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A CRITICAL STUDY OF DOMESTIC SERVANTS IN INDIAN FICTION IN ENGLISH

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PART FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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REGISTRATION NO: 007 (2008)



DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH & FOREIGN LANGUAGES
TEZPUR UNIVERSITY, NAPAAM

JANUARY, 2009

ABSTRACT

Cheats, shirkers, dirty conniving minions to be kept under a firm control, loyal pinheads — these are the recurring images of domestic servants in Indian fiction in English. In literary texts they are treated as a mere trace in somebody else's stories. This thesis exposes the marginalization of the body, labour, and living space of literary servants with particular reference to select novels of Mulk Raj Anand, Attia Hosain, Anita Desai, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Amit Chaudhuri and Arundhati Roy. However, references have also been made to other Indian English novelists writers to make the work more comprehensive.

With the proliferation of literary theory and the advent of several modes of interpretation, literary texts, no doubt, would respond to several possible kinds of readings. The present work is concerned with the thematic concerns of the Indian English novelists with particular reference to domestic servants. The work attempts to bring out in the texts the class, caste, gender bias and prejudices against domestic servants. Inspired by the Post-positivist school of theory, this work seeks to discredit the one-sided presentation of servants in Indian English fiction while arguing for a truer version of experience and identity.

Chapter One, "A Genealogy of Literary Servants", attempts a review of Indian English fiction, English (and for that matter, American) fiction and popular narratives like print media with reference to servants to highlight the need for our study as well as for putting it in perspective. While confirming that the emblematic servant-master relationship is one of exploitation, regardless of cultures and time, such a review also highlight the different factors like class, caste, gender, age, race etc behind such prejudices.

The second Chapter, "Problems in the Study of Servants in Indian Fiction in English", explores some of the problems arising out of the study of servants in Indian English fiction. It attempts to grapple particularly with the problem of the English medium which is regarded as foreign and also whether Indian English fiction, often regarded as an elitist genre, can account for the lived realities of subalterns like servants.

The problem of classifying servants as a class and also the critical concepts of identity and ideology are briefly examined.

Using the novels of Mulk Raj Anand, Attia Hosain, Anita Desai, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Amit Chaudhuri and Arundhati Roy as representative work, Chapter Three, “Marginalization of the Servant’s Body”, reveals that the body of the servant in Indian English fiction is not unambiguous fact of “nature” but a construction. Servants’ bodies are *re-presented* only to marginalize them. The depiction of the Indian upper/middle class domestic panorama does not acknowledge the servant’s name, let alone her/his body. The works of Amit Chaudhuri, Upamanyu Chatterjee or Anita Desai condemn servants to be the anonymous, generalised ayah (nurse), maidservant, mali (gardener), cook or sweeper, that is the “other” people in the text whose corporeal existence merits a word or at the most a sentence. Nando, Uma, Jochna, Haridasi, (Freedom Song) Rehman, Jadav, Panna, Chhaya, Saraswati, Savitri, Meera (A Strange and Sublime Address) are all done predominantly in slight sketches by Amit Chaudhuri, and mostly in uncomplimentary terms as repulsive, misshapen, sickly, elderly or juvenile (in both cases, unchanging). Vasant (English, August), Kasibai, Vaman, Aya (The Last Burden) of Upamanyu Chatterjee are no better. In all their works including those of Anita Desai there is a metonymic relation between external appearance and character-traits; the servant’s body is used as a signifier for the supposed “lack” of cultural traits and hence fit for the lowly tasks of servitude. For these writers the body becomes the site for difference; the middle-class identity is constructed against the other i.e. lower class/caste servant. The bodies of both servant and master though presented as natural, are in fact, structured in a hierarchy. If not disparaged, servants are rendered as ageless or grandparent-like figures in order to make them acceptable to the readers. Even the exceptions, as in Mulk Raj Anand’s Untouchable or Coolie where the servants have been portrayed in positive manner, are not subversions but mere reworking of the middle class hierarchy. In spite of the variety of texts examined from Indian English fiction the same tropes recur giving an indication of their influence and pervasiveness.

Chapter Four, “Marginalization of the Servant’s Labour”, examines how literary texts erased the entire gamut of servants’ (particularly the hard backbreaking) labour behind the day to day household chores and instead represent them as executing minor parts/roles dictated strictly by the exigencies of plot. Barring Mulk Raj Anand, or Thrity

Umrigar, most texts present the running of Indian domestic scene as natural, ignoring the servant's labour or encapsulate this drudgery in a few words at best. The construction of the Indian family, the upper/middle class ideal of simple living or the edifice of culture and refinement all include the hidden labour of servants. Agastya's frequent cribbing against Vasant (English, August), paralleled by innumerable instances in other texts, highlight the common complaint against servants that they don't work properly to the satisfaction of their masters. Whether it is Anita Desai, Amit Chaudhuri, or Upamanyu Chatterjee, servants are presented as constantly demanding or stealing material things. The effect of representation of such demands serves to heighten the image of the servants as cunning manipulators who try to fleece their gullible masters as much they can without putting in hard work. Besides deflecting attention from the underpaid labour of the servant, it helps to heighten the image of the masters as generous. Positing the servants as incorrigibly lazy or "naturally" shirkers and careless about his/her work and to extend this into a generalization has been also a common trope in all the writers under scrutiny. Other strategies to appropriate the labour of the servant include representing servants in lasting personal relations as in works of Attia Hosain. She blurs the boundaries between work and familial relationship and contrasts this with the apparently modern relationship between servants and masters which is based apparently on monetary considerations only. The works of Amit Chaudhuri, Upamanyu Chatterjee or Anita Desai betray nostalgia for the paternalistic feudalism by prescribing a sort of bond with mutual dependence between servants and masters. This may be seen in the frequent recollections by adult-narrators of their idyllic childhood relationship with servants. A servant may at times find fulfilment in the relationship with the master's family just as it is also not improbable that the master's family at times deals with servants as a part of the family. But the fact remains that, this relationship always carried elements of power. Anand was the sole writer who tried to see the servant-master as exploitative. But he too succumbed to glib generalisations. He created ideal figures, gave them middle class characteristics and then made them suffer pathetically to elicit sympathy from readers.

Chapter Five "Marginalization of the Servant's Space", shows how in the texts of Desai, Chaudhuri and Chatterjee, the lived "space" of the servant serve as another site for the othering of the servant and the construction of the upper/middle class identity. Their work not only ascribes a metonymic relationship between the servants and their space, but also manipulates the "observed" domestic space to deny to the servants as little space

as possible, push him to the margins and thus render him invisible as much as possible. Though their work deals with the middle class domestic scene, the focalization sets the servant's quarters entirely apart from the family's living space reflecting the bias that domestics should inhabit areas of the home where the work was to be performed. Even when their narratives move beyond these self-imposed boundaries, there is a kind of vagueness or summary dismissal.

My conclusion argues that the world-view of Indian fiction in English as depicted in Mulk Raj Anand, Attia Hosain, Anita Desai, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Amit Chaudhuri and Arundhati Roy is inadequate and presents a circumscribed reality where domestic servants are occluded. What remains unaddressed in them is the distribution of power within the Indian family, particularly with reference to domestic servants.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled “**A Critical Study of Domestic Servants in Indian Fiction in English**” being submitted to the Department of English & Foreign Languages, Tezpur University, Tezpur, Assam in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, has previously not formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or any other similar title or recognition.

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TEZPUR UNIVERSITY


CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “**A Critical Study of Domestic Servants in Indian Fiction in English**” submitted to the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tezpur University in part fulfilment for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English is a record of research work carried out by **Mr. Sanjib Sahoo** under my supervision and guidance.

All help received by him from various sources have been duly acknowledged.

No part of this thesis has been submitted elsewhere for award of any other degree.

Dated: January 15, 2009


Supervisor : **Dr. Prasanta Kumar Das**
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PREFACE

The present work resulted from an accidental remark made during an informal discussion of the departmental Book Club, Diphu Government College. The remark was about the relative unimportance shown to domestic servants by a particular Indian author in his work even though they seemed to be a ubiquitous presence in Indian life. One thing led to another and with the valuable feedback from departmental colleagues, the germ of this thesis took shape. It grew with more extensive readings in the vast and variegated field of Indian fiction in English. Though the work has tried to encompass as many writers and texts as possible, it concentrates predominantly on a few major writers and some of their texts. The present work started out by focusing on select works of four major and representative Indian novelists in English namely, Mulk Raj Anand, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Amit Chaudhuri and Arundhati Roy. In the course of time, it was decided to take in the works of Attia Hosain and Anita Desai too to make the thesis more comprehensive. Anand's Untouchable and Coolie; Hosain's novel Sunlight on a Broken Column; Desai's Fire on the Mountain, Where Shall We go this Summer? and Fasting, Feasting; Chatterjee's English, August and The Last Burden; Chaudhuri's A Strange and Sublime Address, Freedom Song and A New World; and Roy's The God of Small Things have been included for detailed analysis. But the work also refers freely and rather copiously from the works of other Indian English novelists and short story writers. The endeavour of this thesis is to open up the field of literary domestic servants for further conceptualization and to encourage parallel investigations into literatures in other Indian languages.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The memory of gratitude is not best served by the neat lists of people and places that acknowledgements can accommodate. The help we receive is a more haphazard affair.
- Homi K. Bhaba

I would like to thank firstly my Supervisor, Dr. P. K. Das, Reader, Department of English & Foreign Languages, Tezpur University, for all his valuable advice, suggestions and critical comments throughout the programme. I am grateful for his immense patience even when I could not make any progress in my work. He always had words of encouragement when I was discouraged. I do hope that this work measures up to his expectations. I am also grateful to Dr. M. M. Sarma, Head, Department of English & Foreign Languages and Dr. B. Danta, Dean of Humanities, Tezpur University. Both of them listened to my vague and illogical arguments with patience and cleared my doubts time and again. I would also like to thank the rest of the faculty of EFL department. I would mention here the help from the office staff of EFL department and Tezpur University. I would also like to acknowledge the co-operation to all the staff of Central Library, Tezpur University; library of Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi; Sahitya Akademi library, Delhi; Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla; and National Library, Kolkata.

I was lucky to have the support of my colleagues including Madam Machurina Hussain, Hirakanta Pegu, Dhrubajeet Swargiary, Jelina Moshahary, Kabeen Teronpi, Serdihun Teronpi, Maggie Katharpi, Lengdon Chetia, Jugal Bharali'da', Karabi Das, Larim Taropi, Dipika Swargiary, Sangita Kanoi, Jibon Neog, Suranjana Hasnu, Ranjan Kakoty and several others. The first person to encourage me to do my Ph. D. was Prof. U. B. Pandey. Thank you Sir

I would have not completed this programme without the help of my friends at "AT hostel", Tezpur University - Arindam Sarma, Jyoti Prasad Gogoi, Subasit Borah, and Ajay who made my stay at the hostel a memorable and heady

experience. Emily baidew made me feel at home whenever I visited Tezpur and I would never be able to forget her warm support and repay all the care that she took for me. I would like to express my gratitude to my old friends Neelanjan, Abhijit, Amitabha, Dwijen, Suborto, Litton and Rajuda.

My thanks go to my parents, brothers, Kusum baidew, Minu baidew and my in-laws. I am also grateful to my mama Abyokto Sarma and Mousumi Choudhury who helped me to collect my reference materials. I would have never completed my Ph. D without my wife Bobby who bore my varying moods through the programme with patience. She weathered many storms with me and always took over the daily grind of domestic life so that I could concentrate on my studies. And I cannot forget my little bundle of joy, my daughter Akangsha's constant and welcome interruptions. I am sorry that I cannot name my innumerable students but their love and respect always inspired me to do better

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For my parents

Lilawati Sahoo

and

Bhuban Chandra Sahoo

INTRODUCTION

*The masses are always the others, whom we don't know, and cannot know They are
in fact no masses, there are only ways of seeing people as masses*

Raymond Williams

I

This study seeks to investigate the marginalization of the domestic servant in Indian fiction in English. Servants have always been a ubiquitous fact of Indian reality since ancient times. In spite of the increasing modernization with labour saving devices like washing machines, vacuum cleaners, refrigerators, electric ovens, etc. servants have not become wholly redundant. As far as literary servants are concerned most Indian novelists in English, in an attempt to reinforce the typicality of an “Indian” household, have included domestic servants in their narratives. But in reality the literary servant has been treated as a mere corporeal trace in somebody else’s stories. These novelists cultivate a selective blindness towards servants. They tend to read servants as cheats and shirkers; as dirty, conniving minions who need to be kept under a firm control; as loyal pinheads whose only ambition is to serve their masters. Servants are represented either as passive victims or incorrigible scoundrels but never as normal people. Thus the general tenor of Indian English fiction¹ on servants involves either scathing complaints or eulogies. The body, labour, and living quarters of the domestic servant is simply elided in Indian English fiction. For an initial illustration of this marginalisation of servants, we can turn to a passage from Upamanyu Chatterjee’s *English, August* (1988). The novel deals with the existential anguish of a young urban Indian, Agastya Sen, who joins the Indian Administrative Service and is posted in the small town of Madna in the backwaters of Southern India. However, this novel, like most literary accounts of middle class Indian life, is marked with “absences” that a close reading reveals. The one that concerns us the most in the context of our study is the rather dismissive and condescending attitude displayed in the novel towards the domestic servants. We can refer to a seemingly innocuous paragraph in the middle of the novel where the protagonist visits his uncle’s house for rest and succour.

The Garhwali servant, a cheerful teenager, appeared, said, “namaste” and took away Agastya’s bag. Agastya had spent, off and on, almost six years in that house. . . . It was a three-bedroom house, simple The servant cooked well. Simple things, good food, a lawn shaded by neem, jaracanda and gulmohar . . . in Madna his only ambition had grown to be to clutch these simple things.² [emphasis added]

A casual reader of the above extract would sympathise with the protagonist's desire for "simple" things as a bulwark against the overwhelming existential angst that pervades the novel. The Indian bureaucratic set-up as projected in the novel is a cesspool of the quotidian and the meaninglessness into which an unwilling Agastya is being sucked. But the novel, like much Indian English fiction, is guilty of a collective amnesia, particularly towards the lower class servant. In the above extract, the servant is summarily dismissed as a "cheerful" Garhwali servant. At one stroke, the narrative erases not only his name but also his labour – the back breaking domestic chores of cooking, cleaning and maintaining the "simple" three-bedroom house. The "cheerful" tag deludes the casual reader into accepting the myth of the happy household where the servant is more than happy to serve his masters. The exploitation of the servant, a mere teenager who must have been working for several years without much hope of improvement in his conditions, has been sidelined in the narrative. And so are the marks of coercion that underline the relationship between him and the master. What is instead projected by the text is a middle class utopia of an idyllic home. The literary servant's role, thus, is limited merely to appear, say "namaste", take away bags, cook well and so on and so forth.

The attitude displayed here towards domestic servants is not an odd or highly singular instance. As further illustration, we can refer to an example from *Freedom Song* (1998), a work of one of Upamanyu's contemporaries, namely Amit Chaudhuri.

"Get up, you [Nando] lazy man!" she [Khuku] commanded him.
"Give us tea!"

Nando went on sleeping. . . . She pulled back the curtains which were drawn at night for no particular reason by Jochna before she went home. . . . As if out of some vestigial survival of embarrassment, Nando rose from the carpet, dragging his blanket behind him, a dark four-foot-ten-inch demon, and walked dolefully towards the kitchen.³ [emphasis added]

Amit Chaudhuri has been acknowledged as an author who has been successful in catching the general tenor of Indian middle class existence. But in this vignette of a routine morning scene of middle class existence in metropolitan Kolkata, we find similar traces of misrepresentation of servants. Khuku's harsh tagging of her servant Nando as inherently "lazy" is a standard middle class stereotype of the servant. More striking is the description of Nando as "a dark four-foot-ten-inch demon". In fact, throughout the novel,

the narrative refers to Nando constantly as a “demon”, “vermin”, or “pest”. It would be wrong to assume that he is demonised for no particular reason. In fact, this representation of servants as physically ugly is common to most Indian English fiction and even found in fiction written in the regional languages. Indian novels in English have naturalized this representation of servant’s physical deformity as analogous to mental puerility and cultural lack. Servants are seldom presented as normal in Indian fiction in English.

If the servant’s body or labour receives a raw deal in Indian English fiction, so does his/her living quarters. Indian fiction in English deals extensively with the domestic arena of the middle class and spares no opportunity to present it in detail. Yet it does not spare much literary space to the living quarters of the servant. Most often, servants, if not shown living with the master’s household, are summarily dismissed as inhabiting a slum or some such unsanitary place. The tone towards the servant’s space is always generalised, vague and dismissive. This is true even in novels where there are extensive descriptions of the household. “Not long after she had taken him back, Khuku had heard him [Nando] coughing, and saw him lying about like a sack on the carpet, utterly tired. Dr Mitra, who lived nearby, had come down to take a look at this fatigued specimen, and had advised that a test be done, for TB. Apparently it was still widespread in the bastis and areas these people lived in” (*Freedom* 72) [emphasis added]. Again, Kasibai, the maid from Upamanyu Chatterjee’s *The Last Burden* (1993) is referred to by her master Jamun as a “veteran scrubber from the intestines of some slum, whose most bountiful regulars were crimson-eyed truckdrivers . . .” [emphasis added].⁴

The body, labour and the space of the domestic servant are elided in Indian English fiction. Servants never acquire more than passing references in such narratives about the Indian domestic scene which most Indian English writers seek to portray. Indian English fiction is restricted to the experiences of the privileged middle/upper class ignoring the lived reality of subalterns like servants. Most Indian English fiction, forced by its ideological orientations, tolerates within it certain absences about servants. And it is these absences of the texts that have to be scrutinized. These texts erase the marks of exploitation and domination in the master-servant relationship.

The study of domestic servants, even in literary texts, is problematic since it is a nebulous term complicated by various factors like gender, religion, caste, and even age.

Indian servants have been aged or young (even minors), male or female (in medieval times, eunuchs were preferred for certain jobs), rural or urban, local or migrant, part-time or full time worker. Certain communities have been preferred for specific work at different times. In the predominantly castist Indian (Hindu) household Brahmins or other high castes were preferred as cooks since it was accepted that they were ritually pure and their cooking would be objectionable to none. In Shashi Deshpande's story "The Boy" we see such a servant in Subbayya, a high caste Udipi brahmin working in the house of the narrator's grandfather. "He [Subbayya] was a dictator; nobody could tell him what to do. He decided what he would give us to eat – and that was that. I [the narrator] imagine that they put up with him not only because he was a good cook, but that he could provide meals on time, something that grandfather was very particular about".⁵ In the story above we are presented with the situation where the cook, on account of his high caste, controls the master's family rather than the other way round. But we must remember that the narrator is not the master, but a young girl and hence the power of the servant is exaggerated. We would later see the imperatives behind such literary presentations of the master-servant relationship where the latter is vested with more authority. The prejudice against low caste servants is not altogether absent in communities of other religious dispensations. In fact, Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things (1997) demonstrates how caste plays a role even in Christian households. While the low caste Velutha is discriminated and done to death by the Ayemenem household, Kochu Maria, the cook enjoys an insider's position in the same household on account of her superior caste. But such preferences too had its share of problems as high caste servants were not always plentiful. Swapna M Banerjee cites the example of poor Oriyas pretending to be Brahmins for employment in upper/middle class Bengali households in colonial times.⁶ This was all the more possible, particularly in urban areas, since it was difficult for masters to verify their servants' caste antecedents. But nonetheless, caste continued to play an important factor in the role and position of domestic servants.

All in all, the general feeling has been that servants, at least in the modern age, are in a far better position regarding food, clothing and other basic needs as compared to their earlier counterparts or even other subalterns in the contemporary time. The prevailing middle class attitude has been that servants form a part of the family and are at times treated better than they would have been otherwise. Servants, unlike slaves, also are not forced to work and very often have themselves to blame for their miserable conditions.

Therefore, no matter how badly the servants are treated, they are given a better deal in their masters' houses than they would receive in society. Such attitudes are reflected not only in the manner servants are represented in the literary texts but also, perhaps, account for the lack of critical attention to their exploitation. The indispensability of servants in real life is not matched in their representation in fictional accounts. In literary representations the exploitation of servants is glossed over in a number of ways and the purpose of this study is to underline the marginalisation of servants in fictional narratives.

The textual strategy would be to “read against the grain” of what seems to be the “text’s dominant preoccupations and major strategies”.⁷ Indian English novels privilege the upper/middle class and speak of/for the servant. We would pinpoint all those absences in the texts, particularly those areas of life of servants that are not dipped into even when these texts professed to deal with servants. However, a note of clarification has to be given in this regard. The claim of the study that Indian English fiction marginalizes servants does not mean that the selected texts are not works of art. Our aim is to point out that “some of the most valourized” and “‘Bookered’ achievements in current Indian English fiction” are in reality “much more problematic and hegemonic”⁸ than what authors/critics have already acknowledged so far. Indian English writers may “possess creative talent”, with admirable “narratological skills” and “sophisticated” art of “story-telling”.⁹ But we are not concerned with these qualities as the purpose of this study is to expose the authors for ignoring the servant and subscribing to the common knowledge/constructions about servants. Such a lack could be a result of the location of the Indian English novelists who are almost exclusively from the upper/middle classes. The publishing and circulation of the novels, written in a language which in Indian context is associated with privilege and power, and the location of the readers, predominantly upper/middle classes, could also be seen as other factors working in this regard. To sum up briefly these works do reflect, reproduce and perhaps contribute to the existing hierarchies exploiting the servants. The study focuses on the efforts, artistic and ideological, to “contain” the servants and their presence in the literary texts. “. . . literary works should be viewed as constructs, not mirror images of a pre-existing reality. These constructs, moreover, served to naturalise the values of a dominant order and hence repressed those which threatened to negate that process.”¹⁰ “Servants in novels may not be real characters, but many of the assumptions novels make about servants provide

invaluable information [particularly of the middle class attitude towards servants], and information that it is difficult to get elsewhere.”¹¹

II

There has been a steadily growing realization in the West of the neglect of servants in scholarship, particularly in social anthropological studies.¹² So far as literary servants are concerned Bruce Robbins' The Servant's Hand: English Fiction from Below (1986) is a path breaking work on domestic servants in English fiction. He also commented on the rising cosmopolitan phenomenon of “au pair” in “Upward Mobility in the Postcolonial Era: Kincaid, Mukherjee, and the Cosmopolitan Au Pair”. Mark Thornton Burnett's Masters and Servants in English Renaissance Drama and Culture: Authority and Obedience (1997) and Linda Anderson's A Place in the Story: Servants and Service in Shakespeare's Plays (2005) are some works dealing with literary servants but in a different genre i.e. drama.¹³

In India too, there has been a steadily increasing literature on domestic servants in fields other than literary criticism.¹⁴ Regrettably most literary criticism done on Indian novels tend to leave the “household and the family relatively unproblematized”,¹⁵ particularly with reference to servants. This is because critics “have viewed the so-called public world outside their domestic space as the ‘real’ research arena, and their private home space as a neutral, and intellectually uninteresting, launching pad for the rest.”¹⁶ Indian English writing and its critics try to trace in their works a sort of dichotomy of middle class male oppression versus female subjugation, forgetting the varied nuances in between, and particularly that involving the servants. One fall-out of such lopsided interest on the part of both authors and critics has been the neglect of the subalterns in the domestic sphere like servants. Such absence of literary/critical awareness of the exploitation of servants is understandable to a certain extent. The exposure of the “privileges” that one has “managed to squeeze out of this society by virtue of . . . [one's] gender, race, class or sexuality”¹⁷ is unsettling. Therefore, instead of admitting one's own implication in such oppressive structures, the relations are sanitised while represented. This is precisely what happens in the servant-master relation in Indian English fiction. Critics of Indian fiction in English have generally tended to lump servants with other

subalterns in a study of generalized oppression. Thus, their uniqueness, both in their oppression as well as resistance, is somehow bypassed or ignored. Thus, servants with their daily victimization or modest acts of resistance get scant attention from literary critics

Only a few literary scholars have focused exclusively on representations of servants in Indian English fiction like Tabish Khair and Mohit K. Ray. The former deals partially with the problem first in “Caste in Indian English Fiction: More Oppression?” and later on, more extensively in his book Babu Fictions: Alienation in Contemporary English Novels (2001). Khair is interested not in servants per se, but in the more general “Coolie” class i.e. the predominantly lower caste, non-anglicised and rural class. Servants no doubt share certain common features with other subalterns in the Indian society. But it is also no less true that servants are a unique subaltern group. For instance, their work as well as pay is flexible and so are their relations within the family. Some servants like the aya are paid more or loved more than, say, the sweeper, while an old servant’s position in the family’s power hierarchy is higher than a young/new servant. Maids are liable to be exploited not only for their labour but also for sex. Again, a cook and a sweeper, though engaged in the same household, occupy different positions on account of their different castes. For instance, Kochu Maria and Velutha both work for the Ayemenem household in The God of Small Things. But while the latter, on account of his caste is looked down upon by the family as well as Kochu Maria, the former enjoys a close relationship with the family. Servants are subjected to exploitation while being showered with personal attention. All this complexity is reflected in the literary representations of servants. Therefore, servants – their bodies, labour and space in literary texts – require special attention. Though Khair’s Babu Fictions deals extensively with the subaltern or coolie class, it has certain differences with our work. For instance, he points out the absence of heavy industrial landscape in Indian fiction in English.¹⁸ This is somewhat true yet we have to admit it has very little import on the representation of domestic servants who are more confined to the household. Of course, he deals with the living quarters of the servants, or rather its absence, in Indian fiction in English:

. . . the author [Amit Chaudhuri] does not even once take us into the quarters of the urban poor (servants) in India, who merely appear as cleaners of the family-flat and users of the next-door toilet. What is as surprising is the fact that Chaudhuri can and does

write powerfully about the urban poor in England and takes us into *their* quarters! This is a powerful instance of an often-overlooked fact – that the socio-economic gap between classes/castes in India is harder to bridge than racial differences between the Babu and the Englishmen, both of whom do share many more discursive commonalities.¹⁹ [italics author's]

However, such oversight is not restricted to Amit Chaudhuri only and this is where the present work, by dealing with servants in Indian fiction in English exhaustively, would be able to add to Khair's work. To take another example, Khair is partly wrong to ascribe to Attia Hosain's works a world where servants are integrated with their masters. Referring to Arun Mukherjee's Oppositional Aesthetics: Readings from a Hyphenated Space (1994), Khair states that servants are more visible and deeply integrated into domestic life in Sunlight on a Broken Column . . . than most contemporary *Indian English* novels" [italics author's].²⁰ If we examine the work more closely we would find that it is not so and even in Hosain the prejudices against servants remain and the picture of a feudal world with its integrated servants is used as a narrative tool to critique the modern master-servant relationship which is "seen" based predominantly on cash-nexus.

