethinking home has

to be centred on an awareness of transformation emerging in the local landscape due to various external forces. Moreover, Amato stresses that local history “carries with it the potential to reconstruct our ancestors’ everyday lives” (3). Everyday life always serves as a significant constituent in the articulation of local history. Amato sees local history as a site where we can experience life on intimate terms. Local history is associated with a community’s collective desire to “bring back to life of departed people, places and times” (4). The local historians are interested in traditions, legends and rituals, and nostalgia becomes a significant feature of local history. In Amato’s opinion, their interest resembles that of the folklorist or the anthropologist, for they engage with the physical and mental landscapes of a place. Amato says that some local historians tend to focus only on the frozen image of the past and ignore the changes of the contemporary local landscape. They incline to the past nostalgically and consider all changes in the contemporary local landscape as a decline from a pristine past. Amato considers such disinterest in the changing present as dangerous for the local historian. Apart from being interested in the myths and legends of the past and becoming the revisionists of the erased past, the practitioners of local history must focus on the changing present – they must suspect the credibility of a single and progressive history. Amato says that the local historians must be aware of the growing penetration and dominance of external factors – the political, cultural and commercial changes – over local landscapes and psychology. He says that his intention behind writing a book on local history is to emphasize the need to see the transformations emerging in the local space:

Home, locale, community, and region – and the landscape they collectively form – have entered a stage of transformation. People everywhere live in an increasingly disembodied world, their landscape and minds increasingly falling under the persuasion and control of abstract agencies and virtual images. Like the ecologies they modified and supplanted, human places – homes, farms, villages, and towns – have increasingly lost autonomy. Space and time, which once isolated places and assured continuity to experience and intensity to face-to-face interaction, have been penetrated, segmented, and diminished by surrounding forces and words....As more and more people embrace multiple localities, the big and innovative explodes the small and the traditional....Against this background

of change, turbulence, transformation, and metamorphosis, I propose rethinking home and the rewriting of local and regional history. (2, 3)

Amato considers the aspect of the transformations emerging in local and regional spaces as extremely significant in the writing of local history. When the transformations emerging in the present are considered as significant constituents of local history, the focus on everyday life also becomes important. In local history the most everyday images come to be foregrounded, because local history implies an interest in a particular locale and community. It is evident in the works of the all four writers: Amit Chaudhuri writes primarily about Bengal; Arundhati Roy portrays the locale of Ayemenem in Kerala; Siddhartha Deb writes about Shillong, Silchar and Manipur; Mamang Dai writes about Arunachal Pradesh and the Adi Community. As Amato has emphasized the importance of exploring the changing present, these writers too explore the changing present in the local landscape, and revision the lost narratives of the past. The nostalgia for the past, the local myths and memories become integral part of their fictional narratives, particularly that of Mamang Dai. Moreover, the everyday emerges as a significant narrative focus in their novels, through which they represent the immediate realities of the local space.

Ranjit Guha in *History at the Limit of World-History* defines his own preference for an alternative historiography of India as a “critique of elitism in South-Asian historiography” (1). He says that the indigenous narratologies of pre-colonial times in India were replaced by the Western mode of historiography, propagated by the Raj. Guha quotes Rabindranath Tagore who believes that the past renews itself creatively in literature, unlike in academic historiography which emphasizes on public affairs alone. He primarily talks about the necessity of writing about people who are pushed to the margins of academic or official history and about the everyday world. Guha refers to Tagore’s essay “Sahitye Aitihāsikata”, translated as “Historicality of Literature” where history is defined as a narrative concerned with the everyday world. He says that Tagore’s rejection of the colonialist historiography of India and his proposal for an anti-imperialist, secular and liberal-democratic interpretation of Indian history served as the basic source of ideas for the freedom struggle in between the two world wars. Guha comments on Tagore:

The Indian past has been thematized in many different ways in his narrative poems, plays, and novels. But it is his essays that testify best to a deep and pervasive sense of history. They impress as much by the range of his scholarship as by the skill which he deploys it in the argument. Taken together, the essays stand for an original vision distanced no less from the colonialist historiography propagated by the Raj and the ideologues of imperialism than from the narrowly sectarian Hindu view of the past . . . (75)

