

CHAPTER-3

The Male Body and its Embodiment

I met a traveller from an antique land,
Who said— “Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. . . . Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;
And on the pedestal, these words appear:
My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings

- Percy Bysshe Shelley, “Ozymandias”

3.1 Introduction

This chapter on the male body will begin in the visage of Shelley’s Ozymandias. It will extend the understanding of masculinity as a performance that was begun in the previous chapter and continue with the materiality and social significance associated with the male body. It will attempt to understand how bodies are associated with identities and stand as embodiments of beliefs, value systems and social constructs. The process of embodiment would, in turn, reveal how notions of ideal and deviance are framed, enforced and lived. Finally, the complex relationship between the body with all its external material extensions and the fluid notions of ideal/deviance would point to forms of violence being inflicted vis-à-vis the societal power structure. This would include sexual disciplining by the use of physical violence, society-inflicted psychological violence and violence on the disabled body. The primary texts that would form the corpus of this chapter are- Firdaus Kanga’s *Trying to Grow* (1990), Vasudhendra’s *Mohanaswamy* (2016) and Arundhati Roy’s *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017).

The theoretical framework of this chapter is informed by the concepts of body and embodiment. The body as a site of social construction and power play is an important topic for study in literature. It intrigues us with questions like materiality and its social significance, embodiment and notions of ideal and deviance. What started as a theorisation of the sex-gender binary in Beauvoir (1949) diversified into different directions to culminate in the dissolution of such a binary by stressing the repetitive nature of gender performance in Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990). Butler's next book, *Bodies That Matter: On The Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (1993), problematises the materiality of the human body, considering the heterosexual imperative to consolidate sexual difference through performance as well as representation. They observe-

But how, then, does the notion of gender performativity relate to this conception of materialization? In the first instance, performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate 'act', but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects it names...The regulatory norms of 'sex' work in a performative fashion to constitute the materiality of bodies, and more specifically, to materialize the body's sex, to materialize sexual difference in the service of the consolidation of the heterosexual imperative. (Butler 2011, xii)

Between Beauvoir to Butler, we can situate Foucault, who, through his seminal works like *Discipline and Punish* (1975) and *The History of Sexuality* (1976-2018), shifted the attention to the institutionalisation of bodies. The former book analysed the Western institutionalised control system of prisons, police and legal hierarchies which enmeshed the body in a system of social control, while the latter historicised the discourse surrounding human sexuality throughout the ages. His ideas of regulative discourses were consistently adopted by Butler in their major works. Butler's engagement with the body was further extended by Susan Bordo through her works- *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (1993) and *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and Private* (1999). She appropriated Foucault's method and problematised the three concepts of Gender/Body/Knowledge in her breakthrough essay titled "The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity" (1989). While *Unbearable Weight* discussed the impact of popular consumer culture on the female body, *The Male Body* stressed the representation of the male body in popular cultural modes of communication like movies, advertisements, etc. This legacy of material feminism was continued by Susan Hekman in her works. She did a comparative study of

Butler and Bordo which was published in the form of essays in journals like *Hypatia*, *Signs*, etc. Hekman, along with Stacy Alaimo edited a volume of critical essays, titled *Material Feminisms*, in the year 2008. It sought to understand the development of theory concerning the material aspects of the human body and shifted the attention from the linguistic-discursive model to the materialist model of gender studies.

We need a way to talk about these bodies and the materiality they inhabit. Focusing exclusively on representations, ideology, and discourse excludes lived experience, corporeal practice, and biological substance from consideration... Moreover, bracketing or negating materiality can actually inhibit the development of a robust understanding of discursive production itself, since various aspects of materiality contribute to the development and transformation of discourses. (Alaimo and Hekman 4)

Alaimo and Hekman's words emphasise the need to return to the materiality of the body, thereby expanding the field of feminist scholarship. Following them, in order to better understand the discursive-performative aspect of masculinities in contemporary South Asian fiction written in and translated into English, this chapter would engage with the materiality of the body and critically analyse lived experiences as well as corporeal practices. It would also build upon the concept of embodiment following theorisation by scholars like Ellen Spolsky, Maureen Johnson and Trixie Smith.

Embodiment, according to the Oxford Dictionary refers to "a tangible or visible form of an idea, quality, or feeling" or "the representation or expression of something in a tangible or visible form" ("Embodiment"). In simple words, embodiment refers to an understanding whereby we associate an idea, quality, perception or feeling with a tangible body or thing. Theories of embodiment first emerged during the mid-1980s in the discipline of anthropology. Then it diversified into different areas of study, including phenomenology and literature. Drawing chiefly upon Elaine Scarry's *Dreaming by the Book* (1999), Ellen Spolsky published an essay titled, "Toward a Theory of Embodiment for Literature" (2003) where she charted the trajectory of the development of embodiment theory in literature. In the 2015 essay, "Embodiment: Embodying Feminist Rhetorics", Maureen Johnson and others explain that "The physical body carries meaning through discourse about or by a body. But embodiment theories suggest that meaning can be articulated beyond language. All bodies do rhetoric through texture,

shape, colour, consistency, movement, and function” (Johnson et al. 39). Again, the study of embodiment, according to Trixie Smith et. al (2017),

offers the understanding that instantiations of bodies are rhetorically and culturally situated in relation to institutions and discourses. Furthermore, embodiment attributes a level of agency to these instantiations. As such, agency gives a means to embodied resistance, whether through language and/or materiality. In such acts of embodied resistance, bodies receive, distribute, and/or assert their cultural epistemologies. (46)

The above theorisation points to the diverse and adaptable nature of embodiment theory. Over the years, it has been successfully incorporated by multiple disciplines with fascinating results. To analyse the politics of body and embodiment in the selected texts, we need to understand the concepts of disability, ideal and deviance and stigma. The next section will engage with the notions of disability, ideal and deviance and stigma following the works of prominent scholars.

Disability Studies as an academic discipline emerged in the 1980s in USA and UK. The first US disabilities studies program was started at Syracuse University in 1994. Lennard J. Davis edited one of the pioneering collections of critical essays on disability studies, titled *Disability Studies Reader* (1997) and the Modern Language Association established disability studies as a division of study in 2005. Over the years, several key figures across the globe theorised disability studies. For example, Christopher Bell studied disability from the perspective of race (2012). Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (1997) and Alison Kafer (2013) are well-known feminist disability theorists. The works of Robert McRuer explore the intersection of queerness and disability (2006, 2012). Throughout its course of growth, two distinct models of disability study evolved: the social model and the medical model. The social model of disability understands disability as a construct in perception and reads it in an intersection with race, gender, sexuality, class and other related systems of oppression. The medical model studies it from the perspective of biology and medicine. However, recent developments have envisaged overlapping and borrowing between the two models. This chapter will analyse the central character of Firdaus Kanga’s novel *Trying to Grow* (1991) from a disability studies perspective.

A discussion of the representation of the body and its embodiment in literature often involves questions of ideal and deviance. If embodiment is reading the body as a metaphor, the combined notion of ideal and deviance becomes the determinant social sanction of that metaphor. From the metaphor, the social sanction is directly or indirectly aimed at the body proper. Therefore, the body becomes one of the most important sites connected with the concepts of ideal and deviance. Eminent sociologist Max Weber in his book *The Methodology of the Social Sciences* (1949) writes:

An ideal type is formed by the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct. (90)

Weber's definition of ideal refers to a standard that is set by society to judge related phenomena. He highlights the subjective and comparative nature of ideal. On the other hand, the concept of deviance, as formulated by sociologist Emile Durkheim, refers to non-conformity to the established ideal. It is a behaviour that does not fall in line with the established code of conduct. Like ideal, deviance is also highly subjective. There are two forms of deviance- formal and informal. Formal deviance can be considered a crime, while informal deviance is considered a taboo- an opposition to societal mores. Incest is an example of taboo.

Transgression is an important aspect in the conceptualisation of ideal/deviance. Any act of non-conformity with the ideal may be viewed as transgressive. However, what is transgressive for one might not be for another. But, transgression almost always has destructive consequences for the transgressors. Their acts of transgression can be read as means of resisting immensely strong socio-political, cultural and economic forces that determine everyday lives. The impacts can indeed be life-changing, yet, they drive home the point that resistance and consequent subversion are not impossible, although often hard to achieve.

The notion of transgression is closely intertwined with the notion of stigma. The first effort to understand stigma as a social phenomenon was made by French sociologist Émile Durkheim in 1895. Since then, studies in various directions were carried out by different scholars. It was Erving Goffman, who, for the first time, gave a well-defined

theory of stigma in his book- *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (1963). Here, he attempted to define, classify and analyse stigma. He also discussed stigma and social identity, norm formation and the fluid notions of ideal and deviance. Lerita M. Coleman-Brown built on Erving Goffman's theory of stigma in her essay- "Stigma: An Enigma Demystified" (1986). By bringing in the three important components of fear, stereotyping and social control, she highlighted the subjective social context of her predecessor's theorisation. Our analysis of the works of fiction selected for this chapter will be informed by the theorisation of Goffman and Coleman-Brown.