Mohit K. Ray's "The Servants' of Amit: A Study in Ambivalence" is less extensive and deals with servants in two novels of Amit Chaudhuri. Using rather extensive and exhaustive textual quotations, Ray tries to posit the conclusion that Chaudhuri's "portrayal of the retinue of menials as they [dis]appear and [non]exist to the consciousness of their 'radical' masters," "operate to bring out some of the inherent paradoxes/hypocrisies of officially approved 'radicalism'"²¹ portrayed in his novels.

A couple of illuminating works on Indian servants, though not associated with Indian fiction in English, are Swapna M. Banerjee's essay "Down Memory Lane: Representations of Domestic Workers in Middle-Class Personal Narratives of Colonial Bengal" and later on her book Men, Women, And Domestic: Articulating Middle-Class Identity in Colonial Bengal (2004). Banerjee uses extensively autobiographies, confessional writings, official records etc. to study the influence of servants on the middle class in colonial Bengal. One major limiting aspect of Banerjee's work is its concentration on Bengali literature and to colonial Bengal. It is not that most of her insights are not true in the larger Indian context. Banerjee correctly notes that the humble

servant played not an inconsiderable part in the development and shaping of Bengali fiction, not to mention, the Bengali middle class. The relationship between the [Bengali] bhadramahila and the domestic workers in colonial Bengal was not straightforward. “Hierarchy, dependence, and power governed the [mistress-servant] relationships”.²²

As our study involves domestic servants in Indian English fiction, it would have been very fruitful if all the texts and writers were to be taken into consideration. But it has a highly chequered lineage and, as revealed by a review in the next chapter, would include a huge body of work. Almost every writer, major and minor, has dealt with the Indian domestic scenario, which inevitably includes (or excludes) servants. As mentioned in the Preface, our study, therefore, proposes to deal with select works of six major Indian novelists in English in detail. The writers selected for close reading include Mulk Raj Anand, Attia Hosain, Anita Desai, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Amit Chaudhuri and Arundhati Roy. Anand deserves to be included for being a part of the first mature burst of Indian fiction in English and primarily due to his overwhelming interest in the lower classes including servants as well. Untouchable and Coolie are the two works of Anand that have been taken for close reading. Attia Hosain’s novel Sunlight on a Broken Column is replete with servants and hence included. We cannot ignore Anita Desai’s novels for their representation of the variegated middle-class Indian life. Desai’s Fire on the Mountain, Where Shall We go this Summer? and Fasting, Feasting has been selected for close reading though references have been made to her other works. Upamanyu Chatterjee and Amit Chaudhuri are the more prominent among the new writers of the late 1980s and 1990s, a period when most critics and readers agree that Indian English fiction became more conspicuous with literary awards and critical interest pouring in. Chatterjee’s English, August and The Last Burden have been selected for detailed study. So far as Amit Chaudhuri is concerned we have included his A Strange and Sublime Address, Freedom Song, and A New World for detailed analysis. Arundhati Roy’s inclusion is based on the fact that her only novel The God of Small Things has been praised for its sympathetic portrayal of the subaltern, namely Velutha. We would expose that her sympathy does not extend to her other subalterns particularly the domestic servants like Kochu Maria. The “literary servant”, however, “is too repetitive for treatment by author, just as it is too minor, fragmentary, and marginal to any given text to be treated by work”.²³ Therefore, references have also been made to works of other Indian English novelists and short story writers such as Bankimchandra Chatterjee, R. K. Narayan, Raja

Rao, Nayantara Sahgal, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Githa Hariharan, Shashi Deshpande, Manil Suri, Pankaj Mishra, Bharati Mukherjee, Vikram Chandra, Shama Futehally, Abha Dawesar, Jhumpa Lahiri, Ginu Kamani, Namita Gokhale, Thrity Umrigar, Kiran Desai and Arvind Adiga to make the work more inclusive. Here Indian writing in English “include[s] only the writings of those who are Indian and who have written in English.”²⁴ The texts that would be encompassed within this study would cover both the colonial as well as independent India and the factors of race, caste, gender or class themselves would undergo a vast change. But in spite of radical changes the servant-master relationship remains embedded in exploitation and marginalization of servants in real and literary life.

Though textual evidence on servants have been culled from writers like Paul Scott, he is not an Indian novelist in English per se. Passing references have been made to Indian writers whose work have been translated into English like Rabindranath Tagore, Munshi Premchand, and Ismat Chughtai. But to extend our inferences on to a broader field of Indian literature, extensive parallels and examples from English translations of seminal Indian writers in other Indian languages or “bhāṣā”²⁵ writers would have to be incorporated. This would naturally make our work unwieldy. Our study of the marginalization of literary domestic servants, thus, is an attempt to open up the field of literary servants in Indian literature for further conceptualization.

The present work is concerned with the thematic concerns of the Indian English novelists with particular reference to domestic servants. The work attempts to bring out in the texts the class, caste, and gender bias against domestic servants. It employs concepts like “labour”, “class”, etc from Marxist thought but the thesis is not an endeavour towards it. Certain insights from the Subaltern school inspired by Ranajit Guha and others are also incorporated. Inspired by the Post-positivist school of theory, this work seeks to discredit the one-sided presentation of servants in Indian English fiction while arguing for a truer version of experience and identity. Since the work is primarily on literary texts, it also borrows freely and rather randomly from various schools of thought. Terry Eagleton’s comment in this regard is more than apt.

[The] . . . lack of methodological unity in literary studies should not worry us unduly. . . . Perhaps we should celebrate the plurality of critical methods, adopt a tolerantly ecumenical posture and

rejoice in our freedom from the tyranny of a single procedure. . . .
For one thing, not all of these methods are mutually compatible. . . .
. For another thing, some of these “methods” are hardly methods at
all.²⁶

The study would retain the terms “domestic servant” and “master” instead of a more politically correct “household worker” or “employer”. The former pair of terms may sound pejorative in the present egalitarian era. But the primary motive of this study is to highlight the marks of exploitation and coercion and this would be helped by retaining the master-servant nomenclature. The term “master” would be used as an broad term to include the mistress and all the members of the employer’s family. Of course, the relationship of the servant with different members of the family, for instance the children, might be different from that with the master or mistress. Again, the relationship of the male servant with the mistress would naturally be different from that of the maidservant with the mistress. It is “relatively rare for a [servant] character to owe but a single service, to a single master or mistress, for a single reason. Even within a household, the question arises: . . . [is the servant the] master’s servant, or . . . [the] mistress’s?”²⁷ In the case of outcaste-sweepers like Bakha it becomes more complex because they perform irreplaceable service and yet master-less in the sense that they belong to the community at large. Clear cut rules and duties would always remain an ideal in domestic service. But the paradigmatic relationship between the servant, male or female, and the master’s family is one of power and domination. By focusing on the marginalization of the servant’s body, labour and space, this study seeks to point out that the world-view offered by Indian English novelists as inadequate.

Chapter One tries to encompass a review of Indian fiction in English, and English (and for that matter American) fiction with reference to servants. This has been all done primarily to highlight the need for our study as well as for putting it in perspective. The second chapter tries to tackle some of the problems arising out of the study of servants primarily but not exclusively in Indian English fiction. It examines some of the problems in applying the concepts such as class or identity in a study of servants. The second chapter also examines the issue of Indian writing in English in the light of the fact whether it could account for the lived realities of subalterns like servants. Each of the succeeding chapters then attempts to analyse the different but systematic ways in which the servant’s body, labour and space, is ignored, glossed over, and/or misrepresented in

Indian English fiction. The division of separate chapters on body, labour and space of the servants is more of a strategy than a result of distinct, watertight distinctions between the marginalization of their bodies, labour or space. It is to appropriate the servants' labour that their bodies are marginalized and the very erasure of their bodies depends on their being confined to the margins of the house.

Notes and References

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3. Amit Chaudhuri, Freedom Song (London: Picador, 1998) 3. All subsequent references are to this edition and quotations are incorporated in the text under the title Freedom followed by the page no. in parenthesis.
4. Upamanyu Chatterjee, The Last Burden (New Delhi: Penguin, 1993) 88. All subsequent references are to this edition and quotations are incorporated in the text under the title Burden followed by the page no. in parenthesis.
5. Shashi Deshpande, “The Boy,” Collected Stories Vol. I (New Delhi: Penguin, 2003) 162-170, 163.
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7. Rob Pope, Textual Intervention: Critical and Creative Strategies for Literary Studies (London: Routledge, 1995) 2.
8. Tabish Khair, Introduction, Babu Fictions: Alienation in Contemporary Indian English Novels by Khair (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2001) ix-xvi, xv.
9. R. W. Desai, “Catering to the West through Stereotypes: Some Reflections on Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri,” New Concerns: Voices in Indian Writings, ed. Sushma Arya and Shalini Sikka (Delhi: Macmillan, 2006) 73-83, 74.

10. Gary Day, Class (London: Routledge, 2001) 202.

11. Bridget Hill, Servants: English Domestic in the Eighteenth Century (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996) 21.

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21. Mohit K. Ray, "The Servants' of Amit: A Study in Ambivalence," Critical Responses to Indian Writing in English: Essays in Honour of Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, ed. K. Balachandran (New Delhi: Sarup, 2004) 126-48, 147.
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23. Bruce Robbins, The Servant's Hand: English Fiction from Below (1986; Durham: Duke UP, 1993) xii.
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CHAPTER ONE

A GENEALOGY OF LITERARY SERVANTS

the literary servant has not undergone proportional changes servants are the commonplaces of many times and places

– Bruce Robbins

I

This chapter attempts to encompass a review of representations of servants not only in Indian fiction in English, other Indian literatures, English (including American) fiction, but also popular narratives such as print media. Such a review of the literary representations would reveal the universality of the prejudices against servants cutting across cultures and time and also would expose the complex working and overlapping of factors like class, caste, gender, age, race etc. in the constitution of this group. For instance, we have servants like the untouchable Bakha (Untouchable) and the “paravan” Velutha (The God of Small Things) who have been condemned to servitude socially. Then we have servants like Munoo (Coolie), Nando (Freedom Song) who are forced not by caste but by poverty and lack of viable alternatives to eke out a living till better prospects arise. It is another matter that they never find such better prospects. But Munoo, unlike the untouchable Bakha, can always run away or leave his job, as he really does in the novel. Then again there is sexual exploitation, particularly of maidservants. Young maids are more likely to be sexually exploited, though the young male servant can also be the victim of sodomy as we see in the case of Chamundi in The Mammaries of the Welfare State. Interestingly such relationships particularly in the case of maidservants, for instance the one involving Kasibai (The Last Burden), are presented as mutually fulfilling in literary texts.

A review of Indian English fiction would also reveal that there are constant references to servants, howsoever slight, in almost every minor and major writer. This is not surprising as the domestic sphere was important for these writers. As such it would be profitable to examine comprehensively all the writers and their works. But as mentioned earlier this would render the work unmanageably lengthy. Thus, a review would help us to bring into focus those writers and their works that abound in servants and hence pertinent to our study. However, due care has been taken to include most of the major figures while reviewing Indian English fiction.

As far as Indian English fiction is concerned, right from the early models such as Bankimchandra’s Rajmohan’s Wife (1864), the ubiquitous servant has been included. But such inclusion is merely to play little or no significant part and, at most times, to serve as mere filler in the concerns of the middle class such as marital relationships, the

generational gaps, and the gradual erosion of the Indian joint family and its values. In Rajmohan's Wife, for instance, we have maids like Karuna, Suki's mother and a few others shown in the kitchen courtyard scene in Chapter 5 titled "A Letter - a Visit to the Zenana".¹ But Karuna's role is restricted to helping the heroine Matangini while Suki's mother is to help the villain Mathur Ghose to kidnap Matangini. And when servants have been given importance, they serve merely as instruments for the employers' change of heart as we witness in Mrs Richard Collins's The Slayer Slain² (1864-6), an early novel in India published in English and later in Malayalam. Here we have the oppressed subaltern Paulusa, whose little grandson is accidentally killed by the oppressive landlord Koshy Kurien. In return, Paulusa goes on to save Kurien's young daughter from drowning at the cost of his own life. This display of almost pathological loyalty from the servant serves twin purposes: to induce from their heartless masters' remorse and tears from the readers. Though there is "an element of real conflict", yet the remorse of Koshy Kurien is presented "melodramatically" and "when the resolution comes it is too facile to be psychologically convincing."³

Bankim stopped writing in English after Rajmohan's Wife but his apostasy certainly did not dampen the spirits other Indian writers from writing in English in the nineteenth century. Lal Behari Day's Govinda Samanta (1874), Krupabai Sathianandan's Saguna (1895), Swarna Kumari Ghosal's The Fatal Garland (1915), Bal Krishna's The Love of Kusuma (1910), Kshetrapal Chakrabarti's Sarata and Hingana (1895) and Jogendra Singh's Nasrin (1915) are some such works that dealt with sociological issues. "These novels are deficient in literary merit and enjoy only historical importance. Their themes and sentiments are Indian but the treatment and the technique are Victorian in that the episodes are spun around central characters and the didactic are much too loud."⁴ Therefore, our study would concentrate more on works after the third decade of twentieth century when such efforts reached its maturity at the hands of the trinity of Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, and R. K. Narayan. With a literary career spanning more than six decades, his first work The Lost Child and Other Stories appearing in 1934 and the last Tales Told By an Idiot: Selected Short Stories in 1999, and with sixteen novels, a novelette and nine collections of short stories to his credit, Mulk Raj Anand is one of the prolific Indian writers in English. Anand deserves to be commended on his sympathetic interest in the lower classes including servants, which even after seven decades is perhaps unsurpassed in Indian English literature. In fact, it is a sad indication of Indian English

fiction's lack of interest in the subaltern class. If in Coolie (1936) and Untouchable (1935) the politically committed Anand deals with servants and outcastes, then in Two Leaves and A Bud (1935) he deals with plantation labour; peasants in The Village (1939), Across the Black Waters (1940) and The Sword and the Sickle (1942). The Old Woman and the Cow (1960, published later under the title Gauri in 1976), and The Road (1961). However, Anand's sympathy for subalterns never left his work even in later works like Private Life of an Indian Prince (1953) where he tried to grapple with the idiosyncrasies of the high and the mighty. In this novel we see in the relationship of the narrator, Dr. Hari Shankar, the young royal physician and his bearer Francis, remnants of Anand's undying interest in the lower classes: ". . . rationalizing Francis's default by thinking that the relationship of a master and servant was the most humiliating and that the basic defect lay in me [Hari] for employing a bearer on the modest pay of rupees thirty plus board and lodging, when the actual worth of Francis's human personality was much higher, . . ." ⁵ Anand also deals with the downtrodden in his numerous stories published in The Lost Child and Other Stories (1934), The Barber's Trade Union and Other Stories (1944), The Tractor and the Corn Goddess and Other Stories (1947), Reflections on the Golden Bed (1947), The Power of Darkness and Other Stories (1958), Lajwanti and Other Stories (1966), Between Tears and Laughter (1973), and Tales Told by an Idiot: Selected Short Stories (1999). In Untouchable, Anand for the first time placed an untouchable at the centre of the story and attempted to expose the social (and perhaps literary) prejudices against this most marginalized class. Dead against the dictum of "art for art's sake", Anand asserts that "any writer who said that he was not interested in la *condition humaine* was either posing or yielding to a fanatical love of isolationism . . ." [italics author's]. ⁶ How far Anand succeeds in representing the subalterns is another matter and would be subjected to detailed analysis later on. Anand's contemporary Raja Rao also deals with servants in short stories like "Jhavni" or the one on Bhedia in On the Ganga Ghat (1993). But he succumbed to stereotyping as evident in the lovable but idiotic Bhedia who prays to Shivji: "Take me away, Lord, and make me anything but make me a good servant". ⁷ R. K. Narayan is more known for his middle class characters of Malgudi and servants are a rarity, though not completely absent from his novels. Concerned with the fast-disappearing Muslim feudal families Attia Hosain's only novel Sunlight on a Broken Column (1961) and short story collection Phoenix Fled (1953) are teeming with servants. In her fiction servants are shown as integrated into the domestic household and sharing reciprocal and dependant relationship with their masters; a

relationship where “. . . it is not only the wealthy and titled who live for *Izzat* and die for *Sharam*. The same primal passions possess those who live in the lowly servants’ quarters of the compound” [italics author’s].⁸ But such feudal paternalism is represented as dying out in the modern capitalistic milieu; the earlier organic master-servant relationships have been counterpoised to the new mercenary relationships. How far such representations about the integration of the servants into the employer’s family were true or ideologically motivated is debatable. It will suffice to note here that there are hierarchies amongst the servants and not all of them have been accepted into the master’s family; servants are always the “outsider”. Anita Desai’s novels are also characteristic of Indian English fiction – full of oblique references to servants. For instance, in *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) we have Ram Lal, the taciturn cook, while in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1982) we have the stereotypical lazy servants in Moses and his wife Miriam. In *Fasting, Feasting* (1999), there are servants like the aya, mali, and the cook. Desai never failed to include the ubiquitous servant even in her first novel, *Cry, The Peacock* (1968). Here Maya, the hyper sensitive heroine is taken by her old ayah to the albino who sees her horoscope and predicts the disastrous end. Servants are, however, only incidental to the middle class concerns in her novels. Stereotyped servants appear in the more politically inclined works of Nayantara Sahgal and even in her partly biographical work, *From Fear Set Free* (1962) where we see the faithful retainer Sundar. In *Rich Like Us* (1983) we have Kumar the faithful retainer to Rose and her Indian husband. Salman Rushdie’s novels are full of servants playing varying roles in the plots, such as Mary Pereira in *Midnight’s Children* (1980), Shahbanou the aya of *Shame* (1983), the faithful Lambajan with his wife Aya in *The Moor’s Last Sigh* (1995). For instance, it is Mary Pereira who switches the babies of Ahmed Sinai and Wee Willie Winkie at the hospital. So the narrator, who is actually the son of poor Wee Willie Winkie, grows up as Saleem Sinai, the son of a rich man while Shiva is the actual son of Ahmed Sinai. Here we see Rushdie’s constant references, mostly satiric, to “Bollywood” films which consisted of plots based on switching of babies, the subsequent misunderstanding and final recognition. Such films, more often than not, portray the nurse or ayah mostly as Christian with generic names like Mary. Needless to add, all these nurses are represented as faithful, loving, and helpful.

Upamanyu Chatterjee’s *English, August* (1988) heralded a burst of Indian English fiction in the late 1980s and 1990s. In this novel, we have Vasant, the sour caretaker-

cum-cook who makes Agastya's life in Madna unbearable. Chatterjee, unlike most Indian writers in English, tends to be frank in one aspect of the servant-master relationship, i.e. the sexual. Kaisbai in The Last Burden (1993), Chamundi in The Mammaries of the Welfare State (2000), Gopinath, Harilal in Weight Loss (2006) are some such servants who have sexual relations with their masters. Therefore, we have included his first two novels in our study. Among the new generation of writers of the 1990s included in our study is Amit Chaudhuri whose works abounds with servants. In all his novels, A Strange and Sublime Address (1991), Afternoon Raag (1993), Freedom Song (1998), and A New World (2000), he does not fail to include servants while trying to record the middle class ennui of metropolitan Kolkata. The first novel is divided into two parts; the first contains untitled 14 chapters dealing with Sandeep and his mother's visit to Chhotomama; the second part contains 9 stories – each a short vignette on different but somewhat repetitive middle class domestic scene. Though in the first part we are presented with servants like Saraswati, it is these last nine stories that servants are dealt with more frequently. In fact, not less than five of these deals predominantly with servants and two, namely, “Jadav” and “The New Maidservant” deal exclusively with servants. Servants play a not an insignificant part in other three stories titled “Laksmi Poornima Night”, “Episode Concerning a House” and “When We Moved to this House”. In Freedom Song, we have several servant characters including Nando, Jochna, Uma, and little Haridasi. Even in his short story collection Real Time (2002) we have servants as in the story “The Man from Khurda District”. Though Arundhati Roy has written only one novel, The God of Small Things (1997), it has been included in our study for one of its servant characters, Kochu Maria. She may not suffer from the discriminations of the caste system like Velutha. But she is also discriminated and no less exploited and this is something that eludes the attention from both the author and the critics alike. Velutha may not be a domestic servant per se but he and his father are like feudal retainers who are forced to render services as and when demanded by the Ayemenem household. Amitav Ghosh also has to his credit the ethnographic-fiction, In an Antique Land (1992), which deals with the search for a servant named Bomma in twelfth century southern India. In his The Glass Palace (2000), Ghosh presents the story of Rajkumar who starts his career as a help to a roadside vendor and who falls in love with a maidservant of the Burmese royalty. Mukul Kesavan's Looking Through Glass (1995) also has certain servants. Manil Suri's The Death of Vishnu (2001) is about the life and death of Vishnu, a servant or odd-job man living in a middle class apartment in Mumbai. Pankaj Mishra's The Romantics (2000)

includes a physically and mentally deficient servant Shyam who would repeat without regard to context a Hindi proverb. Vikram Chandra's short story "Shakti" in Love and Longing in Bombay (1997) represents servants like Ganga who play a stereotypical role in the story.

In women novelists, as we have already seen in the case of Anita Desai, servants particularly maids, figure more conspicuously. This is perhaps because the authors concentrate more women and on the domestic sphere in their fiction. In Shashi Deshpande's That Long Silence (1988) maids like Jeeja and her daughter-in-law named Tara suffer due to their abusive husbands. Maids are doubly oppressed on account of their class and gender. In her Collected Short Stories vol. I (2003) we get to see some short stories on servants like "The Boy" and "The Homecoming". Githa Hariharan in The Thousand Faces of Night (1992) has Mayamma, the old faithful retainer who teaches the middle class protagonist the ability to endure. The afflicted maid occupies the centre stage in Thrity Umrigar's The Space between Us (2005) where we have Bhima, a maidservant working in the house of Sera Dubash who is an affluent Parsi lady in metropolitan Mumbai. Deserted by her husband and son, Bhima lives in the slums with her granddaughter Maya who is given college education by Sera. Bhima, on the other hand, is shown as understanding and sympathetic when Sera was brutalised by her husband and mother-in-law. But their relationship is far from ideal as Sera cannot overcome her middle class repugnance towards Bhima to allow her to sit on the sofa or drink from the same cups used by the Dubash family. At the end Bhima is thrown out by her mistress after Sera's son-in-law impregnates Maya. In Kiran Desai's The Loss of Inheritance (2006) we see the persistence of the servant character. Desai's novel deals primarily with the young protagonist Sai's relationships, amongst others, with the old cook. Namita Gokhale's The Book of Shadows (1999) also contains the old faithful cook. Here we have Lohaniju, an old garrulous cook who looks after Rachita Tiwari, a young lecturer who is traumatised by the suicide of her fiancée and scarred by an acid attack by the sister of her dead fiancée. Arvind Adiga's The White Tiger (2008), the latest offering from Indian English fiction, also has its servant character in Balram Halwai who becomes a successful entrepreneur by murdering his master.

Shama Futehally's Frontiers (2006) deals with servant-master relationship in several short stories like "The First Rains", "Portrait of a Childhood", "Jani's Morning",

“A Birthday”, “The Climb”, and “Sharada”. In the first story we have the sexual relation between the young maid Sarita who falls in love and gets pregnant by her master. She is betrayed by him and commits suicide to escape social ignominy. In most of her stories, Futehally deals with the relationship between the young children and their servants. Servants also figure in other short story anthologies like Jhumpa Lahiri’s The Interpreter of Maladies (1999) which includes the story of a maid, Boorima. Ginu Kamani’s Jungle Girl (1995) features servants in two stories “Maria” and “Shakuntala” while Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s Arranged Marriage (1995) contains “The Maid Servant’s Story”. In all the stories, we have a sexual undertone to the relationships between the maids and the members of the employer’s family. This sexual relationship is also reflected in Abha Daweswar’s Babyji (2005) which deals with the lesbian relationship between the young protagonist Anamika Sharma and her maid, the lower-caste Rani. All the four writers interestingly are Indian born women staying abroad and yet writing stories about Indians which inevitably include the servant. It seems hardly exaggerated to say that in Indian English fiction servants must necessarily figure in any imagining of Indian domestic reality. In fact, works by writers of the greater Indian Diaspora such as V. S. Naipaul also deal with servants. For instance, his A Bend in the River (1979) deal with the trader and storekeeper Salim of Indian origin who buys a small business in a town in a French-speaking Central African state. The novel traces Salim’s personal relationships, among others, with his servant, Metty, the son of slaves from the coast. In his A Free State (1971) we have the story, “One Out of Many,” which explores the disturbing cultural changes forced upon a humble Indian servant, Santosh, when he is uprooted from the pavements of Bombay by his diplomatic employer and taken off to a new life in Washington, D.C. In all these writers including Bharati Mukherjee, we see a surprising tendency to write about India and Indians (including servants) even though they stay and have stayed for a long time abroad with very little indication of ever returning. We can see a kind of explanation in Amitav Ghosh words about Naipaul who did not have “the slightest hesitation in writing novels about places and people – Africa and Africans to take an example – with whom he has only a passing acquaintance”.⁹ On the other hand he has only one largely unnoticed book on white people in Mr. Stone and the Knight’s Companion (1963) though he has spent most of his life there. It is because “England is only too willing to celebrate V. S. Naipaul when he writes about the Other World; they find it much harder to take him seriously when he writes of their own”.¹⁰ For Ghosh the voice of the colonial writer is marginalized in the “mother culture”. And it is only by

writing about the colonial experience that the colonial writer could occupy a space within the western literary canon. The recent success of Arvind Adiga's The White Tiger with its servant-protagonist somehow seems to confirm the suspicion that Indian novelists in English would be feted so long as they stick to a colonialist image of India with poverty, superstition, violence, oppression and what better way to show it than using servants.

Of course, the popular belief that mechanization would render superfluous the servant class has been greatly exaggerated as Bruce Robbins remarks that in "the so-called 'two career' couple, or more generally for wage-earning mothers without the support of the family or the state, there is a new dependence on paid female help in the care of children."¹¹ Bharati Mukherjee's short story "Jasmine" deals with such a cosmopolitan servant who is served tea by her master, a professor of biology and has consensual sex with him while his wife, a performance artist, is away on tour. Similarly Rajeev Balasubramanyam's In Beautiful Disguises (2001) deals with a protagonist who runs away from an arranged marriage and becomes a maidservant. Such servants are basically from the lower middle class and become so by choice. The dialectics of power and exploitation have not been totally erased from the servant-master relationship though new factors have come into play. This proves that a study of servants in Indian English fiction is viable and pertinent.