Guha discusses Tagore's reproach about the "poverty" of academic historiography and his "call to historians for a creative engagement with the past as a story of man's being in the everyday world" (6). For Tagore, to write creatively is to write about everyday contentment and misery. Tagore believed that to rescue everydayness from the grasp of dullness, it is important to treat everyday life creatively. Guha comments on Tagore's treatment of everyday life in literature:

Wouldn't everydayness as an averaging process level down historicity itself into dull uniformity? It would, according to Tagore, unless grasped in a creative manner. That is precisely the point he intends to make when he refers to the collection of his short stories, *Galpaguccha*. Its themes are age-old and rendered stale by tradition. But they come alive again by being narrated creatively to show how time and literature work together to recover the living historicity of the quotidian. Tagore relies here on a combination of two most commonly used words in his language to explain what he means. To write creatively, he suggests, is to write about *pratyahik sukhdukhka*, that is, about everyday contentment and misery. (93)

Guha draws on Tagore's emphasis on the narrative of the everyday, historicity of everydayness and rejection of academic historiography. He believes that literature should represent the everyday images of happiness and miseries of common people, rather than simply focusing on the officially recognized aspects of man's history. This new mode of

historiography is found in the fictional narratives of Chaudhuri, Roy, Deb and Dai. Their novels too engage with the stories of everyday weal and woe, as emphasized by Tagore.

Many writers have noticed that in the recent Indian English writing a thematic shift has emerged. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan in an article titled “After *Midnight’s Children*: Notes on the New Indian Novel in English” comments that after the appearance of Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* in 1981, in the majority of Indian English novel a preoccupation with nation can be marked as an essential feature. She says that in the first decade of the new century this “nation-thematic” has shifted into different socio-political concerns (203). *Midnight’s Children* and its successor novels for a next generation bore the “burden” of the nation – this “burden” became the defining preoccupation of their work, as Rajan has stated in her article. She defines it as “the weight of an exacerbated consciousness of responsibility” (204). She says that because of this consciousness the post-*Midnight’s Children* writers were obsessed with the idea of their centrality to the nation. However, a new group of writers has emerged in the contemporary literary scene to construct a counter-narrative for critiquing the underlying premises of nation and nationalism in the postcolonial world. Rajan says that the critique of nationalism in the new writers has come to be expressed in a language of individualism; it is typically formed in terms of refusal or rejection of compulsory national identity. She comments: “If postcolonial Indian intellectuals find it difficult to be ideologues of the nation, it is not only because *nationalism* has become so wholly corrupted as an ideal, but also because the *nation-state* has become a repressive structure” (209). She quotes Partha Chatterjee’s analysis of nation-state in terms of the bifurcation between “nation” and its “fragments” – the centre and the peripheries – to suggest that nation is an ideology which fails to fulfill the peculiar demands of the margins and the peripheral people. Rajan in her article argues that in the recent postcolonial writings the nation-state imaginary has lost its credibility. She says: “The paradox of the postcolonial novel of nation lies typically in the deployment of nation as narrative material, in combination with a critique of nationalism. In my view this essentially cosmopolitan perspective – rather than a mere typical ‘postcolonial’ anti-statist politics – defines the Anglophone Indian novel’s critique of the nation” (212). For Rajan “cosmopolitan” does not simply mean an individual’s access to English or his diasporic location; it stands for the constituent historical elements in the formation of the

postcolonial intellectual of a certain category to which the Anglophone novelist belongs. Rajan's emphasis that nation has not remained an unproblematic narrative material for the recent Indian English novelists points out the emergence of an alternative aesthetic in the genre.