Drawing on the concepts of ideal/deviance, transgression and stigma, this chapter offers a layered critique of the selected texts chosen for this study. It adopts a materialist approach for the understanding of the complex representational politics of the human body. Finally, the chapter critically examines the politics of nomenclature/terminology and the dichotomies prevalent in the public and private perception of one's body.

3.2 The Formula: Osteo = Sexlessness

Brit Kotwal from Firdaus Kanga's semi-autobiographical novel *Trying to Grow* (1990) is a young boy who has a rare condition of brittle bones called *Osteogenesis imperfecta*. He breaks his legs eleven times before he becomes five years old. His teeth crumble and chip if he tries to bite into anything. Although his family suffers a tough time trying to make him grow, he is never ashamed of his disability. His perception of his body as "physically handicapped" is quoted below:

I was scared of the way handicapped people looked. You know, the hesitant gait and robot-stiff movements of the blind, lolling heads and strangulated speech of the spastics. Whenever I saw them, I wondered if I seemed as ugly and pathetic. I'd shudder and turn my mind away. (Kanga 38)

Brit has a very problematic notion of "physical handicap". For him, the externality of such handicaps, like "hesitant gait", "robot-stiff movement", "lolling head" or "strangulated speech" is much more fearful than any internal handicap. His medical condition of brittle bones does not give him the appearance of a deformed body with terrible movement or speech. Therefore, when he sees "spastics" with such attributes, he compares them with himself and then concludes that he is in a much better position in comparison to them. It is as if *Osteogenesis imperfecta* comes much above Cerebral

Palsy in the disability hierarchy, thereby creating a status hierarchy of medical conditions! He dislikes when people pay special attention or try to unnecessarily help him in his daily activities. For instance, he hates when Father Ferra, the principal of Champion School, dismissed all school fees for him as he was “crippled”. Similarly, he refused to take special favours from people in the marketplace just because he was differently abled.

Moreover, it is interesting to note how different words describing his disability are used in the text. The beginning of the text gives a detailed description of his medical condition. According to him, he has a “disease” but he is not “physically handicapped”. He is also not a “differently abled” or “specially gifted” child- the text nowhere mentions such terms. That means, there is no attempt on the part of the text to euphemise disability. Rather, it initiates a debate around the “naming” of disabilities and problematises conventional terminologies such as “crippled” even before disability studies gained solid ground as a separate discipline. For instance, during the conversation between Brit’s father, Sam and Father Ferra, the word “crippled” is not only a reference to physical disability but is enmeshed with ideas of missionary charity and colonial domination:

‘He’s my son’, said Sam. ‘I’m Sam Kotwal. This is Brit, uh, I’m sorry, his name is Daryus. He...he...is a cripple’. Sam’s voice vanished in a whisper. I knew he’d remembered Madame Manekshaw’s warning: ‘Cripple, cripple. That’s our key. These catholic priests will do anything if you are crippled’. (Kanga 50)

The name “Daryus” or “Darius” reminds the reader of the powerful Persian king Darius the Great who was the third king of the Achaemenid Empire. During his reign, the empire was at its territorial peak through massive territorial annexations. The above passage shows Brit’s father preferring the name Brit over Darius, thereby metaphorically preferring “brittleness” or “cripple” over “might” and “power”. Moreover, it is interesting to see how Brit’s home tutor, Madame Manekshaw, encouraged Sam to use the word “cripple” to describe his son. She believed that using this word would enable him to earn the principal’s sympathy for his son as it would remind him of his missionary vows. This way, even if Brit fared badly in the entrance exam, they would be able to secure a seat in Father Ferra’s institution.

Being impressed by Brit's knowledge of English literature, Father Ferra says:

'I like your son, Mr Kotwal. If he passes the tests I shall take heem like these!' Father Ferra punched the air above his head. 'And huan more theeng. I shall charge no fees'.

'Oh! But you must!', said Sam, looking horrified. 'We can afford them very well.'

'Neveerrr!'

'Please, please!'

'No ees no!'

'But this sort of thing is not done!'

'Een your public schools eet is not. We are Catholic. We are deferent. We are betterrr!' Sam was stunned into silence by so immodest an assertion. (Kanga 51)

Through the above conversation between Father Ferra and Sam, the text problematises the missionary agenda of goodwill and charity. Father Ferra's assertion of his school being different and better than the public schools reflects the colonial ideology of infantilising the natives. Even though Sam was in a very well-off position to pay Brit's fees, Father Ferra would not let him pay as it was against the missionary zeal and agenda. They had to appear the "god-sent masters" in their patronising sympathy. Brit Kotwal's admission, therefore, was not an exception. Moreover, the able-bodied Father Ferra was guided by a sense of superiority over Brit. Sensing this superiority and the guiding ideal of charity, Madame Manekshaw, therefore, asserted the use of the word "cripple" in an otherwise humorous conversation.

Kanga's text further critiques racist ideology when, on losing their way towards the hotel, Brit and his family asked for directions at a gas station in Los Angeles. The owner of the gas station gets astonished at Brit's capability of speaking English, despite his disability. Calling him "a genius in a wheelchair", he handed him a huge box of candied fruit-

And he said, 'Take it. Please take it; it's for the baby! - I mean the kid' So we did and the last thing we heard him say was, 'Smart Ki-id'.

But I've never understood if he was astonished by my very ordinary remark because I was Indian or because I was handicapped. Dolly said, 'It doesn't really matter. To them, it's all the same'. (Kanga 74)

From the perspective of the gas station owner, three points can be considered important in the analysis of this conversation. Firstly, Brit was a disabled child who needed constant supervision and support from his family. Secondly, he could speak English. Lastly, he was of colonised descent. It was as if the terms "genius in a wheelchair" and "smart kid" were metaphors for a coloniser's glorification of the infantile achievements of the colonised. Through Dolly's remark, "To them, it's all the same", the narrative questions the inherent racism and ableism embedded in the patronising comment of the gas station owner.

Brit feels embarrassed when he is praised in public for his determination towards a fulfilling life. For example, he felt ashamed when his father, Sam, said to the boy in crutches, "Lad, put a smile in those eyes. Look at my son! He's going to run in the Olympics one day" (Kanga 46). The feeling of embarrassment was again intensified when Father Ferra conferred on him a special prize for standing fifth in class on the Annual Prize Day of his school. Brit observes, "Around me the applause burst and swelled like some orchestral climax while I grew smaller and smaller in my seat wishing I wasn't there, wishing Father Ferra hadn't talked about me, wishing I hadn't got this prize for having legs that didn't work" (Kanga 57). The text nowhere mentions Brit being even a bit ashamed of his body. He is content with who he is. He even considers himself fortunate in comparison to that boy in crutches whom he met in the supermarket or even his aunt's deaf daughter, Tina. But what is problematic for him is unnecessary public attention as it makes him feel "smaller and smaller". He realises that there is a stigma that people associate with disabled bodies. He abhors that stigma and wishes he never had to face it in his life. Thus, Kanga's novel here juxtaposes physical disability with the social perception of disability and highlights the problematic nature of the latter for individuals like Brit.

Trying to Grow critiques the popular tendency to infantilise disabled bodies and deny them any scope for sexual growth and fulfilment. Brit's aunt Jeroo made an

interesting remark about him: “‘So sorry!’ said Jeroo. ‘I forget about your son. You understand, when I say men, I mean- men. Not someone like you, Brit’. I wasn’t male. Not to them. The magic mirrors of their minds had invented a formula: *osteo = sexlessness*” (Kanga 40). Jeroo’s observation was made at a point when Defarge, Sera, Dolly and she were engaged at the bridge table. For her, all men wanted only one thing from women and i.e., sex. She would get scandalised when Polly’s husband came to sit next to her in nothing but shorts and would imagine getting herself pregnant just by the touch of her own brother’s arm. When Sera reminded her to avoid such talks in front of her children, she dismissed Brit from the whole category of man. For her, Brit was not a man, but a disabled child that had absolutely no chance of developing his sexuality. His medical condition, *Osteogenesis imperfecta*, rendered him sexless, almost like a vegetable, living under the mercy of his family members. Hence, it did not matter even if they talked about sex and sexuality in front of Sera’s growing child, Brit.

As Brit grows up and starts exploring his sexuality, he creates a world for himself in the stories that he would cook up for their games like the Royal Game and the Ice Game. Like Arjie from Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy*, the imaginary worlds provide a temporary escape for Brit. He would be a king sometime or a saviour some other times. He says, “they let me create all the stories I was too scared to put down in blue ink on white paper” (Kanga 77). It is interesting to note that in all these games he wanted to become a heroic individual whose body would be an embodiment of his strength and bravery. This is in stark contrast to his present condition with brittle bones which would break every now and then. Moreover, his statement revealing his fear to write autobiographical stories, reveals the conflict within himself. Since the novel is semi-autobiographical in nature, this struggle of Brit can be read as a metaphor for that of the novelist himself.