Representations of servants are not new in Indian literature and nor are the prejudices against them. If we look at the popular Hindu epic, Ramayana, we would find that one of the villainous characters presented is the hunchbacked maidservant, Manthara, who poisons the ears of Queen Kaikeyi against Ram and gets him sent into exile. The representation of servants in Indian literature goes back to two millennia as a glance at such extant Sanskrit plays like Mrichchhakatika¹² reveals. In this play Sudraka gives not only distinct characteristics to such servants or slaves such as Sthavaraka, Vardhamanaka, Radanika and Madanika, but also allows them to play an important role in the successful romance between Charudatta and Vasantasena. In Act II, we find the Vasantasena, a rich courtesan taking in confidence her maid Madanika about her feelings for Charudatta, a formerly rich Brahmin of Ujjayani. This could be interpreted to show the importance of the maid as her confidant. But for all the warmth in the relationship, Madanika remains the slave and unable to marry. This leads her lover Sarvilaka in desperation to steal from Charudatta in order to buy her freedom from Vasantasena's

service. Of course, Vasantasena in a fit of generosity lets off Madanika from her service. Then again we are presented with Cheta and Vita, servants with good hearts, who refuse to side with their evil master, Sakara, in his conspiracy against Charudatta. When Sakara kills or boasts that he has killed Vasantasena in Act VIII, Vita is disgusted and leaves his service. Cheta is tricked and held captive by Sakara to prevent him from revealing the latter's villainy. In Act X, when Charudatta is about to be executed for the murder of Vasantasena, Cheta jumps into the street, chains and all and proclaims the innocence of Charudatta and the guilt of Sakara. But Sakara convinces the Chandalas or executioners that Cheta is a liar and cheat and therefore his statement is not believed. Thus, the stereotype of servants as cheats and liars seems to have a rather ancient pedigree. Mudrarakshasa (Rakshasa and his Signet Ring), a Sanskrit play written by Vishakhadatta (c. 6-7th century) is interesting for it mentions a particular type of domestic servant, a "vishakanyā" or a poison maid. It was believed that such maids, brought up on a special diet of poison, were the ultimate assassins able to kill by a mere touch. Kautilya, the Machiavellian advisor of Chandragupta, sends such a "vishakanyā" to Parvatika, an enemy king and thus assassinates him. Interestingly Chandragupta was supposedly the son of a maidservant.¹³ King Harshadeva's Ratnāvalī composed in the first half of the seventh century depicts King Udayana who falls in love with the maidservant of his first queen and later marries her. But this smooth facilitation of this marriage is only because the maid, Sagarikā who is also called Ratnāvalī "the pearl-garland" after the garland of pearls, by which her identification as a princess gets disclosed later.¹⁴

Thus, domestic servants in the form of slaves, bonded labourers and communal servants like the dalits (erstwhile lower-castes or sudras) have been a feature of the Indian subcontinent since the Vedic times. "The genealogy of servants in India can be traced as far back as recorded history goes – in Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, the Asokan edicts and also in Buddhist and Jain literature that tells us about slaves and *sudras*, both male and female, who worked as domestic servants" [italics author's].¹⁵ Manusmṛti (The Laws of Manu) mentions servants, slaves and the caste system that relegated the lowest caste i.e. the "sudras" to be in perpetual service of the higher castes i.e. the "brahmanas", "kshatriyas" and "vaisyas". However servants have always occupied an ambivalent position even in ancient India. "After the Brahmanas, the kinsmen, and the servants have dined, the householder and his wife may afterwards eat what remains" [emphasis

added].¹⁶ This quotation from The Laws of Manu, Chapter III, 116, in the laws given to the householder, is interesting. Such religious appeal to the householder to treat his servant with affection did not stop the exploitative practices. This ambivalence is reflected in the representations where servants are seen as close companions as well as persons to be avoided.

Medieval households gave rise to a complex dialectics of mutual dependence, mistrust, affection between the servants and the employer's family. Amitav Ghosh's In An Antique Land (1992) deals with the relationship of such a servant who is employed by Ben Yiju, a Jewish merchant from ancient Egypt and settled for business in southern India. The work is fascinating as Ghosh reveals that:

In the Middle Ages institutions of servitude took many forms, and they all differed from "slavery" as it came to be practised after the colonial expansion of the sixteenth century. . . . servitude followed a part of a very flexible set of hierarchies and it often followed a logic completely contrary to that which modern expectations suggest. In the Middle East and northern Indian, for instance, slavery was the principal means of recruitment into some of the most privileged sectors of the army and the bureaucracy. For those who made their way up through that route, "slavery" was thus often a kind of career opening, a way of gaining entry into the highest levels of government.¹⁷

Throughout history the paradigm of master-servant has remained that of exploitation. But there are varying factors and it would be wrong to conflate the modern middle-class master/mistress relationship with his/her servant with that of medieval master/mistress and his/her slave. Ghosh himself hints at this difference when he says that:

Perhaps the most elusive aspect of medieval slavery is its role as spiritual metaphor, as an instrument of the religious imagination. In south India, amongst the pietist and fiercely egalitarian Vachanakara saint-poets . . . slavery was often used as an image to represent the devotee's quest for God: through the transforming power of metaphor the poets became their Lord's servants and lovers, androgynous in their longing; slaves, searching for their master with a passion that dissolved selfhood, wealth, caste and gender¹⁸

The coming of Muslim civilization in the Indian subcontinent increased the role and significance of the domestic servants, but certainly did not lessen the exploitation. In medieval India, slaves were used mostly as domestic servants and in the wealthy households, there were an army of servants, arranged in a hierarchy according to their duties and power they wielded within the household. The presence of the dynasty of rulers who had risen from servitude, namely the Slave dynasty, a part of the Delhi Sultanate from 1206 to 1290 A. D points to such complexity.¹⁹ Iqtidar Husain Siddique gives an idea of the social mobility of this era by referring to *Tārīkh-i Fīrūz Shāhī* written by Ziāuddīn Baranī, a contemporary of the Delhi Sultanate. Siddique writes that people like the barber, the cook, the gardener, and many other base and mean people were elevated to important posts. People like “Pīrā Māli [gardener], who was the meanest and most ignoble person in India, was honoured with the charge of the *dīwān-i wizārat* and raised in this way over and above the *maliks*, nobles, *wālīs* and *muqtas*” [italics author’s].²⁰ Siddique, however, admits that in medieval India too, in spite of social mobility there was criticism for employing recent Indian converts to Islam or low-born people by the Emperor. Such complex relations of medieval India were not to continue for long after the arrival of the colonial Europeans. We would be hard pressed to find any native, slave or servant, who rose into any high post in any European Company or administration.

Native servants, almost exclusively stereotyped, were represented in the most of the works produced by Anglo-Indian writers. “Though in life Indians may have played a more varied role,” it is interesting to note in this context that “in much of early fiction [by “Anglo-Indian” writers] they appear as cooks, bearers, ayahs”.²¹ The English saw the prevalence of the servant culture as another sign of the degenerate and lazy natives and ascribed it to the effeminate nature of the Indian people. Thus, servants became the site of the process of “othering” the native from the strong European. Such an attitude is strange against the backdrop of a strong servant culture present in the then contemporary European society. Banerjee rightly surmises that such observation may be indicative of the socio-economic and cultural background of the colonizers themselves.²² These European-writers did not see the servants in their own countries and were struck by the Indian servants only because of the need to discredit the natives and their culture. The whole argument could be stretched to highlight the fact that servants have always been seen selectively and not for themselves per se. There was more often than not a hidden

agenda behind the visibility of domestic servants, like the oppressed Indian women (or more importantly the Sati) to the Europeans.

Strangely enough, for all the criticism of Indians for their servant culture, the English (or for that matter any European) in India felt no compunction in following the tradition. The Europeans (read English nawabs) led an indulgent life with an army of servants. Nor did the supposedly bitter experiences with Indian domestics prompt the English to cut down their use in the course of their stay in India.²³ Instead some of them even took back to England their faithful servants or paid handsomely for their pension when left behind.²⁴ Nupur Chaudhuri in “Memsahibs and their Servants in Nineteenth-century India” discusses at length some of the attitudes of the “British women - especially the wives of British officials, military officers, missionaries, and merchants, or memsahibs”²⁵ towards their native servants as recorded in their private letters, diaries, manuals, pamphlets, and journals. Such literature reveals the stereotyping of Indian servants as dishonest, lazy, and false thus calling for a strict regime of control and constant supervision.

These stereotypes also appear in most “Anglo-Indian” writers like Rudyard Kipling, Dennis Kinciad, J. R. Ackerley, Flora Annie Steel, Alice Perrin, and Ethel W. Savi. Saros Coswajee regrets that the last three women writers could not overcome the racial prejudices regarding servants even when more exposed to the domestic scene.²⁶ E. W. Savi’s short story “The Interloper” presents the almost pathologically loyal Indian servant willing to die for his British master. The story depicts a loyal servant who in spite of being distrusted by his mistress tries to save her from a mad dog and is badly mauled. The loyal and loving servant is also seen Flora Annie Steel’s short story “The Doll-Maker”. It is concerned with an old servant, who can no longer work, but insists on making a doll out of rags and presents it to his employers as a Christmas gift for their children. Cowasjee does not fail to add that this is the same Flora Steel who suggested in her The Complete Indian Homekeeper an arrangement of bribes and chastisements to keep the native servants under strict control.²⁷ This racial stereotyping, of course, has not continued with Indian English writers. However, the prejudices against the lower class and lower caste servants and other subalterns have not altogether disappeared. The Indian middle and upper classes inherited some of the colonial prejudices which coalesced with the much earlier caste taboos and religious prejudices. And the unfortunate target of such

prejudices was very often the servant. In the famous Raj Quartet by Paul Scott, we have stereotypically loyal servants like Joseph and Suleiman. But Scott's most memorable servant character is Ibrahim in Staying On (1977). In this work we have the Smalley family who stay back even after Indian independence attended by the irrepressible Ibrahim, attached faithfully to his master's family in spite of vicissitudes of time.

In the colonial period, apart from domestic manuals and fiction written by Anglo-Indian writers, a new class in Indian literature or fiction by bhāsā writers took birth. The trend started with Pearychand Mitra's Alaler Gharer Dulal (1858) in Bengali, the first novel written by an Indian, which was followed by many in each of the major Indian language. Most of them like Pandit Gauri Dutt's Devrani Jethani Ki Kahani (1870), Nazir Ahmad's Mirat-ul-Arus (1869), served primarily to edify and as models of achieving domestic felicity. This new literature dealt with the clash of modernity with tradition with respect to the Indian family or more particularly Indian woman. The role of the women in the family, particularly the wife, became central to the debate amongst progressive Indians, proselytising missionaries and reactionary traditionalists.²⁸ If the English saw the suffering women in the Indian family as a further proof of the degenerate oriental culture, the nationalist saw a chance to differentiate the Indian culture from the western and highlight its superiority. The oppression of the Indian woman was posited as the self-sacrificing ethos as against the destructive individualism of the western women. Of course, the progressive nationalist sought the improvement of women and family as the inevitable step towards nationalist goals. In the battle of discourse of domesticity between the nationalists and pro-western liberals the servant was all but ignored. "Obviously, the servants were not yet included in the India of the nationalist imagination".²⁹ Dipesh Chakravorty's remark indicates that the servant's work was not even "seen" let alone accorded the same religious sanctity as the housewife in such narratives. The servant thus became an incidental to the clash of civilizations; a glance at any early novel published in India would reveal this more clearly.

For instance, Bankimchandra Chatterjee's Indira (1873) reveals crucial insights about the rising upper/middle class's attitudes towards servants. It deals with a newly married heroine who is abducted by highwaymen while on her way to her husband's house. Robbed of her clothes, jewellery, and money she has to begin life from scratch as a domestic servant in the house of a lawyer in Calcutta. Gradually she befriends the

young mistress of the house. Her employers then conspire to bring Indira's husband to the house where the resourceful Indira manages to seduce him. She knew that no husband would accept a wife who has been taken away by robbers and does not reveal her identity until he is completely under her power and, with his help, is accepted by his family. That the heroine manages to protect her chastity is not mean achievement considering the then social conditions. Not only that, she succeeds in winning over her employers and also her husband.³⁰ Thus, the middle class heroine may have to become servant under compulsion but her (middle class) virtues, particularly chastity, remain unsullied. Servile servants also fill the stories by Rabindranath Tagore and a classic example is Khokababur Protayabartan (The Child's Return). Raicharan is the servile and loyal servant who surrenders his own son in exchange for the master's son who had died due to his neglect. A young Raicharan raises his young master Anukul who grows up to enter the British civil service and Raicharan, now old dotes on Anukul's son and takes him out on walks on the banks of the river Padma. However, disaster strikes during one such walk and the son is drowned. Suspected of stealing the child for his golden ornaments, Raicharan is thrown out of his job. Broken hearted, he returns to his ancestral village where his wife dies after giving birth to a son. Finding striking similarities between his son and Anukul's dead son, Raicharan raises him like a rich man's son and gives him the best of education. Eventually he goes back to his former master and surrenders his own son saying that he had indeed stolen their child. But Anukul refuses to forgive him and turns him out. Raicharan leaves at the end, a sad and pathetic figure.

Munshi Premchand, whose short story "Kafan" (The Shroud), considered one of the most realistic portraits of subalterns, also succumbs to stereotypes in his stories. For instance, in his "My First Composition" he portrays the narrator's uncle as falling:

. . . a victim to the arrows of Cupid, shot from the eyes of *chamarin* (a member of the menial class). She was young and impetuous and, like the women of her class, also of a smiling face and an entertaining nature . . . She began to indulge in coquetry . . . More slackness crept into her work . . . Matters went so far that practically the maid-servant became the mistress of the house.³¹
[italics author's][emphasis added]

The implication was that maidservants are sexually lascivious and natural shirkers and hence to be kept under strict supervision. However, we find that in stories like "The

Child” Premchand tries to step out of the middle class morality. The story deals with a servant Gangu who marries a widow and is deserted by her. Later he finds that she had given birth to a boy. Gangu brings her back and adopts the boy as his own. When the narrator confronts him with his wife’s infidelity and asks him how he could adopt another’s child, Gangu replies: “This has never bothered me. . . I would love it as my own. After all when one takes a harvested field one does not refuse the crop merely because some else has sown it”.³² The narrator is ashamed of his middle class morality and admires Gangu’s courage and sincerity. This story has close resemblance to Ismat Chughtai’s Urdu short story “A Pair of Hands”. Chughtai while exploring middle class Muslim mores deals with the exploitation as well as the close relationships of the servants, particularly maids. In her bold take on lesbianism, “The Quilt” (Lihaaf), Chughtai presents a sordid relationship between Begum Jan, and her ugly personal maid Rabbo. In “Lingering Fragrance” (Badan ki Khusbo) we find medieval practice of using young maids for sexual initiation of the young men of the employer’s family. In “Kallu” we have a unique story of Kallu, a young overworked servant. He is thrown out after the mistress hears him propose to her daughter while playing with her. Later on, Kallu returns as Kalimuddin, a handsome Deputy Collector and marries his former employer’s daughter. We would be hard pressed to find an equivalent of such marriage between servants and the masters in Indian fiction in English except Saleem Sinai’s with his nurse Mary Pereira in Rushdie’s Midnight Children.

If we turn to Assamese literature, Rajanikanta Bordoloi’s second novel Manomati (1900) presents Pamila, a young lively peasant girl who is the maid of Manomati, the upper caste passive heroine. Pamila is shown as an active character who helps Manomati when her fidelity during her captivity by the Burmese is questioned by her lover Lakhikanta. Tillotama Mishra writes:

Pamila emerges almost as the central character in the novel, though the novelist obviously intended her to play the role in the traditional *sakhi* who acts as the go-between in romantic affairs between the *nayak* and *nayika*. Perhaps it is because of her important role in the novel that the author takes the rather *improbable* step of getting the poor girl married to Shantiram.³³
[italics author’s]

Maids, unchaste by nature are not to be portrayed as being happily married. This speaks volumes on the prevailing attitude to servants. In Rajanikanta Bordoloi's Rohdoi Ligiri (1930) we are presented with a maid who is disgusted in "being the object of men's lust". Separated from her lover, she is transformed into an old woman by a tantrik (wizard). Maids, have to be reborn as Vaishnavi in order to occupy literary centre stage. "Ordinary women like Podumi, Pamila, Rangili or Rohdoi Ligiri, who had been leading a quiet life, suddenly acquire a heroic status at moments of historical crisis".³⁴ Otherwise they are condemned to be the faces of an anonymous crowd. In a play by Jyotiprasad Agarwala, Karenghar Ligiri (1937) Sundar Konwar, a prince falls in love with Sewali, a maid. But stiff opposition from his mother and the feudal society forces Sewali to go into exile. Unlike Harshadeva's Ratnāvalī, Sewali is no princess in disguise and when Sundar decides to marry her in spite of everything, Sewali ends her life by drowning to spare him the social ignominy. To sum up in Indian literature, servants and slaves very rarely occupy centre stage and even those who do are not servants per se but persons of noble birth, not low born. More often servants are relegated to such roles as emissaries of news and revelations that carry the plot forward such as Iliman's old maidservant in Indira Goswami's Dantal Hatir Unye Khova Haoda (The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker, 1988) who accosts Indranath, the protagonist and divulges Iliman's secret affection for him and her desire to marry him.

The present work, no doubt, concentrates exclusively on the presentation of servants in Indian English fiction. But even within the limited ambit of this study some translated works of "bhāsā" writers have been incorporated to show that the prejudice towards servants is not particularly peculiar to Indian English fiction. "There would be similarities since a large slice of regional literatures is also written by middle-class subjects. The difference is that this middle class is often *not* from the ranks of the (anglicized) Babus who write creatively in English" [*italics author's*].³⁵ Since most Indian writers, irrespective of their language, come from the middle class, they naturally share the stereotypes about servants and the same middle class ideology seems to pervade their work. The use of an Indian language, other than the supposedly foreign language i.e. English, hardly renders their representation more authentic or less blind as far the representation of servants is concerned. But a detailed analysis of domestic servants in

works in other Indian languages, though fruitful, would be a gargantuan undertaking and certainly not possible within the limited ambit of this thesis.

II

Like most ancient civilizations, the institution of servants or slaves was prevalent in Greece and later on in the Roman states. Servants therefore, were present in literary productions such as epics like Homer's Odyssey or plays like Sophocles' Oedipus Rex. Bruce Robbins notes Erich Auerbach's comment in Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature (1953) that the first person to identify Odysseus after his long absence is the old housekeeper Euryclea, who recognizes the scar on his thigh as she washes his feet. ". . . Auerbach's democratic sympathies make him almost uniquely sensitive to the marginal, fragmentary, often almost invisible passage of the people through a literature not for, by, or about themselves."³⁶ The Roman poet Ovid in his Amores³⁷ (Love Poems) mentions how he uses Nape, his beloved Corinna's hairdresser as a go-between and in Book II when he tries to seduce a new woman, he tries to bribe her chaperone, Bagoas. Again, in Ars Amatoria (The Art of Love) Book I Part X, Ovid suggests to the young lover as a means of strategy to make friends with the beloved's handmaiden. He urges the lover to corrupt the servant with promises or with prayers and if she were willing, then the pursuit would be easily successful.³⁸ This highlights the fact that for all their exploitation, personal servants enjoyed varying degrees of intimacy with their masters and mistress which enabled them to exert a certain amount of influence on the latter's lives. It would be pertinent here to observe that domestic servants have been subject to various forms of bondage throughout the world at various junctures of history. Robbins states most succinctly about servants in Western literature:

Instead of full representations of the life of the people, literary tradition has typically offered only servants, mere appendages of their masters. Moreover, all that has been represented of these prefabricated tropes is their effects, their momentary performance of useful functions. It is as expository prologues, oracular messengers, and authorial mouthpieces, rhetorical "doublings" of the protagonist, accessories used to complicate or resolve the action, that servants fill the margins of texts devoted to their superiors.³⁹

Servants are found to have graced other genres in English. For instance, in dramatic traditions in England right from its embryonic state where they have been providing comic relief. Supposes, a comedy in prose, one of the earliest in English and performed at Gray's Inn in 1566, consists of a series of disguises and confused identities and the scenes with servants, particularly those of the old nurse Balia, are most amusing. The cunning servant became in Elizabethan comedy of intrigue a stock character who is able to cheat the stupid gull. Face, the servant of Lovewit, for instance, in Ben Jonson's The Alchemist (1610) connives with Subtle, a false alchemist and astrologer, and Dol Common, his consort, to use his master's house to fleece a number of victims. Shakespeare's plays abound in servants and though interesting, they can be safely be labelled into stereotypes such as loyal pinheads and scheming upstarts. It would be, however, worthwhile to take note of one such servant, namely, Caliban from The Tempest. Caliban the "Abhorred slave" of Prospero and Miranda rants against his master taking away his island inherited from his mother, Sycorax. Prospero like a true colonialist first loved Caliban and after the latter had showed "all the qualities o' th' isle"⁴⁰ had turned him into a slave. Prospero justified it on account of Caliban's attempted rape of Miranda, Prospero's daughter. Caliban, thus, is accused of sexual depravity, dirtiness, and the inability to speak articulately – attributes, in most cases, fixed as natural to servants. This encounter of Caliban the "native" with Prospero the colonialist serve to highlight the convergence of stereotypes both of servants and natives. Caliban's retort to Miranda who was upbraiding him for being ungrateful to her in spite of the fact that she had taught him to speak properly is certainly worth considering: "You taught me language, and my profit on't/ Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you/ For learning me your language!" (Temp I.ii.362-64, 6). These lines provide a hint of the anxiety or tension that exists in the relationship between Prospero and Caliban. The latter is not so powerless, after all and is able to resist a little. In the post-colonial critical scenario, the character of Caliban threatens to overshadow all the others just as Shylock does in The Merchant of Venice. We can take another play The Changeling by T. Middleton and W. Rowley, printed in 1653, but acted as early in 1622. The play concerned with love, intrigue, and murder, is dominated by the presence of De Flores, the devious servant. He is hired by his mistress Beatrice-Joanna to murder Alonzo de Piracquo, her would-be husband. But De Flores lusts after Beatrice-Joanna and after murdering at her behest, blackmails her to satisfy him. Thus though not frequently, the

domestic servants occupy centre stage in dramatic stage. In this genre too the servants face not dissimilar structures of marginalization.

Coincidentally the first true novel to be written in English or in fact, any language, Samuel Richardson's Pamela or Virtue Rewarded (1741) deals with the trials and tribulations of a young maidservant who is sexually harassed by her master. Richardson's contemporaries including Henry Fielding and later on the Victorian fiction writers never failed to include servants; how far such representations reflected the true conditions of the English servants is another matter. Ian Watt notes that the "outlook for [English] servant girls was particularly bad. There were, it is true, some glorious catches, although none of them could provide an exact parallel to the supreme one made by Pamela."⁴¹ Henry Fielding correctly in his Joseph Andrews shows that refusal to the master/mistress's advances did not bring marriage proposals but instant dismissal. Another early novel, Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe (1719) includes a servant in the figure of the "native" Friday who follows his master Crusoe to England and later dies in the sequel. Interestingly, Defoe's favourable literary representations of servants were not paralleled by that of his views in real life. He was highly suspicious of servants, and as Sandra Sherman points out that in tracts such as Every-Body's Business, Is No-Body's Business (1725) and The Compleat English Tradesman (1725-27), he tries to deal with this "servant problem".⁴² Most eighteenth century fiction including Laurence Sterne, Tobias Smollet's Humphrey Clinker and the Gothic writers like William Godwin have included servant figures. "Few problems have plagued man throughout his history as much as the servant problem has. Writers of every conceivable kind-novelists, poets, Old Testament lawgivers, modern sociologists and anthropologists-have felt called upon to deal with it. Although it has undergone numerous mutations, it is still alive."⁴³ Norwood H. Andrews Jr. adds that apart from English fiction even eighteenth century periodicals like The Spectator dealt with the servant problem. He also quotes from E. S. Turner's book What the Butler Saw, Two Hundred and Fifty Years of the Servant Problem (1962) to illustrate this: "Sir Richard Steele expresses the view in The Spectator that 'the general corruption of manners in servants is owing to the conduct of their servants' . . . As an example of what a master should be, he created (with Addison's aid) Sir Roger de Coverley, Baronet . . .".⁴⁴

Nineteenth century saw the same trend with stereotypical servants, loyal or artful deceivers, recurring in most Victorian novelists including Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray, Anthony Trollope, Wilkie Collins, Emily and Charlotte Bronte, etc. This was natural for the biggest social divide in the Victorian age was between families with and without domestic service.

In 1851 there had been over a million servants in Britain, making domestic service the second largest occupation after agricultural work. Not only were a vast number of people thus employed, but the range of households in which servants were to be found was very wide indeed. At one end of the spectrum were aristocrats, such as the Duke of Bedford (died 1839), who employed 300 servants, At the other end were thousands of clerks and other lower-middle-class families who employed a single maid-of-all-work.⁴⁵

In Dickens we have the loyal servants like Peggotty (David Copperfield), jolly ones like Sam Weller (Pickwick Papers), and mean and treacherous ones like Miggs (Barnaby Rudge). David Copperfield can be read as a manual on servant problem in which Dora, an inept housewife unable to control her servants, is in sharp contrast to Agnes, David's second wife who is a perfect housekeeper. Elisabeth Jay points out that the housekeeper was seen as the enemy within the Victorian society and this was reflected in its fiction.⁴⁶ In the Victorian fiction, George Augustus Moore deals in full length with servants in Esther Waters (1894). Here the heroine is thrown out by her drunken stepfather and forced into domestic service at Woodview, the house of the Barfields. Esther is seduced by a fellow servant and deserted due to which she is turned out of Woodview. After lots of tribulations, her seducer returns and marries her. But he dies and she returns to Woodview to live with Mrs Barfield, now an impoverished widow living in a section of the old house. Elizabeth C. Gaskell was credited as an active humanitarian and the message of several of her novels was the need for social reconciliation, for better understanding between employers and workers, between the respectable and the outcasts. In Sylvia's Lovers (1863) we have the vivid reconstruction of life at the farm where noisy, unreasonable Daniel Robson, his quiet, devoted wife, and their sturdy old servant Kester combine to create a homely atmosphere for the lovely but helpless Sylvia. Bruce Robbins sums up English fiction (with respect to servants) aptly: "The novels of Richardson and Fielding, Forster and Woolf, Austen and Scott, even Dickens and Gaskell, reinscribe and rejuvenate the conventions of literary servant."⁴⁷

The modern age in the twentieth century Europe and America, however, brought certain problems in publishing fiction on servants as Ivy Compton-Burnett found out. Her servant Manservant and Maidservant (1947) was published in America as Bullivant and the Lambs by the publisher fearing that references to maids and footmen might seem too un-democratic or too-old fashioned.⁴⁸ Compton-Burnett's work dealt with the tyrannical father, Horace Walpole who wrecks the life of his family. Interspersed with this tragedy are the stories of the footman and housemaid, young George and Miriam, with the cook Mrs Selden and the brilliant butler Bullivant. In twentieth century domestic service saw rapid decline though the nostalgia for the Victorian lifestyle lasted longer and the servant continued to be a part of the English literary scene with P. G. Wodehouse's Jeeves canon written over seven decades from 1917 to 1974. One thing to be noted here is that Jeeves, for all his popularity and sympathetic treatment from the author, is at the top of the hierarchy of domestic servants. Jeeves, capable of quoting from the plays of Shakespeare or Romantic poets, is the gentleman's personal gentleman, i.e. valet, of Bertie Wooster and hardly the lowly servant such as the gardener or the cook. It is worth pondering whether an unlettered Jeeves or a gardener Jeeves would have been that popular with readers.