Jon Mee emphasizes that the Indian English writers in the recent period have come away from the "national narrative" mode. In "After Midnight: The Novel in the 1980s and 1990s" he has referred to "a second coming" in Indian English novel, as being exemplified particularly by Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (318). Mee says that this novel's publication in 1981 signaled a new creative awakening in Indian English novel. However, it was just the beginning of new explorations, both thematically and technically. Mee has referred to the historical moment of Independence and Partition being represented by Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, I. Allan Sealy's *The Trotter Nama* and Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*. Mee states that in Indian English novel, a gradual emergence of scepticism can be discerned regarding the idea of the nation. In Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, for example, history is represented as something to be rewritten. This shift to newer explorations in Indian English novel is discussed more elaborately by Meenakshi Mukherjee in *The Perishable Empire: Essays on Indian Writing in English*. Mukherjee makes a reference to Timothy Brennan's famous categorization of a group of novelists as the "Third World Cosmopolitans" which includes Salman Rushdie with some others – like Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Derek Walcott. She comments that the "implicit expectation from Third World cosmopolitan writers (also known as postcolonial) is that they will highlight the experience of colonialism as theme or metaphor" (179). But, Mukherjee says, in the Indian languages only a very few of the major literary works focus on colonialism as an important thematic concern. She says:

Postcolonialism, a burgeoning branch in academic studies, initiated incidentally by countries that have not been at the receiving end of the imperial process in the recent past, privileges colonialism as the framework for the major cultural experience of the century, and it is these academies now that set the terms for critical debates and creative enterprise in the world. Yet we know that in very few

of the major works of fiction in the Indian languages is colonialism any longer an important concern....Many other forms of internal dissension, dislocation and oppression engage the attention of the bhasha writer today, relegating the trauma of colonial experience to the background . . . most of our fictional literature has been conditioned by other, either older or newer, more local, diverse and complex pressures and intricate social hierarchies than can be explained entirely by British rule in India. (179, 180)

Aijaz Ahmad said the same thing about Urdu literature while responding to Fredric Jameson's proposition about the third-world "national-allegory" or "national-narrative". Similarly Mukherjee also says that with some exceptions our literature is focused on issues which are not related to the experience of colonialism. Although she particularly refers to the writers writing in the indigenous languages as being free from the burden of postcoloniality, it is applicable to some Indian English writers too. Mukherjee considers the entire idea of India as amorphous and says that as there is a multitude of specific and local experiences to deal with, the contemporary Indian writers hardly display any anxiety of Indianness, or any desire to be rooted. Like Mee, Mukherjee also points out that Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* interrogates the idea of nationhood: Ghosh's novel has not defined Indianness in uncomplicated terms. She comments: "As in the works of the best Indian language writers today, words like 'marginality' and 'hybridity' seem irrelevant here and segmenting the world into first and third regions a rather absurd activity" (185). While using the word "marginality" Mukherjee refers to the typical sense of otherness characteristic of the postcolonial writers. She says that there are writers who are free from such consciousness. What Mukherjee tries to say is that the recent Indian English writers and the Indian writers writing in the indigenous languages are not restricted by the experience of colonialism and imperialism alone. These writers do not represent a desire to be rooted or an anxiety of nationhood in their narratives.

Amit Chaudhuri has made many important observations on the shift of thematic interest in the new Indian English writing, and he particularly mentions the "Bhasha" or vernacular writers as not being restricted by the postcolonial experience. In his Introduction to *The Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature* he observes that after the

publication of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* the construction of the post-colonial Indian English novel is primarily associated with the idea of Indianness and postcoloniality. He states that Fredric Jameson's idea of a stereotypical postcolonial novel has been followed by many Indian English novelists. Chaudhuri says:

Fredric Jameson has called the 'national allegory' the most characteristic form of the post-colonial novel, and has deemed pastiche the most characteristic literary form of postmodernism. This leads us to the way in which the construction of the post-colonial Indian novel in English – with its features of hybridity, national narrative, parody and pastiche – is connected to the movements and changes in the history of the West itself, especially in the late twentieth century, and to the possible notion that, in the Indian English novel, the West has found a large trope for its own historical preoccupations at least as much as it has discovered in itself a genuine curiosity for, and engagement with, Indian history and writing. (xxix)

But Chaudhuri feels that there are writers who write "about cultures and localities that are both situated in, and disperse the idea of the nation" (xxiv). Chaudhuri praises those writers who write not about the experience of postcoloniality, but about smaller localities. He cites the examples of the portrayal of Nischindipur in Bibhuti Bhushan Banerjee's novel *Pather Panchali*, of Lucknow or London or Sylhet in Qurratulain Hyder's Urdu stories, of Czechoslovakia in Nirmal Verma's Hindi short-fiction as representations of narrative departure from the projection of postcoloniality. Chaudhuri's critique of West's perception of India as a historical void outside the experience of colonialism reiterates the proposition made by Aijaz Ahmad and Meenakshi Mukherjee, that Indian literature does not represent the experience of postcoloniality and the notion of Indianness alone.