Brit wants to feel what teenagers like him feel and “to fall in love”. All the singers like Engel Humperdinck were in love, “the books Dolly read were love stories, and Tina and Ruby were in love” (Kanga 96). It is interesting to note the words that he uses to describe his feeling- he wants his “knees to turn to jelly” or his “heart pound like a jungle drum” or “to pine away and lose his appetite”. These words, as we see, are very conventional expressions mostly referring to able-bodied people. For a person who already has a very weak body with brittle bones and joints, these expressions appear very incongruous. But, by using these terms to describe himself, Brit displays his ability to

challenge the conventional representation of disability through his sense of humour. In other words, the novelist's portrayal of a witty and informed disabled character in contrast to, say, the Dickensian "crippled evil", highlights his attempt to break disability stereotypes.

However, Brit's small body attracted problematic notions of embodiment from individuals. For example, when the little boy whom he and his girlfriend, Amy, met at the cinema asked his father, "Papa, why is this uncle so small?", his father replied, "See, the uncle is handicapped. He cannot do anything; he can only sit. So, his kind sister has brought him to the cinema" (Kanga 224). In another instance, Amy, being unable to lift Brit into the cab, took the help of the cab driver and exclaimed "I should've known...it needs a man to lift a man" (Kanga 212). Then, Brit introspects:

A man? Who was she talking about? I was Brit Boy. But I had to admit she was right. Even if I didn't look much of a man, I had started shaving last month. I couldn't decide if I should be good and grateful, talk nicely to her, sort of keep her happy because she was doing this for me. Or should I be what I wanted to be—cool and nasty? (Kanga 212)

This passage highlights a conflict in terms of notions of embodiment for two different personifications—*Brit Boy* and *Brit Man*—of the same body. The small body of Brit Boy attracted notions of infantile care and support. For the little boy, "uncle" Brit required the support of "his kind sister" (actually his girlfriend) Amy. Brit Boy also required the help of the cab driver in lifting himself onto the cab. But, Brit as a man—*Brit Man*—embodied maturity and sexual attractiveness for Amy. She realises that the body of Brit Man was no less masculine than the body of the cab driver and hence lifting the body of Brit Man requires the strength of the latter. As Brit experiences conflict regarding notions of embodiment in his public life, the conflict also extends to his intimate life. Accommodating Brit Man within the body of Brit Boy, he is confused as to how to behave with Amy. Although he has started shaving, his frail and gaunt body defies signs of masculinity. Caught between the desire to show masculine arrogance by appearing cool and talking nasty with Amy and being the inevitably support-seeking Brit Boy, he feels trapped within his own body. Another instance when Brit experiences conflict of embodiment in his intimate life is when he sexually engages with Amy:

I rolled over with laughter and then she was on top of me. ‘Who are you trying to fool?’ she said. ‘Lights off and romance? You’re afraid I’ll see your legs, aren’t you? Oh Brit! Why can’t you-

My eyes were shut so I wouldn’t have to see the look in her eyes while she took my pants away. Then her mouth was between my legs. ‘So this is what you were afraid I’d see’, she said. I smiled and felt her silky head against the insides of my thighs. Then she lifted her black eyes and said, ‘Brit, you are the sexiest man I’ve ever met.’

For some time after that, I couldn’t see her face too well because I knew she was telling the truth. We didn’t turn those lights off till the monsoon broke at dawn. (Kanga 256)

There is a complex matrix unfolding in the sexual encounter of Brit with Amy as it dissolves the distinction between the public and private stigmatisation of disability. Although Brit has high regard for his body in private, the above encounter shows him internalising the public stigmatisation of disability by not wanting Amy to see his deformed legs in the course of love-making. According to Loja et al. (2013), “Ableism imposes a corporeal standard, the falling away from which represents the pathway to disability (Campbell 2009), which for disabled people produces two consequences: the distancing of disabled people from each other and the emulation by disabled people of ableist norms (Campbell 2008)” (191). Here, while Brit internalises ableist norms, Amy’s insistence on keeping the lights on offers a critique of it. Her exclamation “Brit, you are the sexiest man I’ve ever met”- can be read as the key statement that reinstates Brit’s lost confidence in his body and dissolves the distinction between public and private stigmatisation of disability. Moreover, while Brit tries to hide his deformity behind the dark room by internalising the public perception of disability, Amy, like Cyrus, never doubts Brit of his sexual prowess. Thus, through the observations of Amy and Cyrus, Kanga’s novel asserts that disability is a social construct and celebrates the sexuality of a “brittle” and “crippled” body.

Kanga’s novel intertwines the notions of incest with disability and sexuality. This is evident when Brit expresses his feelings for his cousin Tina:

Tina was for me, that delicious creature every guy wants- a sister whose body he can crave without a scrap of guilt. We were so familiar with each other, yet I

could get a hard-on just watching the half-apples of her breasts as the sun tore through her thin dress. Or we'd sit together at the movies and, all the time I was explaining the story to her with my fingers, I could smell the swooning scent of her skin- part soap, part hormone. (Kanga 95-96)

For Brit, Tina was three persons moulded into one. She was his cousin first, a friend next and finally, a sexual object that could turn him on. The passage clearly mentions that both of them were very familiar with each other's bodies and offered mutual support to each other. While Brit traced the story with his fingers, Tina supported him by providing her body as a medium where he could narrate the same. In this example, they become mutual caregivers to each other. This helps them defy the notion of taboo. In other words, Brit and Tina's disabilities and the constant need for intimate, physical support in day-to-day activities spare them the taboo of incest.

Brit's homosexual relationship with Madame Defarge's relative, Cyrus, is crucial to our understanding of body and embodiment. Cyrus was everything that Brit was not- handsome, muscular and courageous. A square inch of Cyrus was enough for him- "an earlobe that curved towards his cheek, a finger of hair that tickled his neck, the white underside of his arm when he lifted it, chapped lips, the bend of his waist, the nostrils that flared when he laughed..." (Kanga 139). Also, Cyrus was studying the supposedly "masculine" subject of law which was solely based on reason and had no place for emotions. On the other hand, Brit was planning to become a writer. But, despite the stark differences in body and embodiment, the novelist doesn't portray the characters of Brit and Cyrus as stereotypes. Their conversation regarding men crying in public illustrates this point. Here, Cyrus asks Brit if his act of crying embarrassed him. Brit replies-

'I shouldn't have seen you.'

'You mean grown men can cry as long as long as they aren't caught at it?'

'You've said it.'

'You're an ass. Grown men don't care who sees them cry. You ever cry at the movies?'

'No. I'm afraid I'll make too much noise.'

'So you blink and stretch your eyes wide open to make more room for the tears?'

‘Ya’, I said. That’s exactly what I did. ‘But I cry’, I said, ‘when I read poetry.’ (Kanga 128)

Brit and Cyrus’s conversation destabilises the unilateral relation between the stereotype of the strong, masculine and attractive body and the embodiment of the virtue of stoicism. Following Tobin Siebers, the body and its social representation is “not unidirectional... but... reciprocal. Complex embodiment theorises the body and its representations as mutually transformative” (Siebers 25). While Cyrus is initially portrayed as the more masculine and hence more attractive of the two, his shame in showing his emotional side complicates any unilateral understanding of body and embodiment. On the other hand, Brit’s confidence in displaying his emotions despite having an “imperfect” body reinforces his sense of self-esteem. Again, according to the ableist discourse, Brit can show emotions and be seen as less masculine because he is already in a state of bodily crisis. It is taken for granted that his brittle body makes him less masculine as a result of which he can indulge in conventionally considered non-masculine activities like crying. But, being able-bodied, Cyrus is wary of showing any emotions (including crying while watching a movie) as he is under constant pressure to continue the performance of masculinity. Thus, through the conversation between Brit and Cyrus, Kanga’s novel further destabilises any rigid notions of body and embodiment and highlights the hegemony of the ableist discourse.

In contrast to Brit’s relationship with Tina, his association with Cyrus exposes him to the moral policing of his family. Once, when Sera finds them in each other’s arms, she raises a hue and cry and calls Brit “a pervert”:

‘Homosexual, you mean’, said Sam. ‘No one is a pervert any more. You can slice up half a dozen women and you’re only socially maladjusted.’

‘I’m not gay!’ I shouted in panic. ‘At least, I don’t think so’, I added, not as loudly.

‘Nor am I, if you want the truth’, said Cyrus.