Thus, English society or its fiction was not that liberal when it came to accepting servants as its protagonists. It had its own brand of social snobbery, as D. H. Lawrence tried to depict in Lady Chatterley's Lover (1928). Constance Chatterley has an affair with her gamekeeper, Oliver Mellors who in a way is her servant. When she finds out that she is pregnant, she goes to Venice with her sister partly to hide the baby's parentage. Of course, later on she comes back and tells her husband the truth and the novel ends with the lovers waiting for a divorce and a new life together. Mellors is treated with much sympathy and shown alive in a vital way unlike the aristocratic class. But nonetheless he is presented as rough and uncultured. Another major novel that deals with life downstairs is The Remains of the Day (1989) by Kazuo Ishiguro, the Japanese born British author. Set in England, the novel deals with Stevens, a middle aged butler who decides to take a trip through rural England. During the journey he relives his past encompassing his failed relationship with the housekeeper, Miss Kenton. The novel deals nostalgically for the past aristocratic life of England where Stevens finds his duty to serve as perfectly as possible his master at Darlington Hall. But as a sign of the changing times, Darlington

Hall passes from the aristocratic Englishman to an American who as Stevens remarks likes to banter. Stevens thinks that:

. . . a butler's duty is to provide good service. It is not to meddle in the great affairs of the nation. The fact is, such great affairs will be beyond the understanding of those such as you and me [Stevens], and those of us who wish to make a mark must realize that we do best by concentrating on what *is* within our realm; that is to say, by devoting our attention to providing the best possible service to those great gentlemen in whose hands the destiny of civilization truly lies.⁴⁹ [italics author's]

M. Griffith points out Ishiguro's novel is marked by "the silences and gaps in Steven's life: the butler's only memories are of his adult life in his servant's role".⁵⁰

The servants portrayed in fiction produced in the American subcontinent dealt not only with the matrices of gender or class but also race. Deborah Fairman Browning points out that most nineteenth century "discourse about these servants was either acerbic complaint about 'the servant problem,' or platitudes about American egalitarian ideals".⁵¹ Henrietta Stackpole's proud proclamation in Henry James's Portrait of a Lady that American domestics are companions of their ladies and not slaves is nothing but mere sentiment. Fairman Browning clarifies that such ideology of democracy with regard to servants is not borne out in the government reports on the working conditions of servants. The stereotyping of servants continues in American fiction. "Servants were portrayed as either loyal saints or devious rascals, employers as benevolent guardians or ill-natured tyrants".⁵² Sherrie A. Inness confirms this stereotyping of servants and masters in American literature while examining Edith Wharton's stories.⁵³ And things were the worst for when one turned to domestic servants or slaves of African descent. Of course, such slaves or servants were portrayed in stereotypical terms in American fiction (those written predominantly by White middle class writers) exemplified by Harriet Elizabeth Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852). Presented in such fiction as happy, docile workers or savages to be kept under strict supervision, none of the brutality with which they were treated ever came out. Like caste in India, racism in America became subtle and kept changing its forms well into the twentieth century as non-white people were seen fit only to do menial jobs including domestic work. Such characters have received greater complexity in the novels of writers like Alice Walker, Toni Morrison to name a couple.

Toni Morrison's first novel The Bluest Eye (1969) discusses in detail the incalculable impact of the happy family myth on the poor black servants like Pauline. Morrison writes that Pauline works in the house of the Fishers who are a "well-to-do [white] family whose members were affectionate, appreciative, and generous [to Pauline]. . . . She became what is known as an ideal servant, for such a role filled practically all her needs . . . here she found beauty, order, cleanliness, and praise . . . Power, praise, and luxury were hers in this household" [emphasis added].⁵⁴ The myth of a middle class happy family plays havoc with Pauline, her daughter Pecola, and other non-privileged characters mostly from the black community. Pauline internalised this ideal to such an extent that she is unhappy with her own family and rejects her daughter Pecola when the latter comes to the Fishers' house.

Before concluding our review of literary representations of domestic servants, it would be worthwhile to mention two novels dealing particularly with servants. The first is the South African writer Nadine Gordimer's July's People (1981) which deals with servant-master relationship, marked by class and race where the white employers are forced to take shelter and protection from their former black servant July. The second is Valerie Martin's Mary Reilly, an unique and rather insightful work on servants. Published in 1990, it retells the story of Jekyll and Hyde from the perspective of the doctor's maid, Mary who was unnamed and marginal in Stevenson's narrative. Mary Reilly while reproducing the story also "takes us below stairs to observe the servants". Though Martin denied any attempt to criticize Stevenson, her selection of a servant as narrator focuses "on power relations, as mediated by class, gender and sexuality," and "presents a comprehensive view of late Victorian society, implicitly condemning the vision offered by Stevenson as inadequate."⁵⁵

III

If we turn to other representations other than literary, we would find the same dismissive attitude towards servants. The most popular and widely circulated forms, that of print and electronic media, betray a similar ignorance or rather bias towards the domestic servants. Seen in the light of this comment, Indian newspapers can be said to reinforce middle class unity by portraying repeatedly domestic servants cheating, robbing

and murdering their masters. Servants, any random survey of newspapers would prove, are documented only in moments of crisis; they occupy narrative space only when they steal, murder or are murdered. As Sumit Sarkar observes: “Subaltern groups [like servants] normally enter the conventional historical sources at moments of explosion [of violence]”.⁵⁶ The media frenzy on the now infamous Nithari killings⁵⁷ where a domestic help together with his industrialist master raped, killed and even indulged in necrophilia and cannibalism, has turned the spotlight on domestic servants.

A typical news report often glosses over the routine violence, threatened or otherwise, and deprivation caused to the servants and instead highlights the “inherent” treacherous nature of servants as contrasted to the magnanimity of their masters. To give an example, we can refer to one such typical news-report titled “Domestic Hand Suspected in Delhi Twin Robberies”.⁵⁸ The report cites that the “incidents have once again exposed the laxity of residents, who continue to ignore police’s repeated pleas to get their servants verified”. It goes on to give a chart showing the statistics of crimes committed by domestic servants in Delhi for the past few years i.e. 300 crimes in 2003, 270 in 2002 and so on. The implicit message to the readers is that one should be on guard against hiring servants without verification. Constant and strict vigilance is necessary to prevent crimes by servants. We can refer to another report from a state daily titled: “23-year Old Awaits Execution; Mercy Petition with President”.⁵⁹ This particular news-report from Meerut, a major city in Uttar Pradesh, explains that the accused Raju alias Om Prakash was employed as a domestic help at an early age of eight years and after six years of service he killed not only his master, but also the master’s son and sister-in-law brutally. Now as a 23-year old young man, Raju awaits possible execution. Without appearing to condone his heinous crime, it would be unfair to quickly dismiss the victimization of Raju. It is interesting to note that nowhere does the report mention anything about the illegality of hiring a eight year old or betrays any sympathy for the hard labour that the under-aged Raju must have endured all through his six years of servitude. There is not a single word of sympathy or at least, even slight awareness, of the possibility of Raju’s victimization. The routine deprivation or violence, physical or emotional, suffered by domestic servants like Raju is easy to gloss over. What further helps such blindness towards servants is that their service had not been covered so long under Indian labour laws. It has been only recently that we saw “The Housemaids and

Domestic Servants (Conditions of Service and Welfare) Bill, 2004”⁶⁰ to protect the interests of the servants.

Of course, it would be unfair to conclude that domestic servants are abused only in India. Countries like Saudi Arabia, in a report issued by Human Rights Watch, are notorious for their systematic abuse and discrimination of Asian workers, most notably maids from South Asian countries while working in conditions resembling slavery.⁶¹ Even developed countries like Singapore, which has no less than 1,40,000 domestic workers from mainly Indonesia, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka are faced with the menace of domestic abuse. Strangely, domestic workers are a few groups of people in tightly controlled Singapore unprotected by the Employment Act, which sets basic work rights.⁶² It is worthwhile to compare with the U.S.A. where under the US law, those who employ domestic servants must give minimum wages and other benefits and cannot be made to work seven days a week without overtime.⁶³ In developed countries like the US, it is interesting to note that domestic servants can also make fortune out of their experiences. For instance, Nicola Kraus and Emma McLaughlin co-wrote The Nanny Diaries in 2002 about a New York nanny and her unreasonable employers. Both Kraus and McLaughlin are now not so much part-nannies as part of the literary and media scene.⁶⁴ The economics of advanced capitalism may have changed somewhat the role and relationship of the master-servant. However, even in the most developed countries it cannot be denied that servant-master relationship was always embedded in power relations.

Coming back to the Indian context, it would be too hasty to assume that the relations between masters and servants are merely one of domination and exploitation of the latter. A survey of news-items on servants tends to reveal that the middle class attitude towards the servant is ambivalent. For example, Devesh K. Pandey reiterates the middle class concern for a proper need for verification of domestic servants. Pandey notes the mushrooming of servants’ placement centres in Delhi and other places and warns that most often such dubious centres aid and abet larceny. But the striking point that Pandey makes is that most employers are reluctant to get their domestic helps verified through police for fear of the helps running away.⁶⁵ This reveals an element of uncertainty or powerlessness in the employers’ relationship with the domestic help. Thus, there is a constant tension or anxiety in the servant-master relationship with the former trying to affect some control which the latter tries to deny by constant supervision.

Sympathetic concern for servants such as displayed by Anita Pratap is rare. While writing about the sensational murder of Hindi poet Madhumita Shukla by her alleged gangster-politician paramour, Pratap mentions that a “‘minor’ aspect of this saga [Madhumita Shukla’s murder] that seems to have escaped criticism is how she employed a 10-year-old child as servant and, among other things, made him sit outside while she “‘entertained’ male visitors”.⁶⁶

The sad truth is that journalists like Anita Pratap are a rare breed. Discussions about servants would be tantamount to admitting that servants are marginalised, and acknowledging their continued exploitation. It is a fact that nobody wants to acknowledge this somewhat pre-capitalistic and feudal practice of the modern Indian domestic scene, least of all the middle class who profit mostly from such practices. Hence, the collective silence over the exploitation of domestic servants.

Like the print media, the cinematic and television representations both borrow and add to the dominant social preconceptions and stereotypes about domestic servants. Popular Hindi family dramas on various television channels are marked by gross inaccuracies in the Indian reality that they seek to depict. Such representations, more often than not, portray the dutiful wife, mother, or daughter-in-law who in spite of insurmountable difficulties is able to manage houses. Their houses are grand and so are their clothes and accessories even when they are shown hard at work. The maintenance of the house not to mention the sprawling gardens or even the cooking and washing for a large joint family remains a mystery since it is not shown. And strangely enough, they also manage to spend a large portion their time at prayers too. The truth is that there is a clever erasing from the visual narrative, unknown to the unsuspecting viewers, of the servants and their labour. If the labour had been occluded for the mere sake of artistic beauty, there would have been no problem. Artistic limitations are no doubt there. But what is disturbing is that all the credit for the household work is cleverly heaped on the mistress – the loving mother, daughter, dutiful wife or daughter-in-law – to aid the construction of the perfect Indian woman. Such representations could be seen in the character of Tulsi in Kyonki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi or Parbati in Kahani Ghar Ghar Ki⁶⁷ – two of the most popular Hindi serials on the Indian television scene. The symbol of the bunch of keys hung from the waist of the housewife in such television or cinematic representations helped to construct the image of the mistress, “of queen-like dignity and

virtue”, tending the home. even though “such women managed to keep a safe distance from dirtying their hands in actual cleaning, darning and cooking” - “the real work” - “performed by the unseen”⁶⁸ domestic servants.

Parsa Venkateshwar Rao, a film critic rightly points out that there has not been any film from a servant's point of view for “Even if you have a driver as a main character, he turns out later to be a prince.”⁶⁹ He adds that Raja Menon's film *Barah Aana*, to be released in February 2009, will perhaps, be a rare attempt to capture the sufferings of the Indian servant and other subalterns. Cornelia Butler Flora in “Domestic Service in the Latin American *Fotonovela*”⁷⁰ analyses the representation of domestic worker in the *fotonovela* or illustrated romance while Margo L. Smith in “Where is Maria now? Former Domestic Workers in Peru”⁷¹ refer to the representations of domestic workers in the “telenovela” or television soap opera. Such a study of media representation of servants, fruitful by itself, would nonetheless remain outside the limited ambit of this study.

To sum up, we can point out that the same stereotypes of servants are presented in middle class narratives. Servants are those individuals who were not necessarily always “silenced or forgotten but rather lingered in the background”⁷² whether in fiction or other narratives. Indian English novelists have included or made passing remarks to domestic servants. Also this recurrence of the servant figure should not be wrongly ascribed to the Indian writers’ sympathy for servants. More often than not it is actually the need to portray an “authentic” Indian family that prompts these writers to include servants. Novels with servants (howsoever marginal in characterisation) would continue to be written so long as servants are a part of the modern society. From the above review of servants, both in literary as well as popular media, we can observe that servants are always, inevitably represented in a particular manner so as to pre-empt exposure of the exploitative nature of their relationship with their masters. Class may play an overriding part in their exploitation, but as we will see in the succeeding chapter, it is not the only factor. Gender, caste, religion, age, duration of stay with the master etc are some of the other factors that come into play. These are some of the issues that we would discuss in the ensuing chapter.

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CHAPTER TWO

PROBLEMS IN THE STUDY OF SERVANTS IN INDIAN FICTION IN ENGLISH

The history of subaltern social groups is necessarily fragmented and episodic.

– Antonio Gramsci

I

The literary survey in the preceding chapter has served to a certain extent to contextualise our study of domestic servants as well as highlight some of the problems. The problem of grouping servants as a class, since there are so many factors involved apart from the economic, is a big obstacle in any study of servants. The construction of the servant's identity merely on one factor such as the economic, and ignoring others like caste, is open to the charge of essentializing. Theoretical framing of the servant's vis-à-vis the master identity would have to deal with such issues of essentialism. Also associated with the servant's exploitation and its absence in the literary texts is the role of ideology. And adding to the problems in our study is the use of texts written in a language supposedly foreign. In Indian literary and non-literary circles, English is still considered as a colonial legacy and therefore questions have been raised time and again about its appropriateness for representing the Indian realities. In this chapter we would endeavour to examine each of these somewhat interlinked issues of language, class, identity and ideology.

The foreignness of the medium particularly to the Indian reality that it seeks to portray has been one of the recurring accusations against Indian fiction (literature) in English. To add to the woes, the novel form also has been seen as primarily a foreign import in Indian literature. And adding fat to the fire most of the successful and "visible" of the Indian writers in English are based abroad or write from the metropolitan centres. The selection of themes, characters or experiences chosen by such writers have also strengthened the accusation of being selectively blind to the Indian realities. Indian writers in English have created a "hothouse plant rather than one that has sprung from the soil and sprouted and burgeoned in the open air".¹ Ved Mehta defends this selection of themes and characters by saying that it is by design rather than default. If they're not identifiable characters, as is sometimes the case with Rushdie's it is because they're the inhabitants of a fantasy world.² Amitav Ghosh defends his subject-matter and writing in English in these words: "Being Indian does not mean one writes only about one's own village."³ Likewise, it could be argued that it is not obligatory on the part of the Indian writer in English to write about servants while writing about India. It is not altogether impossible to write about India and to avoid talking about the servant. But the problem is

that these writers try to posit their “absence” as a regular aspect of the Indian domestic reality and language here plays a not unimportant role.

Meenakshi Mukherjee illustrates the exigencies of the medium with an example from Bankimchandra’s Rajmohan’s Wife (1864), the first Indian novel in English. While in “many of Bankimchandra’s Bangla novels the English-knowing urban dilettante is the butt of author’s ridicule”, surprisingly in Rajmohan’s Wife the protagonist Madhav’s “knowledge of English . . . are set up as signs of moral superiority over [the villainous] Mathur who stares at the women as they return from the river carrying water, indulges in bawdy gossip and uses illegal means to satisfy his craving for money.” The text leaves no doubt that “English books are obviously signifiers of a more civilized way of life . . . to which Mathur Ghose, despite his money, power and ‘mofussil magnificence’ can never aspire.” Mukherjee adds that in “most of Bankimchandra’s Bangla novels, the English is either the abductor or the adversary” whereas in Rajmohan’s Wife “the white man is ascribed a positive and stabilizing factor” since “the only redressal, almost as divine retribution, comes from the fair-minded white administration – a shrewd and restlessly active Irishman.”⁴ Thus it would not be wrong to assume that the use of English language forced the author to compromise on his thematic concerns.

The efficacy of the medium to represent Indian realities could be doubted more in the case of representation of people like servants who, by and large, are not familiar with English. It was Lal Behari Day who first acknowledged this problem of representing subaltern realities in a foreign language in his Govinda Samanta V2: Or The History of A Bengali Raiyat (1874):

Gentle reader, allow me here to make one remark. You perceive that Badan and Alanga speak better English than most uneducated English peasants; they speak almost like educated ladies and gentlemen without any provincialism. But how could I have translated their talk into the Somersetshire or the Yorkshire dialect. I would have then turned them into English, and not Bengali peasants. You will, therefore please overlook this grave though unavoidable fault in this authentic narrative.⁵

Day’s remark is perhaps the rare exception to the fact that Indian English novels “hardly ever provide us with examples of self-reflexivity about the language they use, enclosed as they are generally within the cognitive and cultural limits of their linguistic

medium.”⁶ In Realism and Reality (1994) Meenakshi Mukherjee points out that the use of a foreign language results at times in the ludicrous. She highlights a highly improbable conversation between a master and his servant full of idioms and phrases borrowed straight from high school grammar books in K. S. Venkataramani’s Murugan the Tiller (1927). Mukherjee remarks “that many Indians tend to overuse these clichés perhaps because of the way English is taught in India, i.e. by memorizing a large stock of idioms and phrases”.⁷ Luckily not all Indian writers in English are as artistically immature as Venkataramani. But the faithful representation of Indian realities in English is still a subject of controversy. Thus, we would have to examine the issue regarding the use of English for representing Indian realities. Though this controversy has been around for quite a long period and the arguments have become clichés, it would be necessary to examine it once again.

In this context, it would be worthwhile to recount the clash of opinions between Ngugi Wa Thiong’o and Chinua Achebe on the issue of using a foreign language. The former deliberately took up writing exclusively in his native language of Gikuyu rather than in English. Ngugi felt that writers who imitate the language of another culture allow themselves to be defined by it and turn into internal exiles:

Colonial alienation takes two interlinked forms: distancing of oneself from the reality around; and identification with that which is most external to one’s environment. It starts with a deliberate dissociation of the language of conceptualisation, of thinking, from the language of daily interaction in the home and community. It is like separating the mind from the body so that they are occupying two unrelated linguistic spheres in the same person. On a large scale, it is like producing bodiless heads and headless bodies.⁸

On the other hand, Chinua Achebe felt that African writers have been able to mould English to their experience. Though he felt that an African could “learn well enough to be able to use it [English] effectively in creative writing”, Achebe was not altogether without reservations. “It is neither necessary nor desirable”, he added, “for an African to use English like a native speaker. The African writer . . . should aim at fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience . . . it will have to be new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home, but altered to suit its new African surroundings.”⁹

Achebe's words are somewhat similar to what Raja Rao wrote in his Preface to Kanthapura where he sought to assert his artistic freedom to choose English as a medium.

One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought-movement that looks maltreated in an alien language. I use the word "alien", yet English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up . . . but not our emotional make-up.¹⁰

English may not be an alien language but it was impossible, for an Indian, to write like an Englishman. Nor was it desirable too. Rao's support for writing in English has found favour with critics like C. R. Reddy and K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar. The latter reproduces in his path-breaking Indian Writing in English (1962) the following comment of Reddy which had earlier appeared in an Introduction to another book by Iyengar himself:

Indo-Anglican literature is not different in kind from Indian literature. It is a part of it, a modern facet of that glory which, commencing from the Vedas, has continued to spread its mellow light, now with greater and now with lesser brilliance under the inexorable vicissitudes of time and history, ever increasingly up to the present time of Tagore, Iqbal and Aurobindo Ghose, and bids fair to expand with our and humanity's expanding future. . . . It has been said that Indian English Literature is Indian in sensibility and content, and English in language. It is rooted in and stems from the Indian environment, and reflects its mores, often ironically.¹¹

But writers have written and written well in second languages such as the Polish born Joseph Conrad in English or Irish Samuel Beckett in French. On the other hand, we have an early apostate in Bankimchandra Chatterjee who wrote his first novel Rajmohan's Wife (1864) in English and all his subsequent works in Bengali. The relative immaturity and anonymity of his English work when compared to the spectacular success of his Bengali novels strengthens the conviction that Indian writers should stick to Indian languages.

It must be admitted even by the ardent supporter of English language that its induction in India, coincided with colonialism and was used to further its interests as Gauri Viswanathan spells out in detail in her Masks of Conquest (1998).

. . . English literature appeared as a subject in the curriculum of the colonies long before it was institutionalized in the home country. As early as the 1820s, when the classical curriculum still reigned supreme in England despite the strenuous efforts of some concerned critics to loosen its hold, English as the study of culture and not simply the study of language had already found a secure place in the British Indian curriculum.¹²

Though the use of English started much earlier, the 1835 English Education Act of William Bentinck was the watershed in the history of English language in India. In the beginning of the colonial empire, the East India Company saw to it that English was taught alongside other Indian languages in the Oriental studies and was not meant to either replace or supersede them. But Macaulay's Minute of 1835 with its professed aim of creating Brown (i.e. Indian) sahibs who would be English in everything except colour turned the tide in favour of education exclusively in English.¹³ Thus, English and English education was presented as more modern and progressive. The issue was more complex because a section of colonial Oriental scholars advocated the use of the native languages as medium of instruction while on the other hand a part of the Indian social reformists like Raja Ram Mohan Roy welcomed English education. They considered English education as a welcome exposure to western theories of nationalism and other concepts for progress as well as political emancipation. Aijaz Ahmad notes that several political leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru or religious reformers including Swami Vivekananda wrote extensively in English without feeling apologetic about it. However, here too things were complex as Aijaz Ahmad remarks that there is "a distinct hierarchal divide [exists] between the 'national' functions of the intelligentsia, which were carried out in English, and the regional functions, which were carried out in the indigenous languages – sometimes by the same people, but at distinct sites."¹⁴

To sum up the argument, mere opposition to English or even its support did not signify nationalist sentiments. But one thing is sure that English in India still continues to be a class marker. For all its popularity and increasing use and visibility in India, the extensive use of English even in its spoken form, is limited mostly to the upper and middle class. Most lower classes, including subalterns like servants, are naturally excluded from these privileged classes who can access the relatively costly and exclusive convent education. In India only about a minuscule percent of the population are said to know English though the number is increasing fast. Braj Kachru notes in his The Other

Tongue: English Across Cultures (1982) that in “India, the number of English-speaking bilinguals is about 5 percent of the total population”.¹⁵ English is not the mother tongue of Indians, except perhaps the small minority of Anglo-Indians. With rapid proliferation of globalisation and its fruits like outsourcing business like BPOs, learning English has acquired a never before urgency in India. But it must be remembered that in the call centres, Indians have to assume an Anglicised or Americanised name besides unlearning all the Indian features of their English, including accents. In fact the call-centre workers have given rise to a new term, “cyber-coolie”.¹⁶ Globalisation does not accept so readily an Indian brand of English, even if we accept that such a variety exists. Aijaz Ahmad also links this enhanced use of English in India “with the consolidation, expansion, increased self-confidence, increased leisure, increased sophistication of the bourgeois classes . . . including its middle strata, especially the modern petty bourgeois located in the professions and in the state apparatus”. He further notes that this middle class or petty bourgeois is the largest among all the ex-colonial countries and also “consolidated fully as a distinct social entity” to constitute a ready market for English writers or publishing houses. For such an English-based intelligentsia only a work in English is a “national document” worthy of consideration while those of “bhāsā” writers are “minor” and “forgettable”.¹⁷ Rushdie’s comment on Indian novels in English vis-à-vis the novels in regional languages speaks volumes about the prejudice against non-speakers of English. In the article entitled, “Damme, This is the Oriental Scene For You” and reprinted in the introduction to his co-edited anthology, The Vintage Book of Indian Writing : 1947-1997, Rushdie asserts that prose writing produced by Indian writers working in English “is proving to be a stronger and more important body of work than most of what has been produced in the 16 ‘official languages’ of India, the so-called vernacular languages” He also claims that “‘Indo-Anglian’ literature represents perhaps the most valuable contribution India has yet made to the world of books”¹⁸

Thus, it would be immature to assume that the mere use of an Indian language instead of English would make the writer more Indian, yet on the other hand it would be equally unwise to assume that the use of English by Indians is not without certain politico-cultural implications. Bruce King is perhaps naïve to assert that “English is no longer the language of colonial rulers; it is a language of modern India in which words and expressions have recognised national rather imported significances and references, attending to local realities, traditions and ways of feeling”.¹⁹ No use of a language is

innocent and hence, the use of English, even in seemingly objective observations, carries ideological ramifications. To take an example, we can turn to Amit Chaudhuri's A Strange and Sublime Address. In this work, there is a section titled "Lakshmi Poornima Night", where we have the narrator, a confident middle-class and young master talking to his sweeper Panna. The latter tries to strike up a conversation with the narrator in order to borrow some money: "... I [Panna] cleaned the basin with new soap. I cleaned the commodes. Commodes don't flush properly, saab. This Calcutta water is not good. Tubewell water is good. Karporashen water is not good, saab. I washed the clothes. Must get new jhadu" [emphasis added].²⁰

What makes this illustration interesting is that the presentation of the word "Corporation" as "Karporashen". The narratorial presentation of a subaltern i.e. Panna's apparently incorrect pronunciation of the English word is not a neutral comment. It must not be overlooked that Panna's entire conversation must have been in the regional language, in this case, Bengali or Hindustani though it is presented in English. The ungrammatical syntax of the reporting language and the stress on the incorrect pronunciation, thus, help to mark out Panna from his middle class narrator-master who is a speaker of correct English. In this context, it has been observed that one of the common ways of distinguishing servants is to reproduce their speech in ungrammatical English, thus differentiating them from their educated masters who speak correct English. Needless to add, there is a further identification of the author and the master since there is no comment on the latter's English. The use of English, thus, indicates class differences. It is, of course, true that most servants are not exposed to formal education, at least the convent school type, and hence are at a disadvantage so far as English is concerned. Therefore it would be wrong to attribute to them, particularly the incorrect English since they would hardly speak it unless of course, forced to work in a European household or highly anglicised metropolitan Indian household. In the colonial period, there existed "Butler English" or the broken English generally spoken by native servants to their white masters. Priya Hosali deals with this variety of English extensively in her book Butler English: Form and Function (2000). Such English was distinguished from Standard English by the absence of the copula and the different usage of tense. The emphasis was on the content and the language is reduced to its bare essentials. The German linguist Hugo Schuchardt was perhaps the scholar in the colonial period who was interested in Butler English. Hosali compares Schuchardt's sample with excerpts from her own data

collected in 1980-82 and again in 1992-2002. She asserts that the variety is very much alive. Hosali asserts that “the socio-cultural and linguistic setting in which this pidgin developed has not been wiped out.”²¹ Since almost all the writers under consideration wrote about Indian, and not colonial, masters and concerned with the domestic scenario of Indian households we would skip this aspect of pidgin English. But this staging of incorrect English for the servants has been discriminatory and ends, more often than not, in ridiculing them and making them comic figures. Thus the dialogues in the texts under consideration cannot be credited, without any reservations, to the domestic servants. Doubts persist as how to represent illiterate servants like Bakha’s or even Munoo’s consciousness in a language they can hardly understand, let alone use. This would mean that English used in the fiction whether to represent the thoughts or the speech of the domestic servants is merely translation of Indian dialogues. This is an important fact to remember lest we as readers accept uncritically the dialogues attributed to the servants in the texts. The following example from A Strange and Sublime Address can be considered in this context:

Outside there was a man with a jhadu in one hand and a bucket in another, a dreary blue cloth tucked around his waist and his knees . . . This man, behaving most mysteriously, ignored her [Meera] and entered with a frown on his face; he stooped forward with a kind of exhaustion as he walked, which made him oddly attractive to her eyes. He went straight to the hall, took a few detours, and disappeared.