Another writer writing on the shifting thematic interests of Indian English novel is Priyamvada Gopal. In *The Indian English Novel: Nation, History and Narration* Gopal has observed that the contemporary literary scene in Indian Writing in English has displayed a tendency to present history and historical consciousness. This historical consciousness nevertheless at times turns to the "idea of India", "but often with a

different, increasingly sombre emphasis on communal and sectarian religious tensions” (177). The idea of the unitary post-colonial nation state is disrupted by many factors, such as Hindu majoritarianism, Islamism and secessionist movements. Gopal comments that although nationhood is no longer a dominant theme, the question of home, belonging and community are still major concerns. Gopal refers to Siddhartha Deb’s *The Point of Return* as an example of such thematic focus. *The Point of Return* shows historical consciousness in a unique way – it presents a critique of the idea of nationhood, the geographically and psychologically alienated people’s desire to locate a homeland and the secessionist tendencies born out of anger and frustrated political dreams. She says that in Deb’s novel, “the uneasy relationship between the postcolonial nation-state and its north-eastern territories provides the context for an often moving study of loneliness and pain as a historical and emotional legacy as it structures both private and social relations. Large and small histories, the larger-than-life and the commonplace, intersect . . .” (183). Gopal also mentions Amit Chaudhuri’s representation of religious tension among the middle-class people in Calcutta in the backdrop of Babri Masjid demolition in *Freedom Song*. This novel also displays the historic moment of transformation, Gopal says, in the lives of the ordinary middle-class people as a result of economic liberalization. This phenomenon changed the entire social and economic landscape in India in the 1990s, and in West Bengal even the official left had to embrace it. So the writers like Siddhartha Deb and Amit Chaudhuri’s historical consciousness is not simply associated with the idea of India. Gopal states:

With some notable exceptions then, the anglophone novel from and of India has liberated itself from a sense of address to the West and from ‘anxieties of Indian-ness’, taking its place in the Indian literary landscape with confidence but without complacency. It is undoubtedly a genre that has come into its own, exuding now a sense of belonging to a cultural and political context that is at once marked by very specific histories and constantly evolving. (187)

It is clear that many writers have written about the contemporary Indian English writers’ shifting focus on small histories and local identities. Many writers have talked about the need of revisioning histories and producing local knowledges and identities.

However, it has been noticed that the North-East of India and the other locales like Bengal and Kerala are hardly discussed together to study alternative narratives of local and marginal voices. In my thesis I have brought the Indian nation-state's "fragments" – the regions of the North-East, Kerala and Bengal together – to analyse whether the idea of nationhood really works successfully to create a homogeneous nationhood in these diverse locales, and whether the official version of history can do justice to the untold histories of people living in the margins or peripheries. Although it is assumed that people from the North-East, Kerala and Bengal cannot be studied together, for they have no similarities of culture and identity – I have brought them under the same umbrella to see whether these diverse "fragments" of the nation can keep faith on official versions of history or find no trouble in thinking that they are the part of a larger political entity called the Indian nation.

The four writers I have selected are from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds with different aesthetic orientations. But there is a similarity, a common ground – as their writings are primarily engaged with the rejection of national-narrative and the projection of an alternative aesthetic centred on local realities, small histories and the critique of nationhood. Amit Chaudhuri is a writer of fiction and is also credited with writing seminal prose-pieces on Bengal, on indigenous writings in India and on the necessity of writing about an identity which disperses the idea of the nation. My thesis examines his novels – *A Strange and Sublime Address* (1992), *Afternoon Raag* (1993) *Freedom Song* (1998), *A New World* (2000), *The Immortals* (2009) and *Odysseus Abroad* (2014). The settings of these novels are basically Bombay and Calcutta, other settings being Oxford in *Afternoon Raag* and London in the 1980s in *Odysseus Abroad*. My thesis focuses less on those novels by Chaudhuri which are based on foreign settings, compared to the others located on Indian settings. Chaudhuri's most significant non-fictional writings are his edited anthology titled *The Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature* (2001), *Small Orange Flags: On Living During a 'State of Emergency'* (2003), *Clearing a Space: Reflections on India, Literature, Culture* (2008), edited anthology *Memories Gold: Writings on Calcutta* (2008), *Calcutta: Two Years in the City* (2013), and *Telling Tales: Selected Writings 1993 – 2013* (2013). In the Introduction to *The Picador Book* he rejects a number of critical propositions made by Salman Rushdie and Elizabeth West in their