‘Of course they aren’t’, shouted Dolly from her bed. ‘They drool over *Playboy* magazine and that has pictures of naked girls.’ (Kanga 175)

It is interesting to note how Sam and Sera are divided in their opinion for homosexuals. For Sera, her son, who is a homosexual, is a “pervert”. She almost criminalises him for his actions. Sam, however, dismisses his “crime” and calls him only “a homosexual”. Dolly’s comment on Brit and Cyrus drooling over the *Playboy* magazine is crucial to our understanding of the intersection between disability and sexuality. In the words of Robert McRuer, “the system of compulsory able-bodiedness that produces disability is thoroughly interwoven with the system of compulsory heterosexuality that produces queerness, that—in fact—compulsory heterosexuality is contingent on compulsory able-bodiedness and vice versa” (McRuer 393). Dolly uses the fact that Brit and Cyrus derive voyeuristic pleasure from the pictures of naked girls to “rescue” them from the moral policing of their parents. Her comment, therefore, reminds the reader of the tendency of society to normalise or even idealise compulsory heterosexual behaviour. The very act of voyeurism becomes a social sanction for Brit and Cyrus.

To sum up, Kanga’s *Trying to Grow* is an engaging read on body and embodiment. Through the experiences of the central character, the novel, on the one hand, juxtaposes physical disability with the social construction of disabilities, and on the other, demonstrates the conflict regarding notions of embodiment. The text initiates a debate around the naming of disabilities and problematises conventional terminologies referring to disabilities. Through the conversations between Sam, Madam Manekshaw and Father Ferra, the novel critiques the missionary agenda of goodwill and charity. Similarly, through Dolly’s comment, the narrative questions the inherent racism and ableism embedded in the patronising comment of the gas station owner. Again, by critiquing Aunt Jeroo’s statement, the above discussion questions the popular tendency to infantilise disabled bodies and deny them any scope of sexual growth and fulfilment. However, Kanga’s novel does allow Brit to create imaginary worlds which enable him to temporarily escape suffocating realities. In the sexual encounters with Amy and Cyrus, Brit is able to overcome the stigma associated with his disability. Through the observations of Amy and Cyrus, the narrative asserts that disability is a social construct and celebrates the sexuality of a brittle and crippled body. Similarly, through the conversation between Brit and Cyrus regarding men crying in public, Kanga’s novel destabilises any rigid notions of body and embodiment and highlights the hegemony of the ableist discourse. Finally, the novel intertwines the notions of disability, sexuality

and incest in Brit's encounters with Tina and Cyrus. Through the portrayal of Brit's and Tina's mutual dependence upon each other, the novel redefines the notion of incest for the disabled. Finally, Dolly's comment on Brit and Cyrus drooling over the *Playboy* magazine exposes the popular tendency to normalise compulsory heterosexual behaviour and use voyeurism as a shield against the criminalisation of homosexuality.

3.3 *Hennu Huli: a female tiger*

The preceding discussion on Kanga's *Trying to Grow* analysed the notions of body and embodiment through the disabled body of Brit. This section will extend our study to critically analyse Vasudhendra's celebrated novel *Mohanaswamy* (2016) which is a work of interlinked stories recounting the major characters' experiences of coming out. The following discussion will argue that both *Mohanaswamy* and *Kalleshhi* have to negotiate forced heteronormativity and their childhood and adolescent experiences shape notions of acceptable/deviant sexualities.

The novel begins with one of the many instances when *Mohanaswamy* finds solace in traversing the contours of his partner, Karthik's, body. Karthik is his long-time lover with whom he shares his accommodation. But of late, he comes to know of Karthik's relationship and upcoming engagement with a woman named Rashmi. Even then, he desires his body and wants to engage with him romantically.

One night, Mohana begins caressing Karthik's body. But Karthik is in no mood to entertain this. He pushes away Mohana, expressing his inability to engage with him:

'Please stop it!'

But *Mohanaswamy* was in no mood to listen...

'Bastard!' shouted Karthik. 'Did I not tell you not touch me? Why won't you listen?' Quivering with rage, he flounced out of the room, picking his blanket and pillow. He went to the other room and slammed the door shut. (Vasudhendra 12)

This is the first instance in the novel when Karthik humiliates *Mohanaswamy*. The use of the slang "bastard" is important for this discussion. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines "bastard" as "a child born to parents who are not married to each other" and "of mixed or ill-conceived origin" ("Bastard"). By verbally abusing *Mohanaswamy*, Karthik tries to create a distance in their relationship and symbolically

moves towards a heterosexual union with Rashmi. This first instance of private humiliation prepares the ground for more such public insults for Mohanaswamy. But, what corrodes him on the inside is his self-pity for being rejected by Karthik. His humiliation intensifies on Karthik's first night with Rashmi. "And all these days, what he considered gold was not genuine, it was fake. No, Karthik, no. Please don't do that. You are being unfair to me. I hate you. Please don't treat me like an insect!" (Vasudhendra 27). The comparison between homosexual and heterosexual love-making adds to his self-pity and consequent inferiority complex. He starts stigmatising himself, mainly because of his failed relationship with Karthik, and begins searching for Karthik substitutes, only to be let down by Raghuraman again.

As the story of the novel progresses, Mohanaswamy recounts the incidents of his early life when he got familiarised with the terminology for people like him, having homosexual orientation. He came to know of the term "gay" only two years ago. Although not sure if it fully described him, he chose to identify himself with that word.

For him, 'straight' meant every other creature on earth except him and the people of his ilk. English dailies and magazines like Debonair often used the word 'gay'. But he didn't know what gays were called in the vernacular. So far he had earned several monikers in the local slang- each one filling him with pain, disgust, humiliation and incredulity. But there was no equivalent word for 'gay' in Kannada. You wouldn't even find it in dictionaries and newspapers. (Vasudhendra 36)

Mohanaswamy polarises himself and the rest of the world into two neat divisions- gay and straight, and is completely oblivious to myriad other forms of being a non-heterosexual. It is interesting to note that Mohanaswamy is unaware if his vernacular, Kannada, has any equivalent for the word "gay". Two possible inferences can be drawn from this observation- a). If there is actually a word for "gay" in Kannada that is unknown to him, he is alienating himself from the age-old tradition of alternative sexualities in South Asia and b). If the equivalent of "gay" is absent, it reveals compulsory heteronormativity in the politics of terminology in the Kannada language. Butler quotes Monique Wittig when she writes, "Because this production of "nature" operates in accord with the dictates of compulsory heterosexuality, the emergence of homosexual desire, in her view, transcends the categories of sex: 'If desire could liberate itself, it would have nothing to do with the preliminary marking by sexes'" (35). Since

almost all languages privilege heteronormative terminology, the absence of “gay”-equivalent reveals the hegemony of heterosexuality in the Kannada language.

In the novel, we find Mohana recollecting incidents of his younger years that shaped him into adulthood. He remembers the day when he was called “GanSu” because of his inability to ride a bicycle. The events that followed complicate the politics of embodiment in Vasudhendra’s novel. That day, a few of Mohana’s friends “lent their bicycles to Mohanaswamy and tried to teach him pedalling. But Mohanaswamy had not succeeded then. Frustrated, his friends gave up, saying, ‘A GanSu can never ride a bicycle’” (Vasudhendra 64). This incident had a profound impact on him. He began to believe that “had he known cycling, he would not have been gay” and “may be riding a bicycle is a symbol of masculinity” (Vasudhendra 65).

Cycling has traditionally been considered to be a masculine sport and Mohana’s friends trying to initiate him into it can be read as their efforts to inculcate manliness in him. But, his inability to learn the sport exposes him to the ridicule of his friends. He becomes a misfit, a perversion, in the normative gender binary. The term “GanSu” becomes a referent for his supposedly perverted sexuality. Anne Mulhall in her essay, “‘What’s Eating Victor Cusack?’ *Come What May*, Queer Embodiment, and the Regulation of Hetero-Masculinity” (2013) refers to Foucault and explains this phenomenon as:

Participation in male team sport in particular is a disciplinary technology in Foucault’s precise sense, bringing the subject into being through the installation of these norms, constituting and confirming the male body as “masculine” and therefore heterosexual. Failure to accede to this demand, for whatever reason, confirms the offender as a perversion of the gendered order of things in the rupture to the binary system of gender norms that his morphology effects, intentionally or not. Denied his being in being definitively positioned on neither side of the gender binary, ‘personhood’ is held in suspension; the transgressor is no longer quite human, has become something less than human: the ‘poof’, ‘queer’, ‘sissy’, ‘faggot’, ‘bender’ is disciplined for his transgression and subject to multiple forms of violence seen as legitimate and warranted from a normative perspective. (284)

Drawing from Mulhall's explanation, we understand that Mohana's inability to ride a cycle, makes him "something less than human" in the eyes of his friends. This leads him to develop a sense of inferiority. He starts stigmatising himself which makes life extremely difficult for him. It is as if his sexuality becomes a sort of psychological disability for him. Thus, in Mohana's case, we see a two-fold repercussion of his sexual orientation- first, he is reduced to a perverted non-person by his peers and secondly (perhaps, more importantly!), he falls in his own eyes.