“Who is this man?” she asked as she returned to the kitchen, screwing up her eyebrows. Being new to the house, everything in it and everything that happened to it made her curious and prescient . . . Already she could not be bothered, however, for she felt sleepy herself. (Strange 192) [emphasis added]

Meera’s lack of understanding of the purpose of the sweeper Panna seems a bit odd considering that she belongs to the subaltern class and as she mentions to Rehman that she had worked earlier in a Punjabi house (Strange 190). Her incomprehensibility is not entirely implausible though another possible reading can be considered. Panna appears with a “jhadu” which is not glossed as broom (particularly for the benefit of the Western audience) and hence incomprehensible. But Meera’s query and Rehman’s explanation would solve the mystery for them and therefore we can deduce that this episode has been staged for their benefit. This can be seen as another example where the medium dictates the construction of the plot and more specifically of subaltern reality.

This is an “important problem confronting the Indian English novelist, especially when she moves out of conveniently Euro-Indian hybrid areas and into the muddy fields of clay-caked buffaloes and paddy.”²²

This transcription of Indian realities has been found to be a Herculean task to surmount and Indian writers in English either end up excluding certain realities or resorting to various strategies. The presence of a glossary in earlier writers to explain Indian words is perhaps the easiest way to address this untranslatable aspect of Indian reality. Other writers like Mulk Raj Anand tried to literally translate Indian phrases and expressions. Salman Rushdie’s method of developing “chutney” English is another attempt. Tabish Khair presents examples to show how the West or Euro-centric audience plays a dominant role even in such a brand of English. For instance, in Rushdie’s novel The Moor’s Last Sigh, there is a seemingly innocuous term “dialamp”.²³ Now “dia” means lamp in Hindi and there is no reason why the author should use both the terms together. The presence of the Hindi term is superfluous and merely to add the illusion of authenticity or “Indian-ness” to the narrative.²⁴

Thus, it could be gathered that there are difficulties in recreating in English the Indian realities, particularly those of the servants and other subalterns. This becomes more difficult because servants are a part of the private sphere of society, i.e. the family. Aijaz Ahmad remarks in this context: “English is, among all the Indian languages, the most removed, in its structure and ambience, from all the other Indian languages, hence least able to bridge the cultural gap between the original and the translated text. This disability is proportionately greater the closer the original text is to . . . domestic, the customary, the assumed, the unsaid” [emphasis added].²⁵

Thus, it would seem that lived realities of the servants, predominantly belonging to the domestic sphere, are untranslatable into English. Indian fiction in English, no doubt, presents a reality but the reality is of the middle class. “It [Indian fiction in English] does not fill a vacuum or simply express what it was; it makes room for itself, it tells some stories and forgets other, and some of these forgotten stories are forgotten largely because of their ‘inability’ to be narrated in English.”²⁶ Thus, the silence about the servants is constitutive of Indian fiction in English and not a mere forgetting. Servants are not narrated for the simple reason that their realities are not so easily transcribed into the

English medium. Though this would seem to be a rather harsh generalisation, it is, nonetheless, largely true. This does not mean that we disregard all the English texts written by Indians. History and circumstances are reasons why Indians speak and write in English as Amitav Ghosh puts it candidly when asked about his choice of English. “It is due to my circumstances that I [Amitav Ghosh] am writing in English. I am a product of modern India. I grew up in North India and not Bengal, so I never had a literary education in Bengali. I was educated in English and taught in Delhi when I wrote my novels. The structure of my everyday life was formed by English.”²⁷ Circumstance is always the reason why one writes in a particular language. But it is only when Indian writers try to adopt a pan-Indian stance then we have occlusion of realities. We see this impulse in these words of Amit Chaudhuri in an interview:

Vernacular writing (writing in Indian languages) occupies a slightly different space. Obviously Kannada literature (literature from the southern Indian state of Karnataka) cannot and doesn't want to speak on behalf of something called India or pretend to be Indian literature. Only writing in English can bear that burden, have that pretension and ambition of representing the history and totality of a country.²⁸ [emphasis added]

We can counter Chaudhuri by asking for whom he and other Indian writers in English seek to represent “the history and totality of a country”. Meenakshi Mukherjee rightly insinuates that “for the Indian writer in English there may be other unarticulated compulsions – the uncertainty about his target audience,” in the “pull towards a homogenization of reality, an essentializing of Indian, a certain flattening out of the complicated and conflicting contours, the ambiguous and shifting relations that exist between individuals and groups in a plural community.”²⁹

Servants are less likely to be exposed to English education or even less exposed to spoken English, either addressed by their masters or amongst themselves. It is by keeping all such facts in mind that we can avoid falling into the trap of stereotyping servants. English is used a class marker in the Indian context and to distinguish the middle class masters from the lower class servants. Language by itself is not the sole standard of class distinction. In the next section we would deal with the issue of servant as a class in more detail. However, we must note here that English is not the only language that is hegemonic in the Indian context. A comparison of pre- and post-independence scenario

of the Indian languages would reveal that certain languages such as Urdu suffered with the promotion of Hindi as the national language.³⁰ But this is tangential to our study since it deals primarily with Indian fiction in English.

II

In the Introduction to Muchachas No More: Household Workers in the Latin America and the Caribbean (1989), Elsa M. Chaney and Maria Garcia Castro points out the main difficulty in the study of domestic servants. “Domestic workers usually work alone or with, at most, one or two others. They have no central workplace, no common free times and holidays. Because they are so isolated, as a group they are essentially ‘invisible’ to themselves and to society. Under these conditions, they find it hard to join together to become aware of, and to fight for, their rights.”³¹ One of the foremost problems of studying domestic servants, even in Indian fiction in English, is the fact that they cannot be grouped as a homogeneous category. The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary defines a servant as “a person who works in somebody’s household for wages, and often for food and lodging”.³² Domestic services include washing, cleaning, cooking, running errands, working in the garden, nursing, and at times even helping out with the family business. All these have been performed by different persons or by a single servant, depending upon the economic status of the employing family and the relative bargaining power of the servant. For instance, it is generally agreed in Indian society that male servants would not wash women’s undergarments. Indian servants even in modern times, is a fluid genus and would include poor and distant relatives, mostly spinsters and widows who are not “domestic servants” per se but would supplement or replace servants very often. There is the singular presence of communal servants like the sweepers. Then there is the rising phenomenon of part-time domestic servants in urban or metropolitan areas due to the problem of cramped living quarters. A genealogy of servants, such as the one done in exemplary fashion by Swapna M Banerjee shows that time and again various factors – race, class, gender, religion, age – have played varying roles in the servant’s position and relationship with the employer’s family.³³ For instance, women employed in eighteenth and nineteenth France and England as servants were mostly unmarried and many of them left service after getting married. In Kazuo Ishiguro’s Remains of the Day, the housekeeper of Darlington Hall, Miss Kenton, leaves her service to get married and

settles down. In sharp contrast maidservants in India are mostly widowed, married and then deserted; literary examples are Kasibai in The Last Burden and Uma in Freedom Song. Swapna Banerjee points out that domestic service in certain cultures, particularly in urban households, was seen as an advantageous occupation.³⁴ She cites Margo L. Smith to refer to a similar situation of domestic service as a step for future development in contemporary Latin American women.³⁵ In sharp contrast in India “. . . women entered domestic service not for buying a higher social status but as helpless women abandoned by families – seeking food and shelter in a secure, urban environment.”³⁶ Our study, of course, deals with texts written by Indian writers in English and about mostly Indian characters situated in the Indian subcontinent. Therefore the idea of race is flattened somewhat in our study. Besides the factor of class, caste and gender, we have to take into account of the age factor while doing a study on Indian servants.

It becomes difficult to study and analyse servants as a group. To make matters worse, written accounts left by servants (at least, in India) are a rarity and there is no written history either of their exploitation, or struggle against such exploitation. Vinay Bahl remarks rightly that “British workers left diaries behind for British historians to find their voices in, but Indian workers and peasants [including servants] did not leave behind any ‘original authentic’ voices.”³⁷ We have now the rare exception of Baby Halder’s autobiographical A Life Less Ordinary (2006). A domestic servant, Halder struggled with parental neglect and marital abuse to try her hand at writing her story. Encouraged by her master, she wrote her autobiography in Bengali which was later translated into English and a second work in on the way. But hers is a rare case in Indian literature.

Thus it would be very difficult to analyse servants, even if literary, as different as Bakha, Hakiman Bua, Munoo or Kasibai. Bakha (Untouchable) can be seen as the ultimate outsider for he is oppressed by one and all, while Hakiman Bua (in Sunlight on a Broken Column) enjoys a privileged position like a member of the master’s family. Munoo (Coolie) may be exploited to death, but at least he does not have to tender sexual favours, willingly or otherwise, like Kasibai (The Last Burden) or Chamundi (The Mammaries of the Welfare State). Things get more complicated when we have to deal with characters like Aunt Mira (Clear Light of Day) who is not exactly hired as servant though she renders service like one. And then we have servants like Mary Pereira (Midnight Children) who goes on to establish a successful pickle industry and gives

employment to her former employer's son, Saleem Sinai. In the Indian subcontinent caste played and still plays a complex role not merely in the Hindu households but also, somewhat varyingly, in those of the other religious dispensations. Caste determined not only the role and position of the servants, but also their wages and other privileges, material or otherwise, accrued from their employers. Caste taboos were very difficult to erase, at least within the domestic arena. Most Hindu household employ cooks from the higher castes because it was thought that food cooked by them are ritually clean and the lower castes servants were normally assigned to dirty jobs like sweeping, gardening or washing of clothes etc. It is true that with rapid industrialisation, increased mobility, active judicial reforms and positive discrimination, caste barriers have been eroded much. But, to say that caste has disappeared or is less instrumental in the Indian realities would be mere wishful thinking.

A superficial glance at the literary texts would also reveal that domestic servants hardly possess any class consciousness and at most times identify with their masters and against other social groups based on language, ethnicity, caste, religion etc. A classic example would be Kochu Maria who sides with the Ayemenem household against Velutha in The God of Small Things. It would seem that the economic factor is superseded by other cultural factors when it comes to even hiring or maintaining of servants. The nature of the servant's work and his pay is also highly fluid making him/her "unique" among the subaltern workers. The working hours as well the nature of the servants' work is normally not fixed, particularly those who live with their masters. While richer households may hire different servants for different household chores, in lesser privileged houses the same person may double up as cook, washer-man, gardener etc. The nature of payment of the servant's wages in India is also not fixed in spite of all governmental and non-governmental efforts to do so. Unlike few developed countries, the payment is always subject to the whims and generosity of the masters and the scarcity of labour. Since gifts and other items of clothing and necessities are doled out, the masters always tend to underpay the servant. We can take one example from A Strange and Sublime Address, where in the section titled "Jadav" we see the young master scolding his servant Jadav when the latter asks for a shirt. The boy reminds Jadav that he has already been given pyjamas and that a new uniform was due only after six months of service. Further, the boy reminds that the pyjamas are of the best quality:

“I brought themselves,” said the boy, “from Gariahat. There are four prices – eighteen rupees, twenty-one rupees, twenty-six rupees, and twenty-eight rupees. And I bought”, said the boy sadly, “the pair that cost twenty-eight rupees. Best quality cloth, the same as I buy for myself.” At this point, the boy glanced at this own pyjamas, and then at Jadav’s. They were both equally white. (Strange 163) [emphasis added]

Here we see how the boy denies the extra shirt to Jadav by pointing out the best quality pyjamas already given. The cost of the pyjamas is highlighted to display the largesse of the master and thus effectively block the proper economic evaluation of the relationship.

Another reason for the lack of a strong class consciousness among servants is that for many servants, particularly the young male, domestic service was often a stop-gap occupation, something to earn the daily bread till one found a proper job. “Workers also move between multiple households of employers. Moves vary from live-in to live-out situations, full-time to part-time work, as well as domestic to a combination of domestic with non domestic work.”³⁸ For instance, Munoo starts as a domestic help but runs away to become a casual and later on an industrial worker. Of course, he ends up once again in the domestic household of Mrs Mainwaring where he dies of tuberculosis. Nando (Freedom Song) is shown as working in the house of Khuku intermittently. That he is unable to get a different job is not wholly due to his laziness (as it is insinuated in the novel) as viable alternatives are unavailable. For maidservants, it was something different as they were not as mobile as males. For the young maids, it was something to contribute to the family earnings till one got married. Jochna, the young maid (Freedom Song) helps out with her meagre earnings so that her family can run and her younger brother can study. Young girls thus were forced into this sort of service as it required little or no skills. Usually, it is only for young children, widows, aged spinsters or unskilled men that domestic labour becomes a permanent occupation. Living with employers also meant that servants are somewhat isolated from other workers and from their own family. Servants are also encouraged to feel a part of the family and hence less likely to be alienated. If alienation from their work is the beginning of class consciousness, it is very likely that servants, compared to other workers, are less prone to it. Of course, “the close association arising out of long-term co-residence and personal service fostered a sense of dependence and belonging among both servants and employers.”³⁹ The need on the employers’ part is

not so much as on the servants' part. Servants unlike slaves, or other forms of bonded labour, had the freedom to walk away from their job though this freedom depended to a great extent on the availability of other and viable opportunities and also to the mobility of the servant. Extremely young or old servants were comparatively less free in this regard. Plus the factor of caste also played a somewhat restricting role in the case of certain servants. Bakha (Untouchable) due to his low caste, for instance, is not able to run away from his job as easily as Munoo (Coolie) is able to.

Judith Rollins sums up the lack of consciousness among Indian servants with these words based on the insights gleaned from Aban Mehta's pioneering work The Domestic Servant Class (1960):

He [Aban Mehta] speculated that five factors mitigate against the organization of domestic: the lack of homogeneity in the group and the fact that they work separated from one another; the personal and sometimes intimate relationship between employer and employee, which makes workers consider organizing inappropriate; the privileged positions of some domestics, which they would not want to threaten; the perception of many workers, especially women, of their position as temporary; and the "apathy, ignorance," and pervasive depression among domestics because of their low-paid and low-prestige jobs.⁴⁰

Of course, servants were not as helpless as projected in the literary texts and wielded a certain amount of autonomy through subversive acts, however little they may be. Thus, the Indian servant is a unique worker. "Although both the employers and the domestics of colonial India were a part of the capitalist rubric of imperialism, the coordinates of capital-labour relations, such as state power, wage structure, market imperfections, technology, elements of discipline, and control, all worked imprecisely and ambiguously because of the very nature of the service itself."⁴¹

All these are not incidental to our study of literary servants and particularly the economic factors which would be discussed more in the fourth chapter dealing with labour of servants. The servant-master relationship is a complex one with multiple nuances. What is disheartening is that most Indian novelists in English miss out or deliberately ignore this complexity in favour of a unilateral portrayal of the servant-master relationship. Jacklyn Cock had remarked that "servants are situated at a locus of

three converging lines of exploitation: class, race and sex.”⁴² To these factors we can add that of caste, and age. Therefore the master/mistress-servant relationship in the Indian context is influenced by a complex working of all these factors.

The difficulty of defining servants as a class does not mean that they cannot be grouped together on the basis of certain shared experiences, particularly in relations with their masters. Our study could proceed better by borrowing the conceptually more rich term, i.e. “subaltern”. Asok Sen defines “subaltern” as an “entire people that is subordinate in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office, or in any way”.⁴³ The paradigmatic relation between the subaltern and the privileged class is one of power and domination. Though this concept overcomes the strictly reductive view of class, its use entails a danger of glossing over the economic factor, which, nonetheless, is the most influential among all the factors that affect a social being. Irfan Habib accuses Ranajit Guha and other scholars of the “subaltern school” of misinterpreting Gramsci’s terminology by laying too much stress on the “‘autonomy’ of the subaltern classes in ideology and culture”. Habib supports Gramsci’s judgement that subalterns like peasants cannot create an ideology of their own and goes on to denounce the “subaltern classes” to be “not true classes, but merely castes, tribes and communities, where *zamindars* and peasants are seen and accepted as undifferentiated” [italics author’s].⁴⁴ We would posit that servants like other subalterns do have their own world with its own ideology and culture. Of course, we cannot construct the servants’ world from evidence culled from texts written by middle class authors. But nonetheless, the texts under construction betray the tension of coping with and suppression of such subaltern consciousness. This issue of ideology and its part in the identity of the classes is very complex and has yielded to varying opinions from various critics. It would be fruitful if we examine some of the contentious aspects.

III

It would be our contention that Indian fiction in English presents servants and other lower class characters as the “Other” against whom the masters could posit their middle class identity. Our attempt would be to expose the various ways in which the servant is presented in a stereotypical manner. In this case it would be all too easy to try

and posit the “real identity” of the servants as against the false identity as constructed by the middle class masters. But this is sort of contention has become difficult in present critical circles where identity politics itself has become debatable. The postmodernists denounce all identities as “fictitious” and “mystifying” since they treat “fictions as facts” and erase all “contradictions” and “differences” internal to the social construct.⁴⁵ In our case it would mean that the identity of either the master or the servant cannot be assumed as fixed. For example, a servant living in the contemporary metropolis might experience his “servitude” very differently from a servant in pre-independent India. Bakha’s experiences as low-caste sweeper (*Untouchable*) in colonial India are to a large extent different from that of Ganesh or Panna (*A Strange and Sublime Address*) who are sweepers in metropolitan Kolkata of independent India. Even two servants living in close proximity to each other, such as Uma and Nando (*Freedom Song*), are differently located in relation to the category of class and gender. Kochu Maria and Velutha, both serving the Ayemenem household in *The God of Small Things* are differently located in respect of their servitude, primarily on account of their different castes. Kochu Maria, the cook is treated not as badly as Velutha and she identifies with the Ayemenem family against him and other untouchables by priding herself “as a ‘Syrian Christian . . . Not a Pelaya, or a Pulaya, or a Paravan. But a Touchable, upper-caste Christian’”.⁴⁶ Kochu Maria, undoubtedly, is exploited for she is paid only seventy rupees a month, and yet she feels (or at least is shown to feel) superior to Velutha and has no sympathy for him. Considering that they are all Syrian Christians and not Hindus, the part played by caste discriminations comes as a surprise.

Dorice Williams Elliott notes the interesting fact that servants tend to distinguish themselves from other workers, and vice versa though both belong to “the working class.” “Not only do they [servants and other workers] both work at menial labor for a wage, but both also come, in most cases, from the same background — their parents and forebears were rural agricultural workers. Both have migrated to cities or towns in search of employment and higher wages.” However, “the two groups experienced quite different working and living conditions, identified themselves with different systems of rank and status, and operated under seemingly different economic systems.”⁴⁷

All in all, contrary to an essentialist view, the signifier servant is nebulous since every servant differs from every other servant considerably or otherwise. A servant may

identify himself/herself on the basis of religion, caste, ethnicity, linguistic etc. Again, the same servant may identify with the master on one issue and distinguish himself/herself on another. The issue of identity is extremely relevant to our study. In the literary texts under consideration we have to examine the unilateral construction of the servant's identity which more often than not converges with the standpoint of the middle class masters/narrators.

As Paula M. L. Moya points out the “first problem with essentialist conceptions of identity, . . . is the tendency to posit one aspect of identity . . . as the sole cause or determinant constituting the social meanings of an individual's experience”.⁴⁸ For example, in the case of servants, class ought to have been the determining factor in their experiences and identities but it is not so. But we cannot ignore the concept of identity, howsoever it may be contested, because of “the fact that goods and resources are still distributed according to identity categories”.⁴⁹ In fact Moya points out that an alternative to essentialist conceptions of identity, termed variously as “strategic essentialisms” and “contingent foundation”, has been posited by theorists like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Judith Butler. The former talks of “a strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest.”⁵⁰ In other words, although one knows that identity is not real one can still use identity in the public domain as a tool for resistance.

For Moya the Post-positivist approach to identity, first articulated by Satya P. Mohanty in his 1993 essay “The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity: On Beloved and the Postcolonial Question” and in his subsequent book Literary Theory and the Claims of History: Postmodernism, Objectivity, Multicultural Politics (1997), is a more “sophisticated and nuanced alternative to current conceptions that see identity either in a deterministic way or as purely arbitrary (or, at most, ‘strategic’).”⁵¹ Mohanty sees identities simultaneously as “real” and “constructed”.

All experience . . . is socially constructed, but the constructedness does not make it arbitrary or unstable in advance. Experiences are crucial indexes of our relationships with our world (including our relationships with ourselves), and to stress their cognitive nature is to argue that they can be susceptible to varying degrees of socially constructed truth or error and can serve as sources of objective knowledge or socially produced mystification.⁵²

Mohanty draws on the insightful work done by Naomi Scheman in her essay “Anger and the Politics of Naming”, where she explains how we commit the mistake of thinking that our emotions as our own “inner” possessions.⁵³ Scheman’s work proves that the postmodernists’ distinction between knowledge based on personal experience and that on theory is wrong since highly personal experience such as anger, pleasure, etc are not immediate and self-mediated but mediated and ambiguous. In our case we can posit rather crudely that a servant or master, may be wrong about his “experience” or “identity” and it is possible to arrive at a more accurate interpretation of it. Seen in this light, a servant identifying or happy with his position is making the simple epistemic mistake of not reading his “position” or his relation with his employer clearly. The employer who reads his relationship shared with his/her servant as happy is also wrong. Of course, literary and biographical accounts use the nostalgic remembrance of the male characters of the loving relationship shared with servants, particularly ayas or nursemaids as a narrative device to glide over the exploitation. Swapna M Banerjee points out that this recounting of the happy idyllic past is partly motivated by the guilt felt by the middle class for having exploited the servants.

Authors recalled vividly memories in which they were loved, nourished, taken care of, or even deprived, mistreated, or abused by the domestic workers. . . . By acknowledging the authority the authority servants wielded over middle-class children and by remembering them in writing the authors tried to amend the wrongs and sanitize the highly stratified, hierarchal relationship between employers and servants in real life.⁵⁴

Such relating thus has to be exposed as false by placing the relationships in the matrices of all the social factors concerned. We have to investigate whether the Indian writers in English have taken into all these factors into account or have constructed “falsely” both the master’s as well as the servant’s identity. Seen in this light even the authors could be wrong in their readings of the experiences that they try to posit in their works.

Read in this way, the essentialist assumption that mere occupation of the “position” of servants or suffering economic deprivation gives the servant a better understanding of the exploitative societal structures is a fallacy. Being a servant would not automatically be sufficient to understand the exploitation that structures such a position. Terry Eagleton also agrees that it is wrong to suppose “that the mere occupancy

of some place within society will automatically supply . . . [one] with an appropriate set of political beliefs and desires”.⁵⁵ Eagleton notes that if that had been the case then all women would have been feminists. Servants may be better placed to understand their exploitation than their masters. But they are liable to misinterpret their situation and form a false identity. The link between their position and their identity may vary since it depends partly upon the interpretation of experience. The simple fact of experiencing oppression is not enough for understanding one’s own or some else’s oppressive situation. “Experience” refers to the fact of personally observing, encountering or undergoing a particular event or situation. But the meanings we give our experiences are unavoidably prepared by the ideas and beliefs through which we view the world. Mohanty points out that “the experience of social subjects has a cognitive component.” He adds that “‘experience’ refers very simply to the variety of ways human process information.”⁵⁶ But the “truth-value” of such understanding of experience will depend on how adequate is the “theory” that explains the intersecting social, economic and political relations that constitute the subject and object of knowledge. Any understanding of the “experiences of any given individual” has to take into consideration “the mutual interaction of *all* the relevant social categories that constitute [his or] her social location and situate them within the particular social, cultural and historical matrix in which [he or] she exists [*italics author’s*].”⁵⁷ This is important in our study for we would find that the authors very often left out relevant categories while constructing the servant’s or even the middle class characters’ identities. And the most important is the economic factor, particularly that which underlined the servant-master relationship.

Thus, “some identities, can more adequately account for the social categories constituting an individual’s social location . . . than some others that the same individual might claim.” If the master (or the author) is “forced to ignore certain salient aspects of . . . [his] social location in order to maintain . . . [his] self-conception, we can fairly conclude that . . . [his] identity is distorted.” Thus, “identities are not self-evident, unchanging and uncontestable, nor are they absolutely fragmented, contradictory and unstable. Rather, identities are subject to multiple determinations and to a continual process of verification that takes place over the course of an individual’s life through her interaction with the society she lives in.”⁵⁸

Thus any true identity would have to acknowledge and understand the social, political, economic, and epistemic consequences of a person's own social location. Mohanty asserts that our social world is one "constitutionally defined by relations of domination".⁵⁹ We find that to maintain his/her identity the author/master may have to repress or misinterpret his/her own or other's (servant's) experiences. The authors would most likely represent the servants by setting aside structural relations of domination as irrelevant to their personal circumstances. This silence in the literary texts about servants would be exposed and so do the lopsided presentation of their experience by the authors. We cannot but agree with Elizabeth Langland that by "stressing that experience is constructed and that politics governs its construction, the new perspective provides a better account of the complexities of social change and human agency."⁶⁰ The middle class ideological orientation of the literary texts has to be analysed, particularly with respect to servants. However, ideology itself is a sticky issue and needs to be examined in detail.

IV

A basic premise of this study is that the representative relationship between the domestic servant and the master is one of power and domination. But most Indian authors in English do not "see" the relationship as exploitative. In fact, Indian English fiction tries to mask this exploitation through various strategies. Here, ideology plays not an unimportant part. This issue of ideology has been problematic and one that has elicited quite varied responses from theorists.