edited collection *The Vintage Book of Indian Writings (1947-1997)*. For Rushdie and West, the actual beginning of Indian writing is in 1947, the year of the country's political independence; in Chaudhuri's anthology the beginning of Indian modernity and literature has been traced back to the middle of the nineteenth century. In the Introduction to the anthology Chaudhuri makes it clear that he primarily intends to avoid the stereotyped construction of postcolonial nationhood, which is typical of post-Rushdie Indian English novel. Chaudhuri criticizes Rushdie's style of writing as "robustly extroverted, rejecting nuance, delicacy and inwardness for multiplicity and polyphony" (xxv). Chaudhuri feels that although in Rushdie's novel the apparent emphasis is on the plural and the multivocal and the approach is postmodern, "the interpretative aesthetic is surprisingly old-fashioned and mimetic. Indian life is plural, garrulous, rambling, lacking a fixed centre, and Indian novel must be the same" (xxv). Chaudhuri comments that both in the traditional Indian epic and the postcolonial Indian English novel a "national-narrative" is rehearsed, although in different ways. In his own fictional-writing Chaudhuri wants to reject this "national-narrative" tone by incorporating a style which projects the everyday and the local. In the Introduction to *Clearing a Space* Chaudhuri goes further in his rejection of "national-narrative" with its obsession with fundamental Indianness, while declaring that he attempts to find out a "genealogy of Indian 'reality' and the mundane" (14). In the Introduction Chaudhuri quotes Rabindranath Tagore's ideology of suspicion of the "logos", on which the idea of nationalism depends. Chaudhuri prefers a form of writing, which Tagore and many Indian writers followed, which deals with the sensuous and the local and shows "how writing remakes language and culture as a habitation of dwelling" (31). In both his fictional and non-fictional works Chaudhuri projects and appeals for an alternative space with no obsession with the idea of nationhood. In *A Strange and Sublime Address* the *flâneur*-like boy, Sandeep explores local knowledges and subjectivities. *Freedom Song* presents a changing Calcutta in the backdrop of many socio-political transformations. Oxford is the primary setting in *Afternoon Raag* and the flash-back mode of the narrative equally emphasizes Indian situations and realities. *A New World* is about shifts in relationships as well as in socio-political situations; it is about Bengal and the country as a whole in the backdrop of economic reform and privatization. *The Immortals* is about music and about conflicting world-views. *Odysseus Abroad* presents London in the mid-nineteen eighties. In this novel the protagonist Ananda tries to belong to a foreign land, wants to write poetry in English. The question

of identity and homeland – two issues often projected by Chaudhuri’s fictional narratives – reappears here.

Arundhati Roy’s single novel *The God of Small Things* (1997) has changed the entire scenario of Indian English writing with its experimentation in language and its focus on small histories. The novel presents the binaries of big and small in the backdrop of the Communist Kerala. In this novel Velutha – the untouchable – represents the subaltern, the exploited, and the small forces of the universe. In this novel Roy presents the official history as exploitative and has projected a counter-history of ordinary men. After writing this novel Roy shifted her literary focus to non-fictional writing, largely addressing the current global-political situation, the impact of capitalism on ordinary people etc. *The Cost of Living* (1999), *Power Politics* (2001), *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* (2002), *War Talk* (2003), *An Ordinary Person’s Guide to Empire* (2004), *The Checkbook and the Cruise Missile* (2004) and *Capitalism: A Ghost Story* (2014) are her significant works on socio-political issues. Roy criticizes the idea of a horizontal national identity in many of her critical writings; in “The End of Imagination” she says:

However, to be fair, cobbling together a viable pre-digested ‘National Identity’ for India would be a formidable challenge even for the wise and the visionary. Every single Indian citizen could, if he or she wants to, claim to belong to some minority or the other. The fissures, if you look for them, run vertically, horizontally, and are layered, whorled, circular, spiral, inside out and outside in. (29)

On the other hand, Roy’s *The God of Small Things* is no less political than her non-fictional works. The subjective and the political get intermingled in Roy’s novel, although not in the “national-narrative” mode mentioned by Jameson.