Haunted by a strong sense of inner turmoil and stigma, Mohanaswamy approaches his mother and asks her the reason he was called "GanSu" by his friends. She tries to dismiss it by saying:

'Forget it, my son. It is nonsense. Why should anybody call you so? You are not a prostitute. You will grow up into a strong, handsome man, who can keep a hundred prostitutes', she said trying to boost his mood.

'But why do people target only me?' Mohanaswamy asked naively. 'I haven't heard them name-calling any of the other boys.'

His mother did not know what to say. After a while she replied, 'You must also behave like boys. Then nobody will dare call you so.' (Vasudhendra 41-42)

The mother's dismissal of his question and the following reply is crucial for this discussion. Here, she recommends forced heteronormative behaviour and heterosexuality for her son who is actually gay. According to her, Mohana growing up and engaging with several prostitutes will be a marker of his strong masculinity. That is, to prove his manhood, he will have to engage in compulsory heterosexual behaviour. Again, her insistence on behaving like boys is reminiscent of Arjie's mother urging him to play games that were only played by boys in Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*. In both instances, what is common is that the characters are forced heteronormative behaviour when they do not conform to heteronormativity. Their non-conformity diminishes their social status in the eyes of their family members and society at large.

In an attempt to fight stigmatisation, Mohana tries many "antics" of the heteronormative world. He tries to appear heterosexual by engaging in vulgar conversations about girls and film stars with his friends. He tries to get attracted to young women by behaving with a "mask of machismo", weaving lies after lie. He chooses

clothing with colours conventionally associated with the masculine, “colours like pink, red and yellow were a strict no” (Vasudhendra 96). However, “when it came to sexuality, no female body would attract Mohanaswamy. Once or twice, he had tried masturbating, imagining naked women. But he couldn’t. No women, no matter how beautiful, would come in his dreams” (96). It is interesting to note how the basic activity of attaining solitary sexual pleasure fails him because he tries to have it in a heterosexual way. This shows that no matter how hard he tries to fit into the heteronormative world, he fails. The stigmatisation that he encounters diminishes his personhood and self-esteem.

Throughout his life, Mohanaswamy has to bear the brunt of verbal abuse, ridicule and public humiliation. His repeated failures in relationships lower his self-esteem. He tries to “cure” himself by offering worship at the Achyutaraya temple, but what he witnesses at the temple site changes his perception of his self permanently: The sight of “two male bodies... rolling on the floor, moaning in pleasure” in the precincts of the temple becomes an eye-opener for Mohanaswamy (Vasudhendra 73). This is the first time in his life when he realises that there are many other people like him and that “he was not alone” in his pursuit of happiness from homosexual union (73). Moreover, the fact that the homosexual union was taking place in the sacred space of the temple renders sanctity to the supposedly non-conformist act. Consequently, he feels “enlightened” that there is some hope of overcoming the stigma that he attaches to himself. The gradually increasing desire to embrace his identity leads Mohana to embark on an expedition to Mt. Kilimanjaro. His success at the expedition fulfils his life and enables him to overcome the stigma that he associates with himself.

The novel carefully delineates how childhood and adolescent experiences shape notions of acceptable and deviant sexualities. Mohana’s acquaintance, Kalleshi, also becomes a victim of both physical as well as verbal abuse due to his sexual orientation. Once, when Kalleshi’s father Veerabhadrappa comes to know of his son’s sexual orientation, he takes him to the village prostitute Sangamma to check his son’s masculinity. He shoves Kalleshi into Sangamma’s hut and after some time, she comes out. “She had taken her blouse off and wrapped her sari across her chest” (Vasudhendra 110). In extreme anticipation, Veerabhadrappa asks her what happened. She sighs, “Kaamanna- the god of lust- hasn’t favoured your son” (Vasudhendra 110).

Out of sheer disgust and anger, Veerabhadrapappa barges into the hut. He witnesses a striking sight there- “Kalleshi was curled in a foetal position, holding his clothes tightly to his chest. The sight of a nude woman had left him feeling nothing but fear and disgust” (Vasudhendra 111). Veerabhadrapappa begins kicking Kalleshi “with all the energy he could muster” and tramples him “like an elephant crushing ants under its feet” (111). It’s only when Sangamma interferes, he stops hitting his son and replies in contempt: “‘I have kept five women like you. But I fail to understand why God gave an impotent son to a powerful man like me’. He spat on the floor. ‘From today on, this impotent creature is not my son, nor am I his father!’” (Vasudhendra 111)

Veerabhadrapappa’s words reveal his disappointment in coming to terms with his son, Kalleshi’s sexuality. The fact that the sight of a naked woman could not arouse Kalleshi hurt his father’s masculine ego. The virile Veerabhadrapappa, who had the record of keeping five women like Sangamma, was injured by the homosexual orientation of his son. He considered it as a “lack” or “disability” in Kalleshi’s body. This “disability” was an injury to the hypermasculinity embodied by Veerabhadrapappa. He stigmatised Kalleshi and considered the now curled-up Kalleshi, a shame for his family and lineage. He felt as if he was cursed by the gods for some sin that he had committed in the past. The disowning of his son in addition to the brutal physical violence inflicted upon him can be read as an act of frustration on one hand, and an attempt to “cure” his son’s disability of “failed” masculinity. However, as the text unfolds, we understand that Veerabhadrapappa’s attempts fail as Kalleshi enters a vortex of stigma and self-pity.

Thus, the above discussion analyses how major characters respond to compulsory heteronormativity and embodied notions of masculinity in Vasudhendra’s novel *Mohanaswamy*. The text highlights structurally embedded heteronormativity in most languages including Kannada, as Mohanaswamy struggles to find a Kannada equivalent for the English word “gay”. Coming out is an extremely complicated process for Mohanaswamy and Kalleshi as it exposes them to the strong disapproval and consequent stigmatisation of heteronormative society. Their childhood and adolescent experiences shape notions of acceptable/deviant sexualities and determine their destinies in the course of the novel. While Karthik symbolically embraces heterosexuality through his marriage with Rashmi, Mohanaswamy tries to negotiate oppressive forces by attempting some “antics” of the heteronormative world like cycling and masturbation. Again, Kalleshi has to bear the brunt of his father’s violence when he tries to “cure” him of his

“failed” masculinity. However, based on the characters’ handling of their experiences of private as well as public humiliation, their stories end differently in the novel. While Mohana embraces his identity through the eye-opener at the Achyutaraya temple and his successful expedition to Mt. Kilimanjaro, Kalleshi succumbs to societal pressures and commits suicide.

3.4 A chuckle and a spread-fingered clap

This section will continue the discussion on body, embodiment and ideal/deviance to analyse Arundhati Roy’s critically acclaimed novel- *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017). It will explore the politics of identification and nomenclature in private as well as public spaces by examining the body of Anjum/Aftab. Through a critical engagement with the “deviant” bodies of Anjum, Tilo and Kashmir, it will study the nuances of embodiment both at the micro as well as macro levels.

Anjum is born Aftab to his parents Jahanara Begum and Mulaqat Ali. The first instance of the discovery of Aftab’s “problematic body” is when his mother delightfully investigates all parts of her newborn baby’s body. “That was when she discovered, nestling underneath his boy-parts, a small, unformed, but undoubtedly girl-part” (Roy 7). It is significant how Aftab’s mother tries to dismiss the notion of him having intersex characteristics. She wants to believe that the partially-formed vagina “nestling underneath his boy-parts” will stay as a piece of non-functional flesh or disappear somehow. At this point in time, she never knows that what she dismisses as a slight irregularity will have bigger repercussions in the future.

Jahanara Begum, however, undergoes a conflict of gender differentiation and consequently, nomenclature in her mind:

In Urdu, the only language she knew, all things, not just living things but all things- carpets, books, pens, musical instruments- had a gender. Everything was either masculine or feminine, man or woman. Everything except her baby. Yes of course she knew there was a word for those like him- Hijra. Two words actually, Hijra and Kinnar. But two words do not make a language.

Was it possible to live outside language? Naturally this question did not address itself to her in words, or as a single, lucid sentence. It addressed itself to her as a soundless, embryonic howl. (Roy 8)

For her, the newborn baby has to be categorised into one of the two- a boy or a girl. It is because throughout her life she has lived and internalised the notion of sex and gender in terms of binaries. Although she is aware of two Urdu words- *Hijra* and *Kinnar* for fluid sexual identities, she cannot reconcile the fact that her son is born intersex. Her “soundless, embryonic howl” is an expression of her exasperation at her inability to classify Aftab into one of the linguistic binaries that conventional heterosexual society has taught her to believe as well as reinforce over the years. As in Vasudhendra’s *Mohanaswamy*, she is caught in a limbo of disbelief and contradiction at the physiology of her baby. Roy’s novel exposes the limitations of language to capture the complex nature of lived realities through the rhetorical question- “Was it possible to live outside language?”.