Ideology in classical and somewhat oversimplified Marxism is used to denote an illusory belief, a dogma which people believe irrespective of its falsity and which serves to mystify or occlude class interests. That servants are unable to realize that they are exploited simply because they are taught or schooled into believing that they are a part of the family or that they are themselves to blame for their exploitation. In the same manner, the masters could be led into the naïve belief that they have the natural "right" to exploit the lower classes. If ideology were to mask the exploitative practices then it would be a simple matter of unmasking these practices by showing up the falsity of such practices. But then this turns out to be far more complex than it first appears to be. Slavoj

Žižek combines Lacanian insights with Marxism to try and offer a more satisfying explanation. His words about anti-Semitism in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989) could be aptly reproduced here in our context of servants. An objective look would confirm that servants really do neglect their duties, are often cheats and that some of them do not wash regularly. An ordinary middle class man is assailed within his class with the bad habits of servants – dirtiness, insincerity, cheating etc. He returns home and finds that his servant is not dirty and sincere in his work. For Žižek, “this everyday experience” does not offer an “irreducible resistance to the ideological construction.” “An ideology is really ‘holding us’ only when we do not feel any opposition between it and reality – that is, when the ideology succeeds in determining the mode of our everyday experience of reality itself”. The middle class employer will turn “this gap, this discrepancy itself, into an argument” for anti-servant prejudice. He would conclude that servants are very deceptive for they hide their real nature behind the mask of everyday appearance and it is only through strict control that they behave themselves. In fact the master would rather congratulate himself for his firmness. “An ideology really succeeds when even the facts which at first sight contradict it start to function as arguments in its favour”. For Žižek, the Marxian perspective of ideology is limited as we are “unable to shake so-called ideological prejudices by taking into account the pre-ideological level of everyday experience” and so he tries to incorporate the Lacanian perspective. The basis of this argument is that the ideological construction always finds its limits in the field of everyday experience – that it is unable to reduce, to contain, to absorb and to annihilate this level. “Herein lies the basic difference with Marxism: in the predominant Marxist perspective the ideological gaze is a *partial gaze* overlooking the *totality* of social relations, whereas in the Lacanian perspective ideology rather designates *a totality set on effacing the traces of its own impossibility*”[italics author’s].⁶¹

Žižek maintains that in ideology there is no simple case of falsity obscuring truth. Ideology is not a dreamlike illusion that we build to escape insupportable reality; . . . it is a fantasy-construction which serves as a support for our ‘reality’ itself”. In fact, the “function of ideology is not to offer us a point of escape from our reality but to offer us the social reality itself as an escape from some traumatic, real kernel.”⁶² In our case it is not enough that we must liberate ourselves of the so-called class prejudices and learn to see servants as they really are. Žižek would maintain that in this way we will certainly remain victims of these so-called prejudices. “We must confront ourselves with how the

ideological figure of the . . . [servant] is invested with or unconscious desire, with how we have constructed this figure to escape a certain deadlock of our desire.”⁶³ Žižek’s concept is interesting but it does not quite explain why servants follow the ideological illusions set up by the middle classes. Gramsci’s concept of hegemony could be more relevant here.

Antonio Gramsci posited the manner by which individuals consented to prevailing ideological values. For Gramsci, there is the “‘spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is ‘historically’ caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys of its position and function in the world of production”. The ruling body has coercive power “which ‘legally’ enforces discipline on those groups who do not ‘consent’ either actively or passively.” This system “is, however, constituted for the whole of society in anticipation of moments of crisis of command and direction when spontaneous consent has failed.”⁶⁴ Gramsci maintained that a ruling body to be successful always needed both economic and ideological power. Both worked through “political” (government) and “civil” society (family, school, church, etc.). Thus ideology refers to the ideas, beliefs, representations and practices which bind people together. People are actively involved in their own conditioning as servants, for instance, may share certain values of their middle class masters such as cleanliness, thriftiness, punctuality, hard-work, etc for uplifting their condition and social mobility. But, this should not be interpreted as showing that servants are fully integrated with their middle and upper class masters.

Louis Althusser in his seminal essay “Ideology and ideological State Apparatus” advances a similar thesis when he points out that “*ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects . . .*” [italics author’s].⁶⁵ Althusser differentiates between the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) which functions by ideology from the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) that functions by violence. The former is plural including “the religious ISA”, “the educational ISA”, “the legal ISA”, “the political ISA”, “the trade-union ISA”, “the communication ISA”, and “the cultural ISA” and is highly effective. Repressive state apparatuses such as the army, police and the legal system function by violence, whereas ideological state apparatuses such as schools, religious institutions, the family etc. operate primarily through ideology.

. . . it is clear that whereas the unified (Repressive) State Apparatus belongs entirely to the *public* domain, much of the larger part of the Ideological State Apparatus (in their apparent dispersion) are part, on the contrary, of the *private* domain. . . . It is unimportant whether the institutions in which they are realized are “public” or “private”. What matters is how they function. Private institutions can perfectly well “function” as Ideological State Apparatuses.⁶⁶
[italics author’s]

Althusser argues that ideological beliefs are not just ideas but materialized in specific types of institutions and organizations. For instance, it is within the organization and functioning of institutions such as family that ideas such as “cleanliness”, “discipline”, “work”, “morality” take on a material form and become embodied in particular practices and actions. Ideological State Apparatuses function mainly by ideology, but they also function secondarily by repression which is concealed and even symbolic to an extent. Althusser concludes that there can be “no purely ideological apparatus” and even “Schools, Churches use suitable methods of punishment, expulsion, selection, etc., to ‘discipline’ not only their shepherds, but also their flocks.”⁶⁷ What is true of schools is also true of the family and it is this element of repression, particularly in the “Family Ideological State Apparatus” that concerns us. In Indian fiction in English, this element of repression, particularly with reference to domestic servants, is hardly taken cognizance of. The repression of the individual or women within the traditional and patriarchal family has been no doubt noted both by writers as well as literary critics. But when it came to domestic servants, barring rare exceptions, there has been a studied silence. This is highly regrettable considering the fact that the dominant ideological state apparatus which has been installed in the dominant position in mature capitalist social formations is the “School-Family couple” replacing the “Church-Family couple”. One of the objectives underlying this study is to see the family as one of the major instruments of societal control, particularly with relevance to domestic servants. The middle and upper classes learn and disseminate ways of societal control within the family.

Althusser however acknowledges that Ideological State Apparatuses is “the *site* for class struggle”, as the ruling class cannot control the ISAs as easily as it can the (repressive) State apparatus. This is because “the exploited classes” are “able to find the means and occasions to express itself there [in the ISAs] either by the utilization of their contradictions or by conquering combat positions in them in struggle.”⁶⁸ Seen in this light,

the middle class family could be seen as a site for struggle between the middle class master and the subaltern servant. Though the master is able to dictate terms most of the time, it cannot be denied that the servant through subversive acts like stealing, gossiping, shirking etc is able to resist. There is always a tension in the novels about the threat from the servants and the author/narrator/master tries to deal with it effectively by marginalizing or occluding the servant and his/her voice.

Terry Eagleton points out the presence of sceptics like N. Abercrombie, S. Hill and B. S. Turner (The Dominant Ideology Thesis 1980) who refute that ideology is vital in societal control. The “dominant ideology in advanced capitalist societies is internally fissured and contradictory, offering no seamless unity for the masses to internalise.” Thus the diffident servant, for instance, may not actively resist a social set-up which oppresses him not because of some ideological beliefs, but because he is “too exhausted from work”, or because “he is too fatalistic or apathetic to see the point of such activity.” Servants may be “frightened of the consequences of opposing” their masters or “they may spend too much time worrying about their jobs” to “give it much thought”. “Ruling classes have at their disposal a great many such techniques of ‘negative’ social control, which are a good deal more prosaic and material than persuading their subject that they belong to a master race or exhorting them to identify with the destiny of their nation.”⁶⁹ In Anand’s Untouchable we see how Lakha, Bakha’s father, is fatalistic and believes that the fate of the untouchables and the cruelty of the high castes is a result of karma: “He [Lakha] had never throughout his narrative renounced his deep-rooted sense of inferiority and the docile acceptance of the laws of fate.”⁷⁰

The importance of ideology could be questioned in various ways such as “that there *is* no coherent dominant ideology . . . that advanced capitalism is a self-sustaining ‘game’ which keeps us in place less through ideas than by its material techniques . . . that there is a dominant ideology at work, but nobody is gullible enough to fall for it” [italics author’s].⁷¹ But Eagleton argues that this does not mean that ideology is finished. He sums up very convincingly that ideology “neither legislates . . . [material] situations into being nor is simply ‘caused’ by them; rather, ideology offers a set of *reasons* for such material conditions” [italics author’s].⁷² In other words, servants are neither oppressed because of ideological reasons nor ideology simply masks the exploitative relations.

Another fact to be remembered is that ideologies are not “conscious, well-articulated systems of beliefs”.⁷³ But this does not lessen their effectiveness.

What is bourgeois about this mixed bunch of idioms is less the kind of languages they are than the effects they produce: effects, for example, of “closure” whereby certain forms of signification are silently excluded, and certain signifiers “fixed” in a commanding position. These effects are discursive, not purely formal, features of language: what is interpreted as “closure” will depend on the concrete context of utterance, and is variable from one communicative situation to the next.⁷⁴

However, we must not forget that the propositions advanced by ideology can be subjected to scrutiny for their truth value. Ideological discourse, Eagleton asserts, “typically displays a certain ratio between empirical propositions” and . . . ‘world view’”. He refers to the example of literary works where there are empirical propositions. “But . . . these statements are not usually present for their own sake; they act, rather, as ‘supports’ for their overall world view of the text itself. And the ways in which these empirical statements are selected and deployed is generally governed by this requirement.”⁷⁵ Texts are deceptive in that while appearing to describe objectively about the servants lure the unsuspecting reader inexorably into the subjective. Eagleton asserts that ideologies would be useless if it were not partly true.

[But it also is equally true that] ideologies also contain a good many propositions which are flagrantly false, and do so less because of some false inherent quality than because of the distortions into which they are commonly forced in their attempts to ratify and legitimate unjust, oppressive political systems. The falsity in question may be epistemic, functional or generic, or some combination of the three.⁷⁶

To take a simple illustration the statement that servants are dirty is true to a certain extent. But to argue further that they are dirty because of some inherent lack of humanity is false. Similar is their case of being stereotyped as thieves and cheats. It would be wrong to state that servants do never steal or cheat. Any random survey of the newspapers would indeed confirm that servants do steal, lie, cheat and at times, murder their masters. But what is to be examined in this study is the way(s) that middle class ideology disseminated by literary (and other) texts tends to attribute these failings to the servants’ corrupt nature. Domestic ideologies thus employ such devices as “unification,

spurious identification, naturalization, deception, self-deception, universalization and rationalization.”⁷⁷

To sum up, while doing a close reading of the texts and its preoccupations we have to keep in mind all these different aspects of ideology. In spite of varied differences between the individual authors and the texts, we can assert that Indian English fiction consists of a general system of viewing the world conceptually, in accordance with which the events and characters of the stories have been evaluated; in our case, domestic servants, in particular. The “norms” are presented through a single dominant perspective, that of the master who is also the narrator-focalizer. Needless to add, that since the master is predominantly from the middle and upper class, the dominant ideology of Indian English fiction is that of the upper and middle classes. But they become subordinate to the dominant focalizer who is always the author/master, thus transforming the other evaluating subjects into objects of evaluation. Thus, the ideology of the middle class author/master/narrator is usually taken as authoritative, and all other ideologies in the text are evaluated from this higher position. We need to destabilize this authority of the master/narrator’s voice within the text.

There is no one-to-one correspondence between real servants and literary servants, just as there is no direct correspondence between literature and the society it seeks to represent. We are interested more how the servant is stereotyped and misrepresented so that it becomes the “Other” for the constructing the middle class master’s identity. Some of the processes in fiction are analogous to those happening in society.

Yet the relation between . . . [domestic] ideology and fiction is unidirectional: the ideology does not simply determine the fiction. Rather, through a process of symbiosis, the fiction *forms* the ideology by articulating and justifying the position and aims of the [master] Troubled by the nagging contradiction between the theoretical justification of exploitation and its actual brutal practice, it also attempts to mask the contradiction by obsessively portraying the supposed inferiority of the [servant]⁷⁸ [italics author’s]

Reworking Abdul R. JanMohamed’s words in another context we can posit that the construction of the servant as the “Other” “operates by substituting natural or generic

categories for those that are socially or ideologically determined. All the . . . [negative] characteristics and traits with which the . . . [master] endows the . . . [servant] are thereby not presented as the products of social and cultural difference but as characteristics inherent in the [servant]”⁷⁹ This sort of denigrating the servant starts with his/her body and in the next chapter we would examine how it is done.

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CHAPTER THREE

MARGINALIZATION OF THE SERVANT'S BODY

The body is not a thing, it is a situation: it is our grasp on the world and a sketch of our projects.

- Simone de Beauvoir

I

The central premise of our study is the exploitation of domestic servants and to understand oppression one has to refer to the body since all subjects are bodies. The domination of servants within the domestic sphere results from the control, howsoever contested it may be, of their bodies by their masters. This chapter would examine how Indian English novels reproduce the strategies through which the upper/middle class authors/narrators/ masters represent and control the servants' bodies. The depiction of the Indian upper/middle class domestic panorama does not acknowledge the servant's name, let alone her/his body even though the servant is a ubiquitous part of this same reality. He or she is condemned to be the anonymous, generalised ayah (nurse), maidservant, mali (gardener), cook or sweeper. The following words of one such servant from Vikram Chandra's Love and Longing in Bombay (1997) reflect the apparent invisibility of such servants to their masters/mistresses:

“I [Ganga, the maid] mean that she [Mrs Dolly Boatwalla] doesn't see me. . . . To such high people the rest of the world is invisible. People like me she cannot see. Its not that she is being rude. It's just that she cannot see me. So she keeps talking about things that she would never talk about in front of you or somebody else. Once she saw me, but it was because she wanted to get water from the fridge and I was mopping the floor and she had to step over my hand.”¹[emphasis added]

What is interesting is that not only the mistress, but also the author/narrator sees nothing of Ganga, apart from her “hand”. This is so because there is hardly description of her except that she “was dark and very thin, . . . [and] her face always expressionless and impossible to read” (Love 42). As a common rule, servants are the “other” people in the text whose corporeal existence merits a word or at the most a sentence. It is in rare cases such as the works of Mulk Raj Anand that servants occupy centre-stage and are described in some detail. It is interesting to note that whether done in detail or sketchily, the servant's body is mostly described in Indian fiction in English in uncomplimentary terms as repulsive, misshapen, sickly, elderly or juvenile (in both cases, unchanging) and only in very rare cases as attractive or appealing. Even Nissim Ezekiel writes in his poem titled “Ganga”² that “She [Ganga, the maidservant] brings a smell with her/ and leaves it behind her/but we are used to it” (21-23) [emphasis added]. The portrayal of the servant's body, of course, does not follow a universal or inflexible pattern in the novels though the

objective is nearly always the same. It is to construct the servant as the “Other” against whom the master can posit his/her middle class identity. Though presented as if it were an unambiguous fact of nature in the literary texts, the body of the servant is never simply there. Servants’ bodies are re-presented but merely to marginalize them.

To illustrate this further let us examine in detail Amit Chaudhuri’s Freedom Song, where the servant Nando is presented a “dark four-foot-ten-inch demon”.³ This is not the only reference in the novel to Nando as a demon. A few pages later, we find this description of Nando as he works with the other servants, Uma and Jochna: “in that frail demonic body with red eyes and tobacco-stained hands, there also existed a genuine soft spot for Jochna” (Freedom 18). As we progress in the novel we encounter more such instances. For example, “. . . grandmother’s lunch was laid out on a table before the bed by Nando, who . . . looked much the same in his white shirt and pyjamas, his hair oiled, and his face demonlike” (Freedom 33). After about forty pages we have the following line: “Khuku often thought that three servants were too many to have in the house . . . [for Nando, Uma and Jochna] reigned like angels or demons without another inhabitation” (Freedom 71). Again, Nando “was considered a nuisance by his wife and even beaten by his son when drunk”, for at home, “this small swaggering man would behave like a patriarch and a pest, something between a monarch and helpless vermin” (Freedom 72). Thus, throughout the novel, Nando is time and again stereotyped as a demon, vermin or pest who is a nuisance not only to his employer but also to his own family members.

It would be a mistake to assume that Nando has been demonised and that too repeatedly for no particular reason or accidentally though the narrative presents it so. His ugliness is textually juxtaposed with his dominating or bullying nature particularly that which he exhibits towards his inferiors, his wife and children. Nando’s physical deficiencies make him incapable of working hard and restrict him, somewhat permanently, to the lowly tasks of servitude. The absence of empathy, both from the master/mistress and narrator, for his low-paid work, with no hope of improvement is worth marking. The net effect achieved is that Nando has himself to blame for his lowly position. The way he alternately flirts and bullies or is bullied by the other maidservants, Uma and Jochna, fully confirms his “lowness”. Thus, the representation of his ugly and diseased body is grist to the main aim of rendering him obtuse and hence of less

significance to the domestic scene that occupies the central thematic concern of the novel. The repetition of Nando's stereotyping could be understood with these words of Homi K Bhaba: "the stereotype, . . . is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place' already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated . . . as if the essential duplicity of the . . . [laziness, thieving, nature of the servant] that needs no proof, can never really, in discourse be proved" [emphasis added].⁴

In each of the sections of this chapter we would seek to examine how the Indian English novel right from the early stages onwards constructed the body of the servant as the "Other" and hence inferior by making it ugly, deformed, diseased or immature and childlike. If servants are not despised then they are rendered as ageless or grandparent-like figures in order to make them acceptable to the readers. We would probe even the exceptions where the servants have been portrayed in positive manner and discover that these are not subversions but mere reworking of the middle class hierarchy. As Gwenda Morgan and Peter Rushton observes, we should be focused less on the actual bodies of servants and more on "how such bodies were made visible, whether voluntarily or unwillingly, . . . how they [servants] were described and represented, . . . and finally, what were the features of appearance, clothing and the physical bodies themselves that attracted attention under particular circumstances". Further in doing all these we must never lose sight of "who had knowledge of such representations"⁵ and for what purpose. We would examine not only the select novels of the six writers chosen for close reading but also other Indian English novelists to make our study comprehensive. In spite of the variety of texts examined, we would find that the same tropes recur giving an indication of their influence and pervasiveness. The servant's body, of course, includes clothing and other material accessories, personal habits or attitudes to health and hygiene, disease and medicine, etc. Before we delve into the texts we need to examine briefly why and how the representation of the body, particularly its metonymic aspect, gained importance in fiction. The impact of factors like patriarchy and colonialism also on such representations of the body cannot be ignored.

II

The modern concept of body seems “natural” and “universal” that we tend to think that it was there right from the beginning of human existence. But Frédérique Apffel-Marglin and Loyda Sanchez rightly points out that the “modern, biological, universal body”⁶ is not a natural and based on Barbara Duden’s⁷ research reiterates that it is a unique historical creation of the past three hundred years or so in the West. “This biological body” or “the discrete, isolated, objectified and material body” is a construction and it emerged for the first time approximately in Western Europe during the seventeenth century. It is “one of the many consequences of the seventeenth-century Cartesian separation between *res extensa* and *res cogitas*” [italics authors’]. Society as made up of individuals each endowed with a separate body and susceptible to “political”, “economic” and “civil” action or development took place during the eighteenth century and spread all over the world, “progressively albeit unevenly, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries”.⁸

Michel Foucault states the growing importance of the body as the target of power, more particularly in his book Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison (1979). Foucault discusses how the modern body is subjected to the forces of discipline and control. By using the concept of the panopticon where every movement of the prisoners is observed and regulated, he stresses that their bodies are subjected, transformed and improved so that they become docile.

What was then being formed was a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviour. The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it. A “political anatomy”, which was also a “mechanics of power”, was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over others’ bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines. Thus discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, “docile” bodies.⁹

Here, the key instruments of power are that of “observation” and the “gaze”. Coming to literary representations, the author/narrator/master practices a similar control on the servant’s body. In fiction particularly we have seen metonymic use of the body

from early stages; its representation always carried an ideological subtext. “Ever since the beginning of narrative fiction, external appearance was used to imply character-traits, but only under the influence of Lavater,¹⁰ a Swiss philosopher and theologian (1741-1801), and his theory of physiognomy has the connection between the two acquired a pseudo-scientific status”.¹¹ Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan further acknowledges that with scientific advancement, Lavater’s theory has been completely discredited. But the “metonymic relation between external appearance and character-traits has still remained an indispensable resource in the hand of many writers”.¹² In fact, external appearance together with action, speech, and environment form the major sources of indirect presentation of character in narrative fiction. The body in fiction is used as a signifier for the supposed lack or presence of cultural traits.

The colonial encounter between the coloured natives and the white Europeans had its impact on the body in the Indian context. The physical differences, not merely the colour of the skin, were highlighted by the Europeans as signs of the weakness and effeminate nature of the natives. This debate has been fully analysed in Mrinalini Sinha’s Colonial Masculinity: The “Manly Englishman” and the “Effeminate Bengali” in the Late Nineteenth Century (1995), Partha Chatterjee’s “The Nationalist Elite” (The Nation and its Fragments 1993) and Indira Choudhury’s The Frail Hero and Virile History: Gender and the Politics of Culture in Colonial Bengal (1998). As discussed earlier in the introductory chapter, this depiction of the lazy and weak Indian by the Europeans was reinforced by the presence of a servant culture. The subtext was that the Hindus (Indians) were effeminate, as contrasted to the manly Europeans, and hence required servants to do the physical work. Some, if not all, Indian reformers and nationalists of the nineteenth century also subscribed to this type of stereotyping as they sought to encourage the natives to be strong mentally and physically. Of course, not all Indian races were considered effeminate due to the presence of the Sikhs, Rajputs and other martial races. There were a lot of nuances and contradictions in the stereotyping processes. But nonetheless, the effeminate Indian remained the overriding stereotype. The commonest example could be given from nineteenth century reformer Swami Vivekananda who exhorted his countrymen including revolutionaries like Bagha Jatin to build muscles of iron and nerves of steel. “No more is this time for us to become soft. This softness has been with us till we have become like masses of cotton. What our country now wants is muscles of iron and nerves of steel, gigantic will, which nothing can resist, which can

accomplish their purpose”¹³ In all this, in spite of the stress put on spiritual growth, the pre-eminence paid to developing the physical body was not inconsiderable.

Thus, it cannot be denied that the coming of the Europeans, particularly the British, had an impact on the Indian psyche regarding the body. As a testimony to this impact, Kumkum Sangari refers to the proliferation of “[d]ozens of textbooks, reformist tracts, treatises on women, and conduct books [which] displayed a choric unity of Brahmin and kayasth literati, Deobandi and Aligarhi reformers, petty government officials and diwans or sadar amins of princely states, khattris and banias, missionaries and schoolmasters, merchants and landowners”. Sangari further adds that the construction of Indian domesticity was the main theme of this literature written and printed in various small cities and towns like “Allahabad, Bareilly, Balrampur, Benares, Lucknow, Agra, Gaya, Mirzapur, Meerut, and Lalitpur by writers who often lived in or/and came from other towns” like “Hamirpur, Hathras, Fategarh, Panipat, Kanpur,” and villages.¹⁴ She names Munshi Ahmad Husain’s Istri Updesh (1873), Munshi Chavasse Pye and Raghunath Das’ Bharyahit (1883), Maulavi Nazir Ahmad’s Mir’at ul-Arus (1869), Pandit Ramprasad Tiwari’s Sutaprabodh (1871), Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi’s Bihishti Zewar (c. 1903), and Gauri Datta’s Devrani Jethani ke Kahani (1870) as some popular examples of this literature. What bound this literature together was the issue of domesticity which was again always tied to the question of the body and associated ideas of cleanliness, hygiene, health etc. Partha Chatterjee points out that in reform manuals like Bharyahit rich women are chastised for not lactating and hiring poor wet nurses. Their bad habits and idleness would cause such women to become diseased. More than that “*Bharyahit* offered housework as the answer to both boredom and leisure; women who rose early would set an example for servants while idle women would have idle servants” [italics author’s].¹⁵ The underlying message is that women’s hard work in the domestic sphere would improve their own health and their children but also to contribute to the economic prosperity of the family by increasing the productivity of servants. The body of the (upper/middle class) individual is thus linked to that of the nation. And the servant’s body was always incidental to such concerns. The body became the site for concerns of nation-building and progress and this came to be reflected not only in reformist literature, but also obliquely in Indian fiction produced by natives, not to mention those of Englishmen. This class was also deeply patriarchal and it constructed a new “social order connecting the home and the world” which “was contrasted not only with that of modern western

society; it was explicitly distinguished from the patriarchy of indigenous tradition”.¹⁶ We should also not conclude that this literature meant for the rising middle classes always eulogized the lower class. In fact, the stereotypical images of lower class were that of dirtiness and laziness. The new patriarchy thus saw itself as different from the immediate social and cultural conditions in which the majority of the Indians lived. The Victorian model of liberated, educated and hence rational men and women caused Indian nationalists and social reformers to construct an Indian tradition where Indian men and women could stand up to its Western models. In this debate extra stress was put on the woman question as this new patriarchy defined itself primarily on the image of the perfect Indian woman. Partha Chatterjee goes on to assert that this “‘new’ [Indian] woman was quite the reverse of the ‘common’ woman [like the maidservant] who was coarse, vulgar, loud, quarrelsome, devoid of superior moral sense, sexually promiscuous, subjected to brutal physical oppression by males.”¹⁷ This new Indian woman, evidently, should not be equated with the westernized woman, for the latter too was subjected to widespread mockery and parodied. “The ‘new woman’ was to be modern, but she would also have to display the signs of national tradition and therefore would be essentially different from the ‘Western’ woman.”¹⁸ In all these debates, the reform manuals no doubt played an important role. But it would not be very far from the truth that the early models of Indian fiction in nineteenth century played an important part in disseminating such concerns of rising middle class about the body and notions of cleanliness, hygiene, progress, and the larger concerns of nationhood.

These notions of the body always revolved around Victorian masculinity exemplified by the Victorian gentlemen – “courteous, affable, kind, deferential, temperate, unassuming, clean, pure, considerate, courageous, understanding, inoffensive, unobtrusive, socially adroit, truthful, civil, circumspect, sympathetic, respectful, unaffected, and adaptable”.¹⁹ Such an ideal can be observed overtly in “Anglo-Indian” (British in India) fiction. Traces of it remain in Indian fiction in English. It is natural that servants would fail to live up to such exacting standards and hence, be presented in pejorative terms. The identity of the master, white in the case of the Anglo-Indian writers and upper/middle class in the case of Indian writers, is constructed against the “Other”. This “Other” is the native in the first group and the lower class/caste including the servant in the second group.