Siddhartha Deb has written two novels – *The Point of Return* (2003) and *Surface* (2005), which was published as *The Outline of a Republic* in the U.S.A. *The Point of Return* tells a story of two generations – of a father and a son – in the background of a troubled territory, the hill-town of Shillong in Meghalaya. The novel occasionally shifts

to another setting – Silchar in Assam, where the majority of the population is the Bengali-speaking people, originally from Sylhet in East-Bengal. *Surface* has its protagonist as an outsider in the North-East, a Sikh journalist in search of a half-told story of a woman in Manipur. Both novels have taken the North-East as their setting to explore into many serious issues – the failure of the idea of nationhood in the peripheral space of the North-East, the quest for identity and home in an alien situation and the problematic of otherness. Deb's *The Beautiful and the Damned: Life in the New India* (2011), a collection of essays and travelogue has attained much critical acclaim for its engagement with the present economic position of the country. Like Roy, Deb also has focused on the reality of the vast economic inequality in India in this book.

Mamang Dai has written three novels: *The Legends of Pensam* (2006), *Stupid Cupid* (2009) and *The Black Hill* (2014). The first deals with the cultural practices, myths and legends of the Adi community of Arunachal Pradesh, the second is set in Delhi and Arunachal Pradesh – the centre and periphery represented simultaneously, the third brings out the erasures and fissures of the academic or official history. All these novels have represented the North-East as a space largely misinterpreted by the centre, a space in need of reappropriation and reconstruction in the psychological map of the people from the mainland. Dai's *Arunachal Pradesh: The Hidden Land* (2003) is about the history, natural resources, traditional beliefs and rituals of the hill-state.

Jameson defines capitalism as an experience of the first-world, socialism as a product of the second-world, and the third-world as essentially suffering from the hegemonic suppression of the capitalist first-world. In the third-world writers Jameson finds an obsessive return of the national situation. He says that particularly the genre of the novel tends towards writing national allegories. Jameson comments: “we have been trained in a deep cultural conviction that the lived experience of our private existence is somehow incommensurable with the abstractions of economic science and political dynamics” (69). The consequence is the categorization of the subjective and the public or the political. Jameson states that in the third-world these relationships are completely different. Even the seemingly private and libidinal dynamic of the third-world text projects a political dimension in the form of national allegory. Jameson comments that in

third-world texts the relationship between the libidinal and the political components of individual and social experience is treated differently from that of the literature in the West. The West makes an essential split between the private and the public; but even the libidinal investment of third-world texts needs to be read in primarily political and social terms. However, the four writers whom I have selected for my study reject the idea that the private and the political need to be treated differently. They explore both the political and the psychological, without turning to the nation-thematic or making a conscious division between the private and the public. These writers do not believe that nationhood is the shaping phenomenon in the life of an individual. They refuse to write “national-narrative” or “national-allegories”. They are not apolitical either: they question the credibility of the institutional or official history, where they discern the features of erasure and fissure. They show how it is possible to produce alternative histories of the local and the peripheral. The first chapter of my thesis tries to show that the metaphor of man’s participation in a common political and cultural ambition in the framework of a nation-state fails. The second chapter deals with the revisioning and reviving of lost and erased histories and tries to show how official records often fail to capture truth and as a consequence distort realities. The third chapter engages with the localizing praxes and performances of ordinary men to restore their culture and to create their own political idiom of resistance. The fourth chapter examines the potential of the everyday to create an alternative space in the apparently unchangeable lives of the ordinary men. The chapter explores the everyday where larger socio-political realities lie embedded.