Jahanara Begum and her husband Mulaqat Ali decide to “cure” Aftab of his malady by first getting a surgery done and then by indoctrinating him with the attributes of manliness. For this purpose, they consult Dr Nabi. He examines him and explains to them that Aftab “was not, medically speaking a Hijra- a female trapped in a male body- although for practical purposes that word could be used. Aftab, he said, was a rare example of a Hermaphrodite, with both male and female characteristics, though outwardly, the male characteristics appeared to be more dominant” (Roy 16). Dr Nabi further says that he can suggest a surgeon who can seal the “girl-part” and prescribe some medicines. However, he does not miss to point out the superficial nature of such treatments as he is sure that they will not be able to cure Aftab of his “Hijra tendencies”. Not missing even the slightest opportunity, Mulaqat Ali then begins his “cultural project” of managing his “tendencies” by indoctrinating him with the attributes of “manliness”. “He passed on to him his love of poetry and discouraged the singing of *Thumri* and *Chaiti*. He stayed up late into the night, telling Aftab stories about their warrior ancestors and their valour on the battlefield” (Roy 16-17).

But, on listening to the story of how Changez Khan fought heroically to win his beautiful wife Borte Khatun, Aftab instead of aspiring to be the valiant and chivalrous hero, chose to be like his beautiful wife. What attracted him was not the courage and manliness exemplified by the hero, but the beauty and aura of the heroine. Consequently, he visualised himself in the image of the beautiful wife of Changez Khan. This, in turn, implies that Mulaqat Ali’s project of cultural indoctrination fails to produce the desired effect of inculcating masculinity in Aftab.

It is only when Aftab turns fourteen that he learns what it means to have a body like his. He develops male attributes like a hairy and muscular body, Adam's apple and a deep voice. On his attainment of puberty, his body, therefore, becomes a site of inner conflict-

His body had suddenly begun to wage war on him. He grew tall and muscular. And hairy. In a panic he tried to remove the hair on his face and body with Burnol- burn ointment that made dark patches on his skin. He then tried Anne French crème hair remover that he purloined from his sisters (he was soon found out because it smelled like an open sewer). He plucked his bushy eyebrows into thin, asymmetrical crescents with a pair of home-made tweezers that looked more like tongs. He developed an Adam's apple that bobbed up and down. He longed to tear it out of his throat. Next came the unkindest betrayal- the thing that he could do nothing about. His voice broke. A deep powerful man's voice appeared in place of his sweet, high voice. He was repelled by it and scared himself each time he spoke. He grew quiet, and would speak only as a last resort, after he had run out of other options. (Roy 24)

The presence and gradual development of male features in Aftab's body leads him to develop a negative perception of himself. In queer studies and medical terminology, Aftab's condition is called gender dysphoria where a person experiences distress "due to a mismatch between their gender identity—their personal sense of their own gender—and their sex assigned at birth" (Morrow and Messinger 8). He stigmatises himself as if there is a lack or a disability in his body. Consequently, he begins to hate his body, so much so that he unleashes violence on his own body. This is very different from Brit's perception of his disability from *Trying to Grow*. Brit maintains a high regard for his body, unlike Aftab who has a very negative private perception of his body. For Aftab, therefore, his body becomes a battleground whereby his biological self and preferential self are at constant loggerheads with each other. But, if we look at the public perception of both the characters from the two novels, we find points of difference. Brit's bodily condition exposes him to unnecessary affection and forced infantilisation, thereby completely negating his developing sexuality, but Aftab's is a case of confused sexuality. "At first people were amused and encouraging, but soon the snickering and teasing from other children began: *He's a She. He's not a He or a She. He's a He and a She. She-He,*

He-She Hee! Hee!” (Roy 12). This drastically diminishes Aftab’s self-esteem and forces him to perform acts of violence on his own body.

Like Brit, Aftab also finds a route of escape in Roy’s novel. This materialises in the form of a place just “a few hundred yards from where his family had lived for centuries”. The place is aptly named “Khwabgah”- a place of and for imagination and dreams!

And so, at the age of fifteen, only a few hundred yards from where his family had lived for centuries, Aftab stepped through an ordinary doorway into another universe. On his first night as a permanent resident of the Khwabgarh, he danced in the courtyard to everybody’s favourite song from everybody’s favourite film- ‘Pyar Kiya Toh Darna Kya’ from Mughal-e-Azam. The next night at a small ceremony he was presented with a green Khwabgah dupatta and initiated into the rules and rituals that formally made him a member of the Hijra community. (Roy 25)

Khwabgah became a place where Aftab’s preferential self received some kind of social recognition for the first time in his life. This social recognition was provided by a miniature society of the utopian third space of Khwabgah. The ceremony where he was presented with a green dupatta became a symbolic transition ritual for Aftab. It is as if this place presented him with an avenue where the inner conflict of his body could be pacified to some extent. Although he could not completely stop the expression of male body attributes, he could live his preferential femininity without stigmatisation by other members of society. Here, he need not run away from the jeering, snickering or teasing remarks. Nor, he would have to succumb to the attempts of cultural indoctrination carried out by his parents. He could live his preference, without being worried about the obstacles posed by his body towards the fulfilment of this end. Finally, “Aftab became Anjum, disciple of Ustab Kulsoom Bi of the Delhi Gharana, one of the seven regional Hijra Gharanas in the country, each headed by a Nayak, a Chief, all of them headed by a Supreme Chief” (Roy 25). Aftab/Anjum’s point of entry to Khwabgah is an important reference point to engage with the politics of embodiment in Roy’s novel.

The momentous decision of Aftab’s life initiated him into a whole new “duniya” of hijra-hood. Anjum started wearing “sequined, gossamer kurtas and pleated Patiala salwars, shararas, ghararas, silver anklets, glass bangles and dangling earrings” (Roy 27).

She pierced her nose, “outlined her eyes with kohl and blue eye-shadow and gave herself a luscious, bow-shaped Madhubala mouth of glossy-red lipstick” (Roy 27).

She wasn't beautiful in the way Bombay Silk was, but she was sexier, more intriguing, handsome in the way some women can be. The looks combined with her steadfast commitment to an exaggerated, outrageous kind of femininity made the real, biological women in the neighbourhood- even those who did not wear full burqas- look cloudy and dispersed. (Roy 27)

For Aftab, Khwabgah became a place where his preferential self of Anjum received social recognition for the first time in his life. Aftab's desire to dress in elaborately designed women's clothes and jewellery became a reality in Khwabgah. Here, he need not pretend to be the courageous Changez Khan, rather he could be the beautiful and gracious Borte Khatun who attracted many heroic men towards herself. By extravagantly dressing in an elaborate get-up, Anjum embraced a ferociously exaggerated femininity, which her previous life with her parents did not allow her to live. She could now dance to the tune of popular Bollywood songs and could recite *thumris* and *chaitis* without being admonished by her father, Mulaqat Ali. Her exaggerated femininity can be read as her attempt to mitigate the “lack” that she has lived throughout her life. All these years she was in a constant war with her body. Her body which was rapidly developing prominent male characteristics was gradually losing its female characteristics. This invited stigma not only from her parents, but also from other members of society. Thus, by flaunting the image of an exaggeratedly feminine self, Anjum recreated the notions of embodiment for herself.

Along with creating a persona for herself, the process of embodiment for Anjum also carried with it a process of unlearning followed by learning. First of all, she had to unlearn the “manly behaviour” encouraged and taught by her father with the help of his mother and Dr Nabi. Then, she had to learn the gait and postures of the inmates of Khwabgah.

She learned to exaggerate the swing in her hips when she walked and to communicate with the signature spread-fingered Hijra clap that went off like a gunshot and could mean anything- Yes, No, Maybe, *Wah! Behen ka Lauda* (You sister's cock), *Bhonsadi ke* (you arsehole born). Only another Hijra could decode

what was specifically meant by the specific clap at that specific moment. (Roy 27)

Anjum's learning of the hijra-idiom, including the signature spread-fingered clap and expletives is a pertinent point of discussion. It is because the embodiment of her hijra-hood is very much dependent upon an exaggerated body language of claps and swear words which are a part of the traditional repository of the hijra community. In the words of Butler (2017),

Hence, it is not that one cannot get outside of language in order to grasp materiality in and of itself; rather, every effort to refer to materiality takes place through a signifying process which, in its phenomenality, is always already material. In this sense, then, language and materiality are not opposed, for language both is and refers to that which is material, and what is material never fully escapes from the process by which it is signified. (68)

It is the hijras' body language, posture and idiom that differentiated them from other members of the society on one hand, and unified them with other hijras on the other. Again, it is the body that landed them in trouble and at the same time, rescued them. But whatever the case might be, their exaggerated body language, posture and idiom could achieve what ordinary heteronormative language could not. These enabled them to rise beyond the binaries of conventional language by creating an alternative linguistic space which was accessible only to them.