In our area of interest i.e. Indian fiction in English the bodies of both servant and master are presented as naturally structured in a hierarchy where the lower class (and very often lower caste) servant is the outsider while the insider is the master. This is somewhat similar to Abdul R. JanMohamed's concept of the "manichean allegory" i.e. seeing the world as divided into mutually excluding opposites. "The dominant model of power-and interest-relations in all [master-servant relationships] . . . is the manichean opposition between the putative superiority of the . . . [master] and the supposed inferiority" of the servant. The manichean allegory is "a field of diverse yet interchangeable oppositions between white and black, good and evil, superiority and inferiority, civilization and savagery, intelligence and emotion, rationality and sensuality, self and Other, subject and object."²⁰ Modifying JanMohamed's application in the colonial context, we can point out that in Indian fiction in English the master is, always inevitably, healthy, hardworking, rational, progressive, and cultured, while the servant was ugly, diseased, lazy, and superstitious. The "othering" of the servants is achieved by presenting a sort of binary opposition between the servant and the master in which only the latter is endowed with all the positive attributes – physical or otherwise. The literary texts set up a series of binary twosome such as handsome or ugly, rational or irrational, hardworking or lazy, and so on and so forth. These are interconnected in such a way that the presence of the qualities of first in any pair meant automatically the existence of the qualities of the first of all the other pairs. Ugliness in servants, for instance in the case of Nando, would mean that they are also irrational and so on. Needless to add, the second quality is perceived as depreciatory. The master embodies the first and the privileged part of all the binaries while the servant embodies the second and negative in each pair. Of course, such pairs are not restricted exclusively to Indian fiction in English or to literature as such. As we have seen in Chapter One, the stereotypes of servants have proliferated in other narratives like print and electronic media, including films and television. Eve M. Lynch's following observation about servants in Victorian fiction is largely true of Indian English fiction:

As the physical presence of the servant both enhanced and aggravated the ease of middle-class domesticity, a heightened concern with readily apparent distinctions that could encode the minutia of household manuals translated into anxiety about corporeal difference. The body of the servant became the locus of this anxiety as the markers of dirt and cleanliness were compulsively monitored by the Victorian imagination. Literary

texts relentlessly record the distinctions between the bodies of the mistress and the servant, with dirt and dress articulating a labor nexus for household relations.²¹

The servant/master's body was linked to other aspects of his/her personality and this was soon presented as natural. Indian fiction in English tends to fix certain ways of looking at the human body in a privileged position and, more often than not, it is the middle class master's body, not the servant's that conforms to the exacting standards. The domestic discourse, predominantly of the upper/middle class, is inflected with patriarchal norms. It is natural therefore that the texts under consideration privilege specific notions of the body. Here as mentioned earlier, such notions were deeply patriarchal and hence, an "imagined" version of the male body was taken as the metaphor for the constructing paradigm. Arthur Flannigan-Saint-Aubin observes that patriarchy's "primal metaphor is anchored by a particular version of the male body – a very selective and partial conception and experience of the male body Men internalize masculinity filtered not only through the experiences of the male body but also through the 'psyche's' evolving representations of aspects of itself as male".²² Needless to add that it is not only women that are "seen" as falling short of this high standard of "normality" set up by patriarchy but also the male subalterns such as the servants. Radhika Chopra in her incisive essay "Invisible Men: Masculinity, Sexuality, and Male Domestic Labor" discusses how conservative women observing purdah from males would freely move about in front of their male servants implying that these servants were not "men".²³

Consequently, in Indian fiction in English, servants, male or female, are always "seen" as deficient physically or deviant, diseased and sexually depraved. Against this view one can posit the positive presentations of Mulk Raj Anand's Munoo and Bakha. But we will find that there are compulsions at work behind such positive presentations and they do not actually subvert the hierarchy of the master-servant. The marginalization of the servants starts with their very names and it would be very much in order if we examine this first.

III

The most important element of the servant's identity – her/his name – more often than not, is erased in Indian fiction in English. It is common knowledge that in general Indian parlance, including Indian fiction in English, servants are given generic names by their masters. In Indian mainstream (inspired by commercial Hindi films produced primarily from Mumbai) television and cinematic representations, the servants are tagged with generalized names like “Ramu”, “Chotu” etc. Very often, the vernacular names of their service, “mali” (gardener), “aya” (nursemaid) are affixed to the servants instead of their real names. This process of naming carries a lot of ideological implications, particularly when examined in the Indian context. The importance of the name can hardly be underestimated in a caste and religious conscious Indian society. In fact, the caste, religion, regional and even linguistic identity are all implicated in the individuals' names. In The Space Between Us Bhima expresses this obsession of Indians with the name, particularly the surname: “In her [Bhima's] time, knowing a person's family name mattered more than knowing their first name. After all, it was the family name that told you all you needed to know – what caste the person belonged to, where they came from, who their ancestors were, what their occupation was, and what their khandaan, their family background was like”.²⁴

In view of the importance of the name to the individuality of each subject, it is not surprising that upper and middle class/caste hire servants only after verifying their caste. But once hired, they are stripped off and given a new name, mostly a corruption of the old one or one designating their work. Consider once again the example from Upamanyu Chatterjee's English, August for such intentional and selective ignorance of the servant's name. The baptism of the servant as “Garhwali”²⁵ is an act of generalising the servant, substituting the name for the place. It also highlights the common assumption among middle classes Indians that people from hilly regions like Garhwal make hard working and dependable servants as compared to those of other regions. Radhika Chopra points out that:

Caste is not forgotten but exists more in euphemisms and assumptions . . . In a context of limited information, other signifiers of “purity” take on significance; in the cities of North India, the generalized term *madrassi* for people from the southern

Indian states or *pahari* for people from the northern hill districts are also indicators of assumptions about caste status; it is tacitly assumed that everyone from these generalized regions – the south and the hills – are upper-caste Brahmin.²⁶ [italics author's]

Though it may seem far-fetched and not common to most novels, such random assumptions do indeed form a part of the common knowledge about servants circulated amongst the upper/middle class. Munoo, in Anand's *Coolie*, is from the hills and as such is taken as a domestic help in Babu Nathoo Ram's house. Again, Munoo's real name is never mentioned in the novel, though the story is about him and the author has the fullest sympathy for him. The other servants in Sham Nagar are also named incompletely such as Lehnu or Varma. Any random survey of Indian fiction in English would confirm that the servants are generally referred not by their names, by the master and the narrative alike. To take a few examples, we can first turn to Upamanyu Chatterjee's *The Last Burden*: "But marvellous, he [Jamun] ruminates sottishly, how each generation has its aya, how sequent ayas have always . . . Doom finds it insupportable that Shyamanand, Urmila and Jamun call her Pista's aya (to distinguish her from the first aya, who was simply "Aya"), and not Doom's aya".²⁷

Here we are presented with two maidservants who are divested of their real names and consecrated by the middle class protagonist with the generalised appellation "aya" – the Indian equivalent of nurse. The first and older maidservant is simply referred to as aya while the second, also named aya, is tagged with the additional name of her ward i.e. Pista. This is done to distinguish her from the older aya who had looked after the older generation. Here the naming is not bereft of its ideological significations though the narrative presents it rather innocuously. Aya means nurture and such naming, after erasing the past of the servant, confers on her a subjectivity which is based wholly on the nature of her work. Thus, both the maidservants are reduced to their functions within the master's family. The aya is good if she loves nurtures and cares for the children as if her own. And it is readily assumed that she would for all ayas are caring and accordingly given the reciprocal love and respect not only by the children but by the adult members of the family. Even though Jamun grows up and his aya no longer looks after him, she still remains an aya. The naming is an act of constituting, but also erases the past of the servant. Neither the narrative nor does the middle class protagonist, Jamun, care for the past of the maidservant. It is as if her past before she became an aya did not exist.

Her [aya's] husband had ditched her long before she had been recruited by Urmila. Her two sons . . . were mashed, aged thirteen and eight, in the landslide of an earthquake. In those decades with them, she never once holidayed by herself in some other town, or visited people out of her past whom Shyamanand or Urmila did not recognize, or – even at her most malcontent – repiningly conjured up a halcyon past that antedated her fosterage. Perhaps the past before her existent employment had just not been – or had been too hellish, or too nondescript. (Burden 89) [emphasis added]

It is not only Jamun, but also the author who finds the Aya's past "too nondescript" to be incorporated in the story. Kasibai's name contains the appellation "bai" that means maid. Chamundi (The Mammaries of the Welfare State) Gopinath, Harilal, Moti, Titli (Weight Loss) are all generic names which serve to characterise the subalterns into nonentities. When we turn to Amit Chaudhuri's novels, we would find that his servants likewise are all labelled with nicknames. In Strange and Sublime Address we have Saraswati, Rehman the cook, Meera, Jadav, Chhaya, Savitri, the sweeper Panna, Ram and so on. If we look at these names, we find that there are generic. Rehman is a common Muslim surname which does not say much except that he belongs to the class of Muslim cooks preferred in middle and upper class households ever since the colonial times for their culinary expertise. Again, Jadav is a common name. Used as a surname, it can also refer to a popular and powerful caste in Northern India but nothing more. In Afternoon Raag we have Chhaya and Maya, two sweeper girls with their unnamed parents. In Freedom Song we have Nando, Uma, Jochna, little Haridasi while in A New World we have Maya, the recalcitrant maidservant. In all these works the name is generic and incomplete as a sign of their depersonalization. Similar examples can be quoted from other novels such as Anita Desai's Fasting, Feasting where Uma and others continue to call their aya as such though she no longer has any children to look after. In fact, though aya remains to do work which has nothing to do with nurturing, Uma and her family regard her as the aya. Sometimes, the servant's name could be an endearing one such as the one given in Jhumpa Lahiri's story "A Real Durwan". The central protagonist is Boori Ma, a sweeper and watchman who lives in the staircase of an apartment building. The term "Boori Ma" means old mother and a common term used to denote old serving women or nurses. Here it does not identify the woman but generalises her. The name of the servant is certainly not one of derision. But the name is ironic for instead of love and affection Boori Ma is forced to work and is at last thrown out of the building where she lived for no fault of hers. Similar is the case with the nurse Hakiman Bua in Attia

Hosain's Sunlight on a Broken Column. Here the "respect embedded in the use of the generalized kinship term" such as Bua "is subverted by the use of the worker's first name by children [like Laila], overcoming the inequalities of age and fortifying the boundaries of class."²⁸ The naming of servants is a process for incorporating them into personal relationships so that they are bound to the exploitative system. We will consider more niceties of this point in the ensuing chapter on labour.

Naming, thus, is not just an innocuous act and its importance could be understood by recounting briefly Slavoj Žižek's discussion in The Sublime Object of Ideology (1989) on the issue of naming, particularly about the clash between the descriptivists and anti-descriptivists. For the former, Žižek elucidates, the association between the name and the object is the consequence of the connotation of a name. A name, thus entails some descriptive features and refers to those items exhibiting these features. Here the meaning of the name and descriptive features of the objects would be given in advance, thus discounting the possibility of any ideological influence on the construction of identities. The anti-descriptivists, on the other hand, assert that the name refers to the object by means of what they call a "primal baptism". A name would carry on to denote an object even if all the descriptivist features of the object at the time of its baptism disappeared. Žižek introduces a variant into the argument:

What is overlooked, at least in the standard version of anti-descriptivism, is that this guaranteeing the identity of an object in all its counterfactual situations, that is, through a change of all its descriptive features, is *the retroactive effect of naming itself*: it is the name itself, the signifier, which supports the identity of the object. That "surplus" in the object which stays the same in all possible worlds is "something in it more than itself", that is to say the Lacanian *objet petit a*: we search in vain for it in positive reality because it has no positive consistency – because it is just an objectification of a void, of a discontinuity opened in reality of the emergence of the signifier.²⁹ [italics author's]

Thus, Žižek asserts that "the unity of the object is the retroactive effect of naming itself", and naming is not just the process of attributing an "empty name" to a "preconstituted subject." In other words, the naming of the servant is the first step to the construction of servitude. The aya is so called not simply because she works as the nursemaid. She is called aya so that she loses all her individuality and becomes her function. And she continues to be called one even when she stops work as a nurse: once an aya,

forever an aya. As shown earlier, it acts as the very constitution of the subject; the servant has to be fitted and moulded to do alienated and underpaid labour. And what better way than to de-individuate the servants and make sure that they are trapped in such personal relations which come pre-packed with the service. Let us examine the following example from Nayantara Sahgal's Rich Like Us (1983) where Rose, an Englishwoman married to Ram, an Indian, is talking to her English friend, Minnie:

“I [Minnie] can't think of a soul who would. Put the tray down here, Boy [the servant].”

Boy had a grey beard and side whiskers, Rose observed.

“What's his name?” she [Rose] asked when he had gone.

“I haven't got a clue,” said Minnie. “We always call the bearer Boy and the cook Ahmed. Dick had a cook called Ahmed before he married me and after that there's been so many I can't remember their names. . . .”³⁰

Here, the servant is called a boy though he is a grown up, or rather an aged man with grey beard and side whiskers. The name “Boy” is less a description of the servant's actual age than a generalised appellation to degrade him and render him childlike. “Infantilization can also be understood as a way of symbolically ‘castrating’”, particularly the male servant by depriving him of his masculinity.³¹ We would discuss later on more about this anxiety of the middle class masters about the sexuality of servants and the need to keep it under control. In Rich Like Us the servant becomes a handy literary device to draw the difference between the Indian-sympathising English woman i.e. Rose from those like Minnie who are unsympathetic to natives like her own bearer. Rose is shown as enjoying a close relationship with her bearer Kumar who in fact remains faithful to her till the end. In fact, apart from Sonali, it is only Kumar who mourns Rose's death. But even if we accept Rose's inquisitiveness about the Minnie's bearer's name as exhibiting her deeper humanity, it is to be remembered that we hardly get anything to see about Kumar's life, apart from his relationship with Rose and Ram. Needless to add, Kumar is also a generic name and hardly bestows any sort of individuality on him.

Servants are always considered childlike and their names are nothing but a “mark of the plural” – that seeks to marginalize them and their significance. The servant's name, thus, is a “sign of depersonalization” since s/he is “never characterised in an individual manner”; s/he is “entitled only to drown in an anonymous collectivity”.³² Servants, at

least to their employers, are never characterised in an individual manner. One aya is the same as another and all ayas are the same. Ambreen Hai remarks that for all the functions that the nanny of Lenny performs in Bapsi Sidhwa's Ice Candy-Man, she is "always called the 'Ayah' – as if she were no more than her function". In fact, "she is named only once as Shanta" in the text. She [the Ayah] "acts as both an idealized self and other – beautiful, desired . . . – an adolescent body through whose adventures the narrator [middle class Lenny] vicariously acquires dangerous knowledge." Hai also points out that the "ayah's ethnic, gendered, and class position enables her body to become the displaced figure for a nation that is brutalized and ravaged for telling a story otherwise too traumatic to be told."³³ The undertone of most of Indian fiction in English is that all servants characters are the same and hence hardly necessitate any attention, even an individualised name. It would be wrong to assume that such generalised naming is restricted only to servants. In fact, it may extend to other subalterns and other lower castes. And the first stage of such depersonalizing always inevitably starts with the name. Thus in much of Indian fiction in English, the past of the servant has been expunged.

Forms of address bring into play relations between the powerful and the powerless. The undoing of personhood begins from the moment employment is sought and negotiated. The North Indian term *naukar* is generalized to refer to all categories of male domestic workers, but more descriptive terms suggest specific occupation. Thus, *mali*, or gardener; *jamadar*, or sweeper, *khansama*, or kitchen help, are descriptive terms used when people are hired, indicating the work they will do as well as the space they will occupy.³⁴ [italics author's]

It is not the exclusive fault of Indian fiction in English to condone the name of the servant and it would be interesting to note here the novels and stories of P. G. Wodehouse concerning Jeeves, one of the immortal servant figures in English fiction. Jeeves is the gentleman's personal gentleman, i.e. valet, of Bertie Wooster. The Jeeves canon started in 1917 but it was only in the late novel Jeeves and the Tie That Binds (1971) that Jeeves's first name i.e. Reginald is revealed to Bertie and to the readers: "Hullo, Reggie," he [Bingley] said, and I [Bertie] froze in my chair, stunned by the revelation that Jeeves's first name was Reginald. It had never occurred to me before that he had a first name. I couldn't help thinking what embarrassment would have been caused if it had been Bertie".³⁵ It is as if not only Bertie and the reader, but the author himself could not be bothered about such trivial things such as the servant's name.

Middle class masters, thus, try to de-individuate the servant by naming her/him even when they have their own names. This naming, an act of power since it confers to the employer the privilege of “knowing”, is not peculiar to the master-servant situation only. The act of gazing and of giving names has been in the colonial encounter one of the potent acts of power of the part of the colonial and the bane of the colonized. But as postcolonial critics have pointed out, the natives were not that helpless and name giving had been a two way process; the colonials had also been given names by the natives. Toni Morrison’s Tar Baby (1981) clearly demonstrates the power of naming by the masters. Valerian, the white master calls his gardener and odd job man as Yardman and his wife Mary. What’s interesting is that Yardman brings sometimes different women to help with his work, but all of them are called Mary by Valerian and his family. Even the other people of his household, including his butler, Sydney, his wife, Ondine, and their niece, Jadine don’t know the real name of Yardman or of Mary. Considering the fact that except Valerian, they are all from the same community one could have expected some kind of sympathy for Yardman. Race is not the only divisive factor in society and class also counts as Morrison insinuates through her novel. Though the narrative informs the reader about their real names, it is left to Son who informs Valerian and others that Yardman’s actual name is “Gideon” and that of Mary, “Thérèse”.³⁶ It is Son who sympathises with the lower class and poor blacks and this real sympathy is shown by his refusal to call Yardman and Mary except by their real names. The impact of the authorial erasing of the servants’ names could be gauged from a consideration of Valerie Martin’s Mary Reilly. In R. L. Stevenson’s Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde there are several servants, some of whom remain unnamed. In “an attempts to subvert the political bias of the original text,” Valerie Martin points to the importance of the servant’s name in her revisionist novel Mary Reilly (1990). “Martin’s novel retells the story of Jekyll and Hyde from the perspective of the doctor’s maid. . . . In Martin’s retelling, all these anonymous characters [from R. L. Stevenson’s novel] receive their own name: the cook becomes Mrs Kent and the knife boy is named Peter; in the place of the whimpering maid, Martin has two: the chambermaid Mary and the scullery maid Annie.”³⁷ By assigning a name and the narratorial voice to the chambermaid, Martin manages to “recover” the hard domestic labour of the Victorian servants and positing it against the leisured and parasitical lives of the masters like Dr. Jekyll subvert the whole story. We would be hard pressed to find similar examples in Indian fiction in English as it hardly bothers to see the perspective of the servant. Most of Indian English fiction is influenced by middle class ideology even

when it seeks to sympathise with the working class. This lack of concern results in not only ignoring the name of the servant but marginalizing his/her body through various strategies.

IV

Nando's demonization in Freedom Song which had been noted earlier in the introductory chapter exhibits the most common and frequently employed trope of Indian fiction in English i.e. of subsuming the servant's body by making her or him ugly and deformed, or diseased and aged. The prime object is not only to posit the servant as the "Other", but also to render him or her inconsequential. This trope steers the reader towards a particular reading of the text without the reader even knowing or being aware of it. It is interesting to note the emphasis on Nando's dark skin. In a tropical climate where the average person is tanned, to a more or less degree, this emphasis is somewhat strange and racist. In a temperate climates like England, this is understandable. We can also agree with Eve M. Lynch's observation that in Victorian literature the purpose of "associating a dark or dingy pigmentation with the lower class" servant was "to impose a visual barrier aligned with dirt that resisted subjective interpretation of character, intellect, and moral positioning."³⁸ The presence of darkness in Indian English fiction is baffling and leads one to suspect that it is a discursive feature of the English language borrowed by the Indian novelist to denote ugliness. Anyway, this association of servants with ugliness is neither new nor exclusively restricted to the Indian fiction in English. As revealed in the Introduction, it has proliferated into literatures of different nations. Scott Wilson remarks that:

Servants, slaves, and workers are generally defined as something less than their masters, owners or employers who provide moreover the measure of what is noble or dignified, of what is more or less than human. There is something unsettling inhuman about slaves, something, from the point of view of an aristocrat [master] even a little uncanny about them, since they resemble their masters yet are of quite another nature.³⁹

Wilson refers to the main reason for "seeing" servants as physically unattractive and repulsive. Here attention should be paid to the fact that deformity is grist to the main object of calumniating servants. They are physically defective and therefore they

necessarily must be wicked by nature. Wilson refers to the Jacobean tragedy The Changeling (1622) where De Flores, the ugly servant, offers to murder at the behest on his mistress, Beatrice-Joanna. More than his inferior social status it is De Flores's physical ugliness that suggests to Beatrice-Joanna his suitability to murder. The popularity of such stereotyping extends to Indian literatures in other languages. Swapna M. Banerjee quotes from Rabindranath Tagore's popular poem "Puraton Vritya" (The Old Servant) as illustration. The poem contains the line:

Bhuter moton chehera jemon nirbodh oti ghor
 Ja kichu hara ginni balen, "Kesta beta-i-chor"
 The ghostly looking awful blockhead
 For everything that gets lost in the house,
 The housewife calls the servant Kesta the thief⁴⁰(Trans. Banerjee's)

Here Banerjee rightly points out the middle class assumption that servants are naturally prone to thieving. But she overlooks the more uncomplimentary line: the one which presents the servant's deformed physiognomy. The semantic juxtaposition of "Bhuter moton chehera" (ghostly-looking) and Kesto's "thieving nature" seems to posit a causal relation between them. Similarly fictional narratives presenting servants' thieving nature being reflected by their deformed physiognomies is a slippage that only a reading against the grain would reveal. Even Richardson's Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded (1740-41) has such stereotyping of ugly servants as evil as a cursory reading would reveal. The following are the descriptions of two such servants from the novel. The first is of Colbrand, a servant sent by Squire B. to guard Pamela from running away.

He [*Monsieur Colbrand*] has great staring Eyes, like the Bull's that frighten'd me so. Vast jawbones sticking out; Eyebrows hanging over his Eyes; two great Scars upon his Forehead, and one on his left Cheek; and two huge Whiskers, and a monstrous wide Mouth; blubber Lips; long yellow Teeth, and a hideous Grin. . . . long ugly Neck and his Throat sticking out like a Wen.⁴¹ [*italics author's*]

The second description is of Mrs Jewkes, the villainous housekeeper who acts as procuress for Squire B. and instrumental in imprisoning Pamela to force her to yield to Squire B.'s lust.

She [*Mrs Jewkes*] is a broad, squat, pousy, fat Thing, quite ugly, if any thing God made can be ugly; about forty Years old. She has a huge Hand, and an Arm as thick as my waist, I believe. Her nose is flat and crooked, and her Brows grow over her Eyes; a dead,

spiteful, grey, goggling Eye, to be sure, she has. And her Face is flat and broad; and as to Colour, looks like as if it had been pickled a Month in Salt-petre . . . She has a hoarse man-like Voice . . . So that with a Heart more ugly than her Face (Pamela 114)

Needless to add that Pamela, though a servant, has been presented so much of an epitome of beauty and other maidenly virtues by Richardson that she ends up winning not only the heart of her master but of the readers as well. Indian fiction in English too has naturalized this representation of servants' physical deformity as corresponding to a mental/emotional/cultural lack. In Bankimchandra' Rajmohan's Wife we see in the zehana scene of Chapter 5 that there "was a servant woman, black, rotund and eloquent" and another, "who boasted similar blessed corporal dimensions, but who had thought it beneath her dignity to shelter them from view".⁴² This highlighting of the servant's physical ugliness in literary texts is not accidental and Scott Wilson adds that there has been a "historical inferred identity between horror, disgust and servitude".⁴³ He points out that the servant's very corporeal presence, from the point of view of upper/middle class, has caused something of a problem. S/he resembles their master or mistress and yet has to be exploited. This meant that they had to be demonised or rendered ugly so that the masters could gloss over their being developed into mere tools. Sarah Jordan writes that:

To most comfortable-class writers, the bodies of the so-called "idle" poor [including servants] were grotesque, objects of fear and revulsion. When the laboring-class body was not industriously engaged in work that would benefit "society" (by which was generally meant the middle and upper classes), it was seen as disgustingly appetitive, dirty, and uncontainable. Conversely, bodily attributes considered grotesque were seen as signs of idleness, and therefore of undeservingness. Even when the poor [servants] *were* industrious, their bodies could be rhetorically reduced to their useful parts, thereby rendering them non-threatening as attention focused on building an empire.⁴⁴ [italics author's]

Thus the "comfortable class" meaning the upper and middle class always represented the servants' bodies and we see such a process in representation of literary servants in Indian fiction in English. We can consider the following example where Agastya, the middle class protagonist meets his servant Vasant and his children: "With the naib tehsildar was a grey-stubbed sullen man, the caretaker-cook of the Rest House. He spoke Hindi with great reluctance. There were children at the door, in various sizes; all seemed to breathe though their mouths" (English 6) [emphasis added]. To understand

the underlying importance of the body in the novel we can take up one such example. “If Madna had been Delhi, and the weather less hot, and if he’d woken up earlier, he [Agastya] would have gone for his run. He had been a competent long-distance runner in his college days. Running seemed to clear his mind and start his day well” (English 8). These lines in the very incipient of the novel exalt physical fitness which naturally is seen to be embodied only by the middle class protagonist. In fact, Agastya ascribes to every character that he meets a kind of metonymic relationship between their physical characteristics and their mental capability. Witness Agastya’s imaginative recreation of R. Tamse, when the former sees for the first time the latter’s painting in the Rest House of Madna. Unlike himself, Agastya imagines Tamse as “short, plump, but not worried at all about his weight, and therefore very slightly complacent, gentle and not quite relaxed in the company of people like Agastya” (English 9). Thus, it is not merely Vasant who fails to live up to the standards of masculinity of Agastya, but even other middle class characters.

Let us take consider this description from Amit Chaudhuri’s A Strange and Sublime Address: “In the morning, the sweeper came equipped with brooms and rags to wash the toilets and the bathrooms. He was tall and ugly, and his eyes were always bloodshot . . . simply a dirty and a surprisingly clumsy one. He made an awful noise as he worked, banging things here and there; perhaps it soothed his nerves in some ways” [emphasis added].⁴⁵ Here we have a perfect example how the servant, a sweeper in this case, has been physically presented as repulsive and this prepares the way for distinguishing him from Sandeep’s mother, the middle class mistress. The latter also upbraids the sweeper for having the fourth child while being unable to provide for their proper upbringing and education (Strange 40). The implicit assumption here is that the lower class servant, unlike the conscious and responsible middle class parent, do not really care for proper child-rearing and hence breed more. We can take another illustration from Amit Chaudhuri. “He [Rehman] sleeps all day, eats plenty of rice, and wakes at evening to cook our dinner. He has the red, glazed eyes of a drinker, but he swears he does not drink, he cannot bear to pronounce the word, his eyes have been like that from birth. His belly, beneath his tight vest, is like a distended tumour” (Strange 147) [emphasis added]. “One of the most often-discussed attributes and signs of the grotesque, idle laboring class [including the servant] was drunkenness. Drunkenness and idleness were constantly paired, and each was condemned as leading to the other.”⁴⁶ Here

Rehman's physiognomy is equated with a natural lack; his obesity is ascribed to his gluttony and inherent laziness while his red eyes due to drinking later on are described as scurrilous and cunning. Rehman's belly is thus not a mere physical detail in the text.