David Miller says that nation should be defined not merely in terms of the physical characteristics and behaviour of a group of people, but by the way people conceive of themselves (17). This statement indicates that nation is an entity which is dependent on many socio-psychological factors. In the first chapter of my thesis titled “Interrogating the Nation: Collapse of the Imagined Community”, I am trying to examine these socio-psychological factors and their reliability. The chapter examines the marginal space of the North-East as represented in Siddhartha Deb and Mamang Dai’s novels, and analyses the failure of the metaphor of participation among the people of the North-East. It addresses the issue of dispersed identity with reference to the novels of Arundhati Roy and Amit Chaudhuri, and shows how some of the characters of Chaudhuri and Roy are trapped in an interstitial space. The primary focus of the chapter is the dispersal of

identity which leads to the failure of national sentiments. Whereas the novels of Deb and Dai are examined in the light of the peripheral status of the North-East, Roy and Chaudhuri's characters are interpreted as remaining in an in-between cultural space for their detachment from Indian culture. These characters are detached from India – sometimes geographically or spatially and sometimes psychologically.

The second chapter of my thesis is titled “Reviving the Lost Narratives: Search for Small and Erased Histories”, where I am trying to show how the four writers under discussion have rejected the idea that official or institutional history is the only mode of knowing the past in an authentic way. The chapter analyses the history of the common man in the novels of Amit Chaudhuri and Arundhati Roy, and examines the untold histories and lost narratives in Siddhartha Deb and Mamang Dai's novels. This chapter is primarily associated with the revisioning and retelling of history. In this context a comment by Marnie Hughes-Warrington can be cited. Hughes-Warrington says: “History is not only concerned with change; it is also subject to change” (1). Keith Jenkins refers to the historical model proposed by Hayden White. Jenkins says that for White the historical work is “a verbal artifact, a narrative prose discourse, the content of which is invented – or as much imagined – as found” (18). Jenkins draws on White's idea of the invented or imagined element of history to argue that the facts of history have to be related to a context in order to make them meaningful. He says that a historian cannot find the background, the totality or the context against which the facts may attain significance. So such contexts are ultimately imagined or invented: all interpretations of the past are as much invented (context) as found (the facts), all historical interpretations are metaphorical and metahistorical. Jenkins, with reference to White's historical model, says:

First, White thinks that what history *is* is predominantly a form of narrative discourse, the content of which is much invented/ imagined as found and which on the whole is not expressive of discontinuity and the positive acceptance of the sublime. Second, he thinks that what history/ historiography *ought* to be, is a series of discontinuous histories the content of which is as much imagined/ invented as found, but which acknowledges the presence of the sublime as a

‘useful fiction’ on which to ‘base’ movements towards a more generous emancipation and empowerment than is currently in place in order to realize a radical, liberal – but not much detailed – utopia. (148)

Jenkins thus discusses White’s development as a historian and emphasizes the imagined and invented aspect of history-writing. Such definition of history helps to understand why history needs revision and reinterpretation. The four writers under discussion also have reanalysed history, have tried to restore the lost and erased narratives of the past. The small histories of the common men which are ignored by the public or the official narratives are also represented by Roy and Chaudhuri’s novels. In fact the ordinary men’s history remains the history of an outsider or the “other” as analysed by Harry Harootunian. He calls himself a historian of societies outside Euro-America and says that he engages with the task of writing about the experience of otherness. Harootunian quotes a Japanese native ethnologist Yangita Kunio who defines H.G. Wells’ *A Short History of the World* as a partial history. Wells’ history has ignored Africa and Asia and much of the rest of the world for which it remains an “Englishman’s account of the world” (Harootunian 7). Such partial history, or a history written from the perspective of someone who ignores the marginal people, often bears gaps and silences, which need revision and reconstruction. Harootunian says: “A history founded on the ‘now of recognizability’ is not a state, a step in a continuous process, but, rather, a ‘tableau’, a ‘presentation’ a recovery of what was lost, repressed, excluded” (16). Harootunian also praises Hayden White’s model of history-writing. While referring to the new ways of perceiving history, he says:

No theorist is more important to this discourse than the historian Hayden White, whose *Metahistory*, along with Edward Said’s *Orientalism* and Fredric Jameson’s *Political Unconscious*, recalls for us the force of a particular historical conjuncture that would not simply supply new ways to look at history, culture, and politics but, just as important, would reduce the received conventions and approaches to a past not worth retrieving. (A very interesting prehistory of current cultural studies in the United States could be written on the basis of these three seminal texts, which appeared at about the same time.) White’s book

parallels Said's pathbreaking analysis of knowledge and power in the colonial enterprise, and even though it has not had the impact of *Orientalism* on transforming English studies and revising the canon, it has, I believe, made historians more aware of what they are doing . . . (10, 11)

Harootunian has pointed out, through his reference to White's model of history-writing that it is important for our historians to see how the historical knowledge of the peripheral can be retrieved. The novels of Chaudhuri, Roy, Deb and Dai also represent history as "invented", rather than as something "found": they explore the undocumented and submerged areas of man's history.