Anjum's chief Ustad Kulsoom Bi took great pride in the history and myth of the Hijras. According to her, the collective history of the hijras embodied the virtues of resilience and endurance amidst all odds. When she would take the newly initiated Hijras to the Light and Sound Show of the Red Fort, she would urge them to pay special attention to the reign of Mughal Emperor Mohammed Shah Rangeela of the mid-eighteenth century. During the narration of his rule, "the zenana would light up in pink and echo with the sound of women's laughter, the rustling of silk, the *chhann-chhann-chhann* of anklets. Then, suddenly, amidst those soft, happy, lady-sounds would come the clearly audible, deep, distinct, rasping, coquettish giggle of a court eunuch" (Roy 51).

'*There!*' Ustad Kulsoom Bi would say, like a triumphant lepidopterist who has just netted a rare moth. 'Did you hear that? That is *us*. That is our ancestry, our

history, our story. We were never commoners, you see, we were members of the staff of the Royal Palace’.

The moment passed in a heartbeat. But it did not matter. What mattered was that it existed. To be present in history, even as nothing more than a chuckle, was a universe away from being absent from it, from being written out of it altogether. A chuckle, after all, could become a foothold in the sheer wall of the future. (Roy 51)

Being present in history in the form of something as insignificant as a chuckle is a matter of great privilege and hope for Ustad Kulsoom Bi. This “deep, distinct, rasping, coquettish giggle of a court eunuch” secures their place in history and echoes as an embodiment of courage, resilience and endurance of all the hijras throughout the ages. With Anjum internalising the hijra idiom including the signature spread-fingered clap and use of expletives, it is as if the chuckle finds its echo in the dreamy quarters of Khwabgah.

However, even after adopting the preferential identity of Anjum, she cannot conform to the regulations of Khwabgah for long. She exercises her whims and fancies in rearing up Zainab and travels to Gujarat with Zakir Miyan. However, in Gujarat, they are caught amidst the riots where Zakir Miyan is killed by some Hindu religious fundamentalists. She could escape death for being a hijra as the murderers thought that killing a hijra would bring them bad luck. Apart from a change in behaviour and personality, Anjum tells the inmates of Khwabgah nothing about the riots and her fate there. Displaying a strange behaviour in Khwabgah, one day, she set fire to most of her belongings and left the place. “Only a ten-minute ride from the Khwabgah, once again Anjum entered another world” (Roy 57). This was the space of a graveyard the northern boundary of which “abutted a government hospital and mortuary where the bodies of the city’s vagrants and unclaimed dead were warehoused until the police decided how to dispose of them” (Roy 58).

Anjum made her new home in the graveyard. She placed her cupboard and a few belongings near Mulaqat Ali’s grave and unrolled her carpet and bedding between Ahlam Baji’s and Begum Renata Mumtaz Madam’s graves. Over time she enclosed the graves and built rooms around them. She built a separate bathhouse and a toilet with its septic tank. Water was drawn from the public hand pump and electricity was stolen from

the mortuary where the corpses required round-the-clock refrigeration. With these facilities, gradually Anjum started receiving a motley crowd of visitors. She decided to name her guest house “Jannat” - meaning “Paradise”:

Gradually Jannat Guest House became a hub for Hijras who, for one reason or another, had fallen out of, or been expelled from, the tightly administered grid of Hijra Gharanas. As word spread about the new guest house in the graveyard, friends from the past reappeared, most incredibly Nimmo Gorakhpuri. (Roy 68)

The slice of paradise that Anjum created for herself and named “Jannat Guest House” became an alternative space for those who wanted to escape the hegemony of the tightly administered grid of Hijra Gharanas. More specifically, Anjum, who could never conform to the dictates of Khwabgah headed by Ustad Kulsoom Bi, found her safe haven in Jannat, the graveyard guest house. It is quite interesting that a place like a graveyard becomes the final place of accommodation (although metaphorically, it is for everyone!) for Anjum. This is perhaps the beauty of Arundhati Roy’s writings which question the binary of ideal and deviance and blurs the differences between the two. Starting from the body of Anjum, the writer, time and again, dissolves the distinction between the two and creates the apparently deviant space of the graveyard as the ideal for her. Thus, the space of the graveyard complements the body of Anjum and later on, becomes home for another “deviant” character of the novel, Tilo.

In her search for a home, Tilo reaches Jannat Guest House and Funeral Services. She is assigned a room on the ground floor which she has to share with Comrade Laali and family, Miss Jebeen the Second and Ahlam Baji’s grave. It is here that “for the first time in her life, Tilo felt that her body had enough room to accommodate its organs” (Roy 305). What is striking is that of all the places standing as embodiments of safety and security, Tilo found home in a graveyard that dilutes the contradictions between life and death, body and embodiment and corporeal and metaphysical existence.

When Tilo reaches Jannat Guest House for the first time, she remembers the name of a hotel called “Hotel Anjali” in the small town where she grew up. “The street hoardings that advertised this exciting new development said *Come to Anjali for the Rest of Your Life*” (Roy 305). She could somehow relate this tagline with Jannat Guest House:

The pun had been unintentional, but as a child she had always imagined that Hotel Anjali was full of the corpses of its unsuspecting guests who had been murdered in their sleep and would remain there for the rest of their (dead) lives. In the case of Jannat Guest House, Tilo felt that the tagline would have been not just appropriate, but comforting. Instinct told her that she may finally have found a home for the Rest of Her Life. (Roy 305)

The concept where apparently deviant or non-conformist bodies find home or rest in the unreal third space of the graveyard is echoed time and again in the novel. In Anjum's words, "This place where we live, where we have made our home, is the place of falling people. Here there *is no haqeeqat. Arre, even we aren't real. We don't really exist*" (Roy 84). Be it the Jannat Guest House of Delhi or the Mazar-e-Shohadda of Kashmir, the graveyards function as spaces complicating the contradictions between life and death, reality and dream. Thus, by complementing non-normative bodies as well as identities, the graveyards, in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) become embodiments of the problematics of ideal and deviance.

The curious story of Tilo's life further complicates conventional notions of embodiment. First of all, the outline of her life- initially as a student and then as a working professional- becomes a fluid documentation of ideal and deviance. Then, her association with Musa and Gulrez in Jammu leads Amrik Singh to arrest her in charge of being the accomplice of a terrorist. In the Interrogation Centre of Kashmir, ACP Pinky questions Tilo regarding her relationship with Mr Biplab Dasgupta:

'Who is he to you, this Dasgupta?'

'A friend.'

'A *friend*? How many men do you fuck at the same time?' This was ACP Pinky.

Tilo said nothing.

'I asked you a question. How many men do you fuck at the same time?'

Tilo's silence elicited a slew of insults along predictable lines (in which Tilo recognized the words 'black', 'whore' and 'jihadi') and then the question was asked again. (Roy 381-382)

The initial questions hurled at Tilo label her as a deviant woman. Although Major Amrik Singh could find the whereabouts of Biplab Dasgupta and Tilo's acquaintance with him, the time that he took to do so already proved disastrous to her. In a frenzy of vindictiveness incited by the atmosphere of the Interrogation Centre, ACP Pinky found out a cheap punishment for her. This was "the primordial punishment for the Woman-Who-Must-Be-Taught-A-Lesson".

Mohammed Subhan Hajam, the camp barber, was just leaving as Amrik Singh rushed into the room.

Tilo was sitting on a wooden chair with her arms strapped down. Her long hair was on the floor, the scattered curls, no longer hers, mingled with the filth and cigarette butts. While he tonsured her, Subhan Hajam had managed to whisper, 'Sorry, Madam, very Sorry'. (Roy 383)

Hair is a symbol of femininity and fertility in various mythologies across the globe. Milton described Eve's hair in *Paradise Lost* as, "She, as a veil down to her slender waist, /Her adorned golden tresses wore/Dishevelled but in wanton ringlets waved,/As the vine curls her tendrils" (Book IV. 304-307). Eve's beautiful hair is considered an embodiment of femininity. On the other hand, hair also invokes fear and is considered a symbol of revenge. In Indian mythology, Dushashana drags Draupadi by holding her hair, which is later avenged when she washes her hair in his blood on the sixteenth day of the Kurukshetra War. In Greek mythology, Medusa is one of the three Gorgon sisters who has a head full of poisonous snakes instead of hair and could turn anyone/anything who gazed into her eyes, to stone. These are a few instances that show the significance of hair symbolism in global mythologies. On that note, the tonsuring of Tilo's hair can be seen as a punishment for her "deviance". Just like Perseus decapitated Medusa's body, ACP Pinky ordered the barber to shave Tilo's hair in a symbolic decapitation of the terrifying female. The image of Tilo, sitting on a wooden chair with strapped down arms and scattered curls on the floor, is presented as an incarnation of the primordial terrifying female who is taught a lesson for her "deviance".

The preceding discussion on embodiment and ideal/deviance can be extended to interpret the concept of body in terms of accommodation. Roy's novel juxtaposes two bodies which are caught in the attempts at accommodation. They are- Kashmir as a great body and Tilo's body. As analysed in the above discussion, Tilo's body's constant

struggle “to accommodate its organs” apparently “comes to a rest” in her new-found home of the graveyard. However, there is no such rest for the great body of Kashmir as it appears to be in a constant struggle resisting internal forces of fissure as well as external pressures of territorialisation. Following Tilo’s case, the next part will analyse the portrayal of the great body of Kashmir in terms of accommodation.

In Roy’s novel, Kashmir is shown struggling to accommodate individuals and institutions within itself. On the one hand, there is mention of the Mazar-e-Shohadda making space for the burial of the martyrs’ bodies. In an attempt to accommodate the dead bodies of martyrs, the Intizamiya Committee made a clever plan of laying out the graves in the Mazar-e-Shohadda. They either resorted to mass burial or a layered burial where space was efficiently managed so that the great body of Kashmir could embrace as many of its martyrs as possible, in its fold. And on the other hand, there is a reference to individuals like Musa being swallowed by the great body of Kashmir. “Life as he once knew it was over. He knew that Kashmir had swallowed him and he was now part of its entrails” (Roy 344). The imagery is that of a bigger body swallowing a smaller body in such a way that the boundaries of the smaller bodies disappear and it becomes a part of the bigger one. This ensures that in our attempt to remember and locate the space of the smaller body within the bigger body, we have to fall back on the territorial outlines of the bigger body. But again, the territorial boundary of the bigger body is a bone of contention for many individuals and groups as territoriality is intertwined with discourses surrounding nationality, religion and culture. Bashford in his essay “Quarantine: Imagining the Geo-body of a Nation” (2004) discusses territoriality through the concept of geo-bodies:

Nations in the modern period always required mapped boundaries: they needed to be imagined and enforced as ‘geo-bodies’. In *Siam Mapped*, historian Winichakul Thongchai writes: ‘Territoriality involves three basic human behaviours: a form of classification by area, a form of communication by boundary, and an attempt at enforcing ... The geo-body of a nation is a man-made territorial definition which creates effects – by classifying, communicating, and enforcement – on people, things, and relationships’. The explicit turning into discourse of geographic boundaries as well as the enforcement of these lines on-the-ground – their representation and administration – are part of what created spaces as nations, and nations as ‘geo-bodies’. (115)

Bashford, by quoting historian Winichakul Thongchai, gives us an idea of how spaces turn into geo-bodies. Roy's novel portrays Kashmir as a geo-body which has a two-dimensional role. First of all, it functions as a monstrous corporeal entity which engulfs Musa and demonizes ACP Pinky. Secondly, it is projected as a discursive entity which pervades and becomes an all-encompassing presence in the politics portrayed by the novel. Therefore, Kashmir becomes an embodiment of struggle, resilience and resistance in the novel. The politics of accommodation continually frame and re-frame the internal as well as external outlines of the entity which take on the roles of a monstrous corporeal entity and a discursive entity simultaneously. By beautifully juxtaposing two bodies which are caught in the attempts at accommodation, Roy's novel highlights one as a miniature of another. Tilo's exclamation as her body becomes able to accommodate all her organs echoes Kashmir's struggle to accommodate forms of dissent and resilience.

A very striking imagery of body and embodiment is depicted by Roy in the form of two minor characters, "The Lime Man" and "The Performance Artist", whom Anjum met near the Jantar Mantar in Delhi. Through these characters, Roy expands the scope of displaying dissent as well as resilience from the private worlds of Anjum and Tilo to the public anonymity of the sea of protesters on a street of the national capital. The Lime Man was a naked man with lime stuck all over his body with superglue. When she saw him, he was sipping mango juice from a carton. If anyone asked, he refused to cite the reason for his display or protest. On the other hand, The Performance Artist wore a suit with a tie and a hat and stuck seekh-kebab shaped turds on his dress. There was a wilted red rose pinned to his collar and a white handkerchief showed out from his breast pocket. If anybody asked him the purpose of his display, he gave a patient reply in contrast to the rude Lime man. According to him, "his body was his instrument and he wanted the so-called 'civilized' world to lose its aversion to shit and accept that shit was just processed food. And vice versa. He also explained that he wanted to take Art out of Museums and bring it to 'The People'" (Roy 107). Interestingly, the name "Lime Man" echoes the name of another character in Arundhati Roy's first novel *The God of Small Things*. He was the "Orangedrink-Lemondrink Man" who molests Estha at Abhilash Talkies. It is difficult to ascertain whether the similarity is deliberate or accidental. But, whatever the case, the two characters from the respective novels contradict each other in terms of activity as well as situation. Again, "The Lime Man" and "The Performance Artist" do

not find any more mention later in the story. But, through their body display amidst the crowd of protesters near Jantar Mantar, their bodies become symbols of dissent as well as resilience. By portraying Anjum as trying to identify with the sea of protestors at Jantar Mantar (of which the Lime Man and Performance Artist were integral parts), Roy creates a collective, non-corporeal body of scattered individuals which becomes an embodiment of protest as well as resistance.

Thus, this section maps the journey of Anjum from being Mulaqat Ali's "deviant" son Aftab to being the rightful descendant of the Delhi Hijra Gharana, Anjum. By portraying Jahanara Begum's conflict of gender differentiation and nomenclature with regard to baby Aftab, Roy's novel exposes the limitations of language to capture the complex nature of lived realities. Aftab's transition is not easy as it is marked by extreme pressures of gender dysphoria, public stigmatisation and cultural indoctrination. However, his entry into Khwabgah opens up an alternative space where, under the leadership of Ustad Kulsoom Bi, he learns to embrace his preferential self, Anjum, by recreating notions of embodiment. Although Anjum is unable to completely escape her biology, still the dreamy realm of Khwabgah provides her with a liberal space where she can resist stigmatisation and perform an exaggerated body language of claps and swear words. Through a conscious process of simultaneous unlearning and learning, Anjum secures for herself a place in the history of hijras. However, being unable to limit herself within the rigid hierarchy of Khwabgah, Anjum makes her "home" in the curious space of the graveyard. Therefore, the graveyard complements the body of Anjum and later on, becomes home for another "deviant" character of the novel, Tilo. In a critical expansion of the notion of embodiment, the above analysis juxtaposes the bodies of Tilo and Kashmir to study their attempts at accommodation. Tilo's body's constant struggle "to accommodate its organs" apparently "comes to a rest" in her new-found home of the graveyard. However, there is no such rest for the great body of Kashmir as it appears to be in a constant struggle resisting internal forces of fissure as well as external pressures of territorialisation. The discussion also reveals instances when deviance is punished in the novel. The image of the tonsured Tilo is read as an incarnation of the primordial terrifying female who is taught a lesson for her "deviance". Finally, through Anjum's attempt to identify with the sea of protestors at Jantar Mantar and by accommodating alternative worldviews of the confluence of motley characters at Jannat guest house, Roy's text opens up infinite possibilities of protest as well as resistance.

3.5 Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter engaged with the complex representation of body and embodiment in the three selected texts- Firdaus Kanga's *Trying to Grow* (1990), Vasudhendra's *Mohanaswamy* (2016) and Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017). By mapping the journeys of sexual discovery and growth, this chapter highlighted how major characters responded to compulsory heteronormativity and embodied notions of masculinity in the selected novels. It revealed how public as well as private perceptions of their bodies caused conflicts of embodiment in their lives. Be it physical disability (Brit) or homosexuality (Mohanaswamy and Kalleshi) or gender dysphoria (Anjum), they grappled with the normative politics of nomenclature and terminology. Coming out was an extremely complicated process for all the protagonists as it exposed them to the strong disapproval and consequent stigmatisation of heteronormative society. Their childhood and adolescent experiences shaped notions of acceptable/deviant sexualities and determined their destinies in the course of the novels. Despite such challenges, they were successful in discovering spaces (like Brit's imaginary worlds, the Achyutaraya temple, Khwabgah and Jannat Guest House) and events (like Brit's sexual encounters with Amy and Cyrus) of respite where apparently non-conformist, "deviant" identities could be embraced fully, thereby escaping the pressures of gender dysphoria, body-binarisation and cultural indoctrination. This chapter also complicated the understanding of embodiment to critically analyse the accommodation efforts of a "deviant" character and a "monstrous" entity. While Tilo's body's constant struggle "to accommodate its organs" apparently "comes to a rest" in her new-found home of the graveyard, the great body of Kashmir struggled constantly to resist internal forces of fissure as well as external pressures of territorialisation. Again, by juxtaposing images of severe punishment being accorded to non-conformists like Kalleshi and Tilo with the images of Anjum getting lost amidst the sea of protestors in Jantar Mantar and Tilo finding a home amidst the motley crowd at Jannat Guest House, the preceding analysis highlighted the possibilities of protest as well as resilience. Finally, through instances like Mohanaswamy's inability to find the Kannada equivalent of "gay" and Jahanara Begum's inability to classify the gender of her new-born baby, the chapter revealed the inadequacy of heteronormative language to capture the complex nature of lived realities.