. . . she [the mistress] must tell Rehman to sell the old copies of the newspapers that were stuffed now in two drawers in the hall. He'll be very eager to sell them, she thought grimly, and of course he'll forget to give me the money. She got irritated with him without knowing why – it was something to do with his smooth manner and red eyes and large belly; it was the big belly she resented most and felt an especial sense of rivalry with, for it seemed to ignore her sovereignty and in a sense it ruled the house. Irritated, she wondered whether Rehman had put the garbage down the garbage-chute as he was supposed to; she decided to take it up with him later. Lastly, her thoughts went to the new girl, Meera, and here her irritation changed into images of colour and grace; she could trust this girl, she felt, who was genuine and hardworking and needy. (*Strange* 186-7) [emphasis added]

As mentioned earlier the novel sets up a series of interconnected binaries such as handsome or ugly, rational or irrational, hardworking or lazy, etc. Ugliness in the case of Rehman is somehow linked to his laziness while the beauty of Meera is linked to her hardworking nature. Needless to add that Rehman is also irrational as is evident from his blind beliefs and religious zeal.

Thus, the body of the servant acquires significance in one other aspect i.e. as an object of surveillance. It “has long been supposed that power and surveillance go together in social relations, and that the bodies and social actions of the relatively powerless are subject to inspection by those in control”.⁴⁷ In the example referred to earlier the unnamed mistress who is also the focalizer is irritated with her cook seemingly with his “smooth manners”, “red eyes” and “large belly”. She highlights Rehman's belly which she feels seems to ignore and defy her sovereignty and ruled the house instead of her. Her anxiety is heightened by her feeling that he tries to cheat her of the money got by selling old newspapers. That he shirks his chores such as not putting the garbage down the garbage-chute on time seems to confirm her fears. Rehman, it appears from the narrative above, appears ugly to his mistress because he is a threat to her control over the house. This supposition is further validated by the image that the mistress has of the new maid, Meera. The mistress feels that she can trust Meera for she appears or promises to be a “genuine”, “hardworking and needy servant”. And hence Meera's images conjured by her

mistress are “of colour and grace” (as contrasted to the ugliness of Rehman). There is a hint of criticism of the caste, ethnic background of Rehman who unlike his employers, is from Bihar. Swapna M. Banerjee observes that through the process of “inscribing essentialized stereotypes to domestics from lower class non-Bengali ethnic groups, the Bengali middle class forged its cultural and socio-economic superiority through an active process of ‘otherization’”.⁴⁸ The relationship of master-servant being one of mutual mistrust and suspicion, the servant is always subject to constant actual/imagined surveillance. The surveillance is deemed necessary because of certain constructions of the body of the servant. Banerjee refers to the “ruptures and cracks in the beliefs and practices of the employers – fraught with tension and emanating from the possibility of subversion and transgression of their ideals by the subaltern ‘other’ whom they tried to keep at bay and effectively under control.”⁴⁹

What is interesting is not that the body, in the case of servants, is presented as a primary trait to construct the character/identity. There may be nothing wrong in such characterisation. Normally, Shlomith Rimmon Kenan states, “character” is a construct “in terms of a network of character-traits” which “may or may not appear as such in the text”. The construct (identity) is arrived at by “assembling various character-indicators distributed along the text-continuum and, when necessary, inferring the traits from them”. Technically speaking, “any element in the text may serve as an indicator of character” and “character-indicators may serve other purposes as well”.⁵⁰ But what is distressing is that in the case of servants, direct definition which names the trait by an adjective, abstract noun or parts of speech is more prevalent than indirect definition. It is as if the narrator/master “knows” all about the servants and it also precludes the possibility of any change or progress. Upamanyu Chatterjee’s *The Last Burden* abounds with such physical denigration of servants, particularly of the maidservant, Kasibai who works for the protagonist Jamun.

From the rickshaw Jamun can see her [Kasibai’s] mammoth belly between white blouse and white sari. . . . He [Vaman] now parts his frizzy hair, Jamun notices, on the left, and his upper lip – puppy, plumpish – is bedecked by a tentative, ridiculous moustache . . . he [Jamun] can’t visualize Kasibai and his father together, in the same room – he sipping tea, she banking against the doorpost – or in the same world. Like matter and antimatter – . . . the two simply cannot meet. Kasibai is gazing at him. A blunt nose, a virile, leathery face. . . From wherever she is, Kasibai’s

kept tabs on the jock – who is giraffelike and marooned, with dacoit's whiskers sprawling across his jowls like a verdant pubic thatch, and is immensely cantankerous because of acidosis (Burden 281-82) [emphasis added]

Kaisbai, her son Vaman and even her absent husband are all vilified and shown as physically repulsive. If Kasibai has a “blunt nose”, “leathery face” and “mammoth belly”, her son has a ridiculous moustache while his father is “giraffelike” with “dacoit's whiskers”.

Here we have to note another aspect of the servant's body and particularly the manner of its representation. To understand it better we can refer to another example from English, August where the narrator-hero describes other subalterns of Madna: “He [Agastya] saw snatches of other lives – veined hands on bicycle handle-bars and behind them a man emptying a bucket into a drain, the tensed calves of a rickshaw-wala, sweat-wet shirts around a stall selling fruit juice” (English 21). This metonymic description is interesting for Agastya does not see the whole man, but parts of the individual. Right in the beginning of the novel we have another similar description: “They [Vasant and naib tehsildar] did eventually, their faces and forearms tense with disconcertment. They called others for help. They dragged the bed under the fan” (English 6) [emphasis added]. It is symptomatic of the mindset of the upper and middling classes for whom the lower class/subaltern do not matter as individuals, but only as workers. These privileged classes do not see the individuals. The following words of Sarah Jordan about labouring classes in England elucidates the need to dismember the servant's body:

Another way of portraying the . . . [servants] even further in editing out potentially repellant, inconvenient, laboring-class bodies, discarding the alimentary canal that craves and pollutes, the skin that grows dirty and shows through the rags. The . . . [servant's] body is reduced to the hands or feet that perform the labor the comfortable class requires.⁵¹

Thus, in Indian English fiction the servant's body is subject to dismemberment for the narrative is inevitably from the middle class masters' point of view. The author/narrator/master's gaze is always on certain parts of the servants. M. K. Ray points out that in Amit Chaudhuri's Afternoon Raag that the servant Ponchoo “seems to be just a pair of hands carrying the harmonium, the tables, or the bag of rubbish with equal care at the command of his employer. He seems to have been taken for granted as just the pair

of hands” [emphasis added].⁵² Eve M. Lynch remarks in a similar vein that “the spectacle of the ‘empty’ servant lacking intellect and moral positioning provoked the intellectual uncertainty of object animations, with the servant seeming like a doll come to life or dismembered limbs which dance by themselves: body parts, especially hands, were the common way to signify the uncanny human void in the servants position.”⁵³

In A Strange and Sublime Address we have a young master describing his maid Savitri “sitting on the carpet, one knee raised in a pyramid beneath her sari. Her arms, her neck and her shoulders were dark-brown and polished, like the wood on some of our doors” (Strange 137). For Bruce Robbins the amputated hands of the servants “are the mark of an absence, an area of non-representation. They are agents without a principal, parts without a whole”. He points out the inherent paradox behind such partial but repeated representations of the servant’s body. “On the one hand, they indicate that something is missing. Where are the vanished bodies to which these hands belong? . . . [But] if ordinary people [including servants] were invisible because they were powerless, then why do they, or their hands, actively exercise so much power?”⁵⁴ Sarah Jordan puts it rather aptly that the use of “hands” for labourers is not merely “a common figure of speech”. Such “rhetorical reductions of laboring-class bodies to their useful parts, these metaphorical and metonymic dismemberments, worked to erase the threatening or disturbing aspects of the bodies. By using these tropes, a writer can focus on the parts of a worker that are of use to the comfortable class and ignore the rest of him.”⁵⁵

Let us take up Anand’s Coolie and examine some other servant figures apart from Munoo. The author’s sympathy for the down-trodden does not extend to other servant-boys of Sham Nagar. If Varma has a “coarse, bestial face” and swagger “beneath the cloak of his saintliness and strength”, then Lehnu, another servant of the neighbourhood, is “a thin-lipped, sharp-nosed Brahmin”.⁵⁶ Likewise, Bakha in Untouchable may be idealised and handsome but this treatment is not extended to the other outcastes by the author. “As they [other outcastes] sat or stood in the sun, showing their dark hands and feet, they had a curiously lackadaisical lazy, lousy look about them”.⁵⁷ Rakha, Bakha’s brother, Ram Charan, and others are also painted as physically deficient. “Thus, the ‘dirty’ servant is socially and literally figured as the body – even as body parts, such as hands – with no selfhood or subjectivity; the foul spectacle of the outside posits that there is no inside, no interiority, to inscribe a self.”⁵⁸

Most critics praise Arundhati Roy for her favourable portrait of Velutha in The God of Small Things yet they miss out the fact that she does not extend her sympathy to other subalterns such as Kochu Maria, “the vinegar-hearted, short-tempered, midget cook” [emphasis added].⁵⁹ Roy’s sympathy extends only to servants who are good-looking or useful, and not to those like Kochu Maria who are positively ugly. In the figure of Kochu Maria, we have one of the most hideously drawn servants in Indian fiction in English: “She [Kochu Maria] had short, thick forearms, fingers like cocktail sausages, and a broad fleshy nose to either side of her chin, and separated that section of her face from the rest of it, like a snout. Her head was too large for her body. She looked like a bottled foetus that had escaped from its jar of formaldehyde in a Biology lab and unshrivelled and thickened with age” (God 170). Nothing could be more physically gross than Kochu Maria and the narrative seems to employ the worst possible terms to describe her physically. She is also damned as a nitwit who “enjoyed the *WWF Wrestling Mania* shows, where Hulk Hogan and Mr. Perfect, whose necks were wider than their heads, wore spangled Lycra leggings and beat each other up brutally. Kochu Maria’s laugh had the slightly cruel ring to it that young children’s sometimes have” (God 28) [italics author’s]. Kochu Maria’s liking for the brawny and supposedly unintelligent wrestling superstars is reflective of her mental capacity. The comparison of Kochu Maria with children is also not something peculiar to Roy’s novel; servants are always “seen” (by their masters, of course) as childlike and immature and hence to be subject to the constant control of their mature masters. This grossness is somewhat replicated in the following description of the maids in Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children:

A woman with the biceps of a wrestler was staring at him [Aadam Aziz], beckoning him to follow her into the room. The state of her sari told him that she was a servant; but she was not servile. Two more women, also built like professional wrestlers, stood stiffly in the light, each holding one corner of an enormous white bedsheet, their arms raised high above their heads so that the sheet hung between them like a curtain.⁶⁰ [emphasis added]

Such representations of physically repulsive servants are rampant among other Indian novelists in English. Witness this from Rohinton Mistry’s short story “Auspicious Occasion” from his collection Tales From Firozsha Baag (1987):

A woman in her early seventies, tall and skinny, she [Tanoo, the maidservant] was bow-legged and half-blind with an astonishing quantity of wrinkles on her face and limbs. Where her skin was not

wrinkled, it was scaly and rough. She had large ears that stuck out under wisps of stringy, coconut-oiled grey hair, and wore spectacles (one lens of which was missing) balanced precariously on a thin pointed nose.⁶¹

We can turn to another novel to witness such physical denigration of the servant. The following is the portrayal of the gardener in Anita Desai's Fasting, Feasting: "He [mali, the gardener] comes to life with a gratifying start. 'Ji!' he cries and comes crawling out on all fours from his dark, smoky odorous cave like some misshapen, bow-legged insect. Seeing it is only Uma, he gives a smile as toothless as an infant's. . . . He is an aged glow-worm bumbling through the dark" [emphasis added].⁶² Just a page earlier in the novel, the narrative had marked mali's hut by the "powerful aroma of cow-dung pats" used for fuel and "the raw rank odour of the tobacco he smokes in his chilam". Mali is, thus, not only misshapen and grotesque but also smells dirty. This sort of physical denigration would surely be uncalled for in a work that purportedly protests and seeks to show the injustice that Uma (the middle class heroine) suffers for being not so beautiful and hence as marriageable as her younger sister. But then, servants hardly matter either to middle class masters or authors/narrators. The comparison of mali with the insect is also nothing new for "servants, as a part of the lower orders suggestively tied to animals and social chaos, do not have sufficient interiority and intellect to distinguish them as individuals."⁶³

Let us take into account two descriptions from Githa Hariharan's debut novel The Thousand Faces of Night (1992). The first one is about Devi's grandmother while the second is about the old maidservant Mayamma. "My [Devi's] grandmother was a wizened old woman, illiterate, and widowed in her early thirties. She was as thin as a stick . . . But her face was also lit up by her brown tapering eyes".⁶⁴ In sharp contrast is old Mayamma who "seems less frightening, a dried-up house lizard too harmless to be repulsive" (Thousand 62) [emphasis added]. While the old grandmother is made endearing, the same old maidservant is rendered grotesque and animal-like. This sort of physical denigration is noticeably marked in Anita Desai's Where Shall We Go this Summer (1982) where the ayahs consisting of "Goanese women, Mangaloreans, fisher folk turned city domestics, [and] Bombay women" are described as "huge hipped, deep-thighed, pink-gummed and habitually raucous".⁶⁵ Furthermore, there is a recurrent pattern of animal imagery associated with servants and other subalterns in the novel. In

the very beginning of the narrative, we have all the common people such as the fishermen, Ali the caretaker, Joseph of the diesel-oil pump and other who drink with Moses being represented as goats: “But we do, *we do*,” sang Joseph and Ali and several others nodding their heads briskly up and down like so many goats neighing about the table” (Summer 12) [italics author’s]. Moses, the servant of Sita, is described variously as “a dusky ox who could be trusted” (Summer 14) or “like some monstrous porpoise that easily lifts and falls with the waves and is never tipped or turned” (Summer 20). Tabish Khair cites an example from Anita Desai’s Where Shall We Go this Summer (1982) where the ayah takes Sita’s baby to the park and a fight ensues amongst the other nurses congregated there. The narrative uses words like “clamour”, “shrill”, “scream”, “tooting”, “madly flapping edge”, “ripping” etc to build up an image of violent bird-like behaviour from the nurses. “This perception of the crowd [including servants] – the ‘lowly and refined outside’ – as violent, dangerous and carnivorous is a recurrent pattern in this and other Desai’s novels”.⁶⁶ This animal imagery can be seen in the following illustration from Salman Rushdie’s The Moor’s Last Sigh: “And even though Miss Jaya was as snappy as a claw, with lips as sharp as scratches and eyes as narrow as squeaks, even though she was as thin as ice and as bossy as boots”.⁶⁷ In Upamanyu’s The Last Burden we have the information from Jamun that the “sweeperess has decamped the day before with one of the Ayah’s male friends, a scraggy, peevisish wolf called Kishore” (Burden 28) [emphasis added]. Of course, we have no clear indication that Kishore is a servant. But this much we can guess is that he is also a subaltern. Let us consider this example from English, August: “A rapid but timid knock on the door, like the scurrying of some rodent. A small black man in the white khadi of a peon” (English 9) [emphasis added]. Bhima’s husband Gopal, granddaughter Maya are portrayed as good looking but not so the other subalterns. Shyam “the pockmark-faced neighbour” of Bhima in her slum reminds her of the “cobra at Mahalati temple, who lowers his hood as soon as the high priest puts a silver bowl of milk before him” (Space 54). Other women of the slum are referred to as “eagle-eyed” with “paan-stained teeth and gossiping tongues” (Space 57). Even the clerk in Maya’s college is presented as having “small, gleaming, piglike eyes” (Space 23). But it would be wrong to conclude that these animal stereotypes are restricted only to Indian fiction in English as this excerpt from Gieve Patel’s poem “Servants”⁶⁸ demonstrates:

They sit without thought,
Mouth slightly open, . . .
.....

. . . They sit like animals.

.....

Animals resting in their stall, (15-16, 21, 23)

Even though the poet asserts that he “meant no offence”, yet the allusion to servants’ physical resemblances to bovine creatures sitting in stalls is hard to ignore.

Ugliness is not ascribed to the servants through their physical features alone. At times the servants’ clothes and other material accessories are marked out rather than their bodies. “It has been argued in the archaeological context that ‘dress is an embodying activity, as costume ornamentation leads to modification of the body itself,’ and certainly it can be easily seen that costume and decoration are one of the forms in which social action is *embodied*” [italics author’s].⁶⁹ Dirt was the chief distinguishing common feature of the servants’ clothes. “The dirt on the servant,” Eve M. Lynch observes, “offered writers a discursive field of other which was used to express desire, racial and class, deviance, and a bestial loss of interiority and subjectivity”.⁷⁰ Their personal habits also mark them out as repulsive. “Vasant was sitting in the sun, thumbing the dirt off the soles of his feet” (English 275). Lynch uses Mary Douglas’ studies of purity and danger to point out that “there is no such thing as absolute dirt; dirt is essentially an offense against order, or ‘matter out of place’. It implies two conditions: a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order.”⁷¹ “The signs of dirt on the servant,” Lynch adds, “point to a system of location, a ‘place’ for reticulating contention and chaos within Victorian domestic ideology. The household servant fills the place of disorder, embodying a con-text against which the ‘ordered’ Victorian woman, her family and her home could be read.”⁷² If Vasant has the habit of cleaning his dirty toe nails, then Kaisbai and her son Vaman are shown in the narrative as dirty and boorish distinguishing them from Jamun, the middle class master.

. . . he [Jamun] is frequently disgusted by their boorishness, by the smacking sounds that Vaman emits when he chomps, by Kasibai’s thunderous hawking and expectorating first thing in the morning; for the months that he’s known them, he’s haphazardly striven to educate them for his own peace of mind (“Flush, you fucker, flush! Why don’t you remember that this handle is not fucking decorative! . . .”) (Burden 287) [emphasis added]

The difference between Jamun and the servants is not one merely of money, but of eating habits (Vaman makes “smacking sounds” while eating); of cleanliness (Kasibai

does “thunderous hawking” while washing or does not flush the toilet after using it). The overall effect achieved is the undermining of her rather successful role as the companion of Jamun. At one point Jamun deliberately disowns any responsibility or feelings towards Kasibai or her son. Since he had not shown any sympathy to more deserving servants like his childhood ayah, Jamun justifies his inconsiderateness to Kasibai. There is also an image at the end of the novel of Kasibai as dressing up and receiving Jamun’s father at the rail-station like a dutiful daughter-in-law. Kasibai has been repeatedly and deliberately represented as physically repulsive by Jamun. This is related to his anxiety about her; she can and does appropriate the role of the middle class housewife. Therefore, the servants must always be “seen” with a lack – a lack that is always already there. In this context we can recount Susan Bordo remarks about the body that the “body is not only a *text* of culture. It is also . . . a practical, direct locus of social control. Banally, through table manners and toilet habits, through table manners and toilet habits, through seemingly trivial routines, rules, and manners, culture is ‘*made* body,’ . . . converted into automatic, habitual activity” [italics author’s].⁷³

Indian fiction in English draws a distinction between the middle class masters who are cultured and hence frugal in their food habits, unlike the hedonistic lower class servants who devote themselves exclusively to the mere enjoyment of food and drink. This is evident in the numerous representations of the middle class characters as somewhat averse to food. Tabish Khair points to Anita Desai’s Fire on the Mountain where Nanda Kaul disdains Ila Das and “the outside world but also of food and, evidently, eats like a bird”.⁷⁴ Sita, the protagonist from Desai’s Where Shall We Go This Summer?, voices clearly this middle class ideal: “. . . she [Sita] folded her arms about her and stared at the closed door, saying ‘They [her husband’s guests] are nothing – nothing but appetite and sex. Only food, sex and money matter’” (Summer 43). Later she also revolts against her husband’s family who appeared to her was being obsessed with food.

The women . . . [were] bent over their trays on which they were chopping vegetables – chopping, slicing, chopping, slicing the incredible quantities of vegetables they daily devoured. Like elephants, she [Sita] thought – eating grass, shifting from foot to foot, swaying their trunks, small-eyed, eating . . . very soon the kitchen odours and kitchen sounds thickened and swelled till they became indubitably real, overpoweringly real. She took to smoking instead of eating . . . (Summer 44)

This disgust with food and eating is surprisingly repeated in Desai's later work like Fasting, Feasting. Arun while living in America with the Patton family shows his disgust particularly at the non-vegetarian food cooked by Mr. Patton. Like Sita and Nanda, Arun thought food as "an unbearable nuisance – those meals cooked and placed before him whether he wanted them or not (and how often he had not), that duty to consume what others thought he must consume" (Fasting 185). In fact, the whole of Part Two in this novel deals repeatedly with Arun's distaste for food whether it is cooked by his Indian colleagues or the vegetarian food that he concocts with Mrs. Patton.

On the other hand, unlike the middle class masters the servants were very often portrayed as gluttonous. Haridasi (Freedom Song), for instance, is shown as eating a lot of rice, or the cook, Rehman and others stealing food to stuff themselves. Another common and dirty habit ascribed to servants to mark them out in literary texts is smoking surreptitiously "bidis" or cheap uncured tobacco rolled in tendu leaves. Let us examine this example from English, August where Agastya goes to visit his superior Deputy Collector Srivastav's house for the first time. During the visit Srivastav yells at one point for his servants to take away his little son who had pissed in his pants. "The corridor was almost opposite Agastya. He saw the servants before Srivastav. They strolled round a corner into sight, sharing a bidi, Ramsingh scratching his (own) balls, while Srivastava and Menon continued to shriek for them. Gopu trampled on the stub, then both began running, ending in a close finish in the room, panting like defeated marathon men" (English 56) [italics author's].

A bidi is not a neutral signifier but a class marker. For the average Indian middle class, it represents something that is smoked by lower class people with a foul smell and is associated with vulgarity and villainy. It marks the absence of sophistication, one that would come with, say, smoking a cigarette. Nando is described as having "tobacco-stained hands" (Freedom 18). Thrity Umrigar pinpoints precisely the middle class fear of the servant's body when she presents Sera Dubash, the employer trying to justify her prejudice against letting her maid Bhima to sit on her furniture or using the common utensils: "Part of it [prejudice] is the damn tobacco she [Bhima] chews all day, she [Sera] thinks to herself. It just makes me feel sick and dirties everything else about her. Also, having seen where she [Bhima] lives, [Sera wonders] . . . what kind of water she uses to bathe and, well, how effectively she is able to clean her nether regions" (Space 29). So

far as smoking of the servant is concerned we can see an interesting case in Anita Desai's Where Shall We Go This Summer? The narrative presents both the mistress Sita and her maid Miriam as smokers. But the former's habit is presented as an act of rebellion against her husband's family: ". . . she [Sita] had vibrated and throbbed in revolt against their [Sita's in-laws] placidity, calmness, and sluggishness. She behaved provocatively – it was there she started smoking, a thing that had not been done in their household by any woman and even by men only in secret" (Summer 63-64). We see no such defence of Miriam's smoking. When Sita's cigarettes run out, she turns to Miriam for tobacco. But even then the author makes a distinction between the mistress and the servant. When Miriam rolls cigars for Sita, the narrative points out that she makes "surprisingly neat and slim brown cigarillos" for her mistress (Summer 100). Sita, the middle class protagonist, is and always will be "seen" as a sophisticated smoker while lower class maid Miriam will always be "seen" as the uncouth smoker.

The dirtiness of servants and their clothes also finds repetition in Amit Chaudhuri's A New World where in the very incipient of the novel we find these lines: "The two or three part-time maidservants who always sat by the entrance steps looked at the two arriviers casually; it was as if they were used to the sight of huge itineraries, arrivals, and departures, and it no longer disturbed the monotony and fixedness of their lives. A faint smell of stale clothes and hair-oil came from them" [emphasis added].⁷⁵

The servant's dress as dirty could be ascribed to their exploitative conditions is missed by most of Indian English fiction. What is stressed is its representation and this stems, not from any partial liking for servants, but from a fear of transgression. Anne Buck asserts that "the well-dressed serving-maid [in eighteenth century England] remained the whipping girl for vague social ills throughout the century".⁷⁶ Sandra Sherman points out that it is this fear of class transgression i.e. the well dressed servant be mistaken for their masters that prompted Daniel Defoe to rave and rant against well-dressed servants in his Everybody's Business is Nobody's Business. "In the semiotics of the market, clothes operate on the same principle as a vacant shop floor: they are the immediate surroundings that construct a persona, cueing an identity to the public".⁷⁷ Defoe expresses the growing fear that not only the well-dressed servant-apprentice could be mistaken for the master, but the dressed up maid could also creep into the master's bed.⁷⁸ It is not only the decline of the feudal custom of clothes clearly denoting one's

livelihood but the increasing availability of cheap consumer goods that it became difficult to fix servants as a sign.

It is not only in the case of the well dressed maid that clothes had to be monitored. Radhika Chopra points out that within the home, these male servants' sexuality is monitored through control of dress, way of talking and other modes of distancing. For instance, servants are not encouraged to dress in explicitly male attire (jeans, t-shirts and other tight fitting clothes). "Modern, contemporary styles of dress for domestic workers replicate some of the colonial clothing styles for servants (as all domestic workers were, and are still, called) and include bare feet or soft-soled shoes that make no noise, tailored but loose garments in a single colour, making no distinction between upper and lower body parts."⁷⁹ In Amit Chaudhuri's Strange and Sublime Address a middle class couple complains about their servant who constantly demands jeans and shirts implying that servants ought not to demand and wear such clothes (Strange 171).

If we look at the ever growing consumerism of the nineteenth and its full impact in the twentieth century not only on the Western world but also in the Indian context, we find that consumer durables like clothes, soaps etc have increasingly cheaper and easily available to lower classes than before. Likewise it has been difficult to deny them to lower classes like the servants. Not to mention that the practice of giving out old clothes as part of the paid wages or new clothes as bonus meant that servants could end up dressed somewhat like their masters. This anxiety about class differences and the actual lack of control in reality is translated and compensated for in literary texts. In Indian fiction in English, therefore, servants are compulsorily marked out whether it is smoking, using excessive hair-oil, wearing dirty clothes, lack of clean sanitary habits and presented as the Other against whom the master/narrator/author could set up the middle class ideal of cleanliness and culture. The following words of Sara Dickey sums up the argument beautifully:

Differences between classes are signified by a range of markers, including clothing and other items of fashion consumer goods and their display, manners and sophistication, education, and language, among others. And in common usage, although class-specific attributes are sometimes spoken of as coming from such environmental influences as a rural or urban setting or family upbringing, they are more often spoken of as being essential and

possessing inherent sources such as “genes” or “blood” such as does caste.⁸⁰

Later on we would see that Bakha, Munoo, Velutha, the three servants who are presented in a good light refrain from such ugly habits. Of course, Bakha smokes unlike Munoo but he prefers cigarettes like Red Lamp in imitation of the English sahibs. He does