The third chapter of my thesis titled "Writing Back to the Centre: Localizing Praxis and Performance" deals with the issue of how the novels of the four writers under discussion have represented certain practices. These are practices associated with the restoration of local culture and tradition and with the rejection of the authoritative presence of any hegemonic ideology. This chapter focuses not only on the local cultural practices of the tribal communities, but also on the resistant impulses underlying the innovative use of language. The chapter tries to show how the novels of the four writers under discussion have created the narratives of resistance: a counter-culture has been created in response to the authoritative presence of hegemonic cultures. The alternative mode of cultural, political and linguistic expression produced in the novels of Roy, Chaudhuri, Deb and Dai ultimately writes back to the centre, to any authoritative mode of representation. Here again Hughes-Warrington can be cited, particularly in the context of Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam*. Hughes-Warrington says that our relationship with the past is associated with forgetting, erasure and substitution. The rituals of memorization for restoring the past can be termed as spatial texts (23). The Adi Community's cultural practices in *The Legends of Pensam* can be defined as spatial texts through which the community's ethnic identity is restored against homogenization. The tribal communities feel that to counter the politics of homogenization and appropriation, these cultural practices help them in producing the narratives of resistance.

The fourth chapter of my thesis is titled “The Everyday as Explorer: The Production of Local Knowledge in the Quotidian Space”. This chapter engages with the theory of the everyday, as defined by Walter Benjamin, Michel de Certeau and Henri Lefebvre to explore the heart of everydayness, where larger socio-political realities are embedded. The everyday as defined by these thinkers can be a site of critique and alternative possibilities. Harootunian says: “Everydayness is a form of disquiet” (21). It suggests that the everyday experiences lead us to many hidden trajectories. The hidden potential of the everyday to critique and to produce alternative spaces has been represented in the novels of the four writers. However, in Amit Chaudhuri’s novels the representation of the quotidian space or the everyday has attained more primacy compared to the other writers. In Chaudhuri’s novels the characters come out as the *flâneur*, in Walter Benjamin’s words, to unravel the hidden social realities, to find out how larger political and economic forces affect the lives of the ordinary men.

The four writers, whom I have selected for my study of an alternative narrative – Amit Chaudhuri, Arundhati Roy, Siddhartha Deb and Mamang Dai – display a historical consciousness in a new way. It is a historical consciousness which is not simply rooted in the experience of postcoloniality or the idea of nationhood or a desire to be rooted. Deb and Dai write about the peripheral status of India’s North-East in the psychological and geographical map of the nation-state. Whereas Deb focuses on the experience of otherness and the resultant secessionist tendencies, Dai treats the marginal space from a standpoint of ethnographic representation. Dai turns to the revival and retelling of the legends and lost histories of the tribal community, whereas Deb shows that the centre-periphery binary will continue to exist and the realities of the North-Eastern region of India have never been comprehended fully in the mainland. In Roy’s portrayal of Kerala’s everyday life the haunting realities of capitalist suppression get revelation. The small histories of ordinary men get intermixed with the dark story of the region’s socio-economic and political phenomenon. Even heritage and culture get affected in such shifting scenario, as Roy has shown in her novel. Chaudhuri’s representation of quotidian realities, local knowledge and subjectivities in need of revival and reinterpretation also shows that a writer’s historical consciousness need not be centred on postcoloniality alone. My study of these four writers endeavours to throw light on the shifting trajectories of Indian English novel in the recent period, by highlighting their

representation of local, submerged and peripheral histories, critique of the idea of nationhood, their various localizing strategies and their exploration into the everyday as a site of alternative possibilities.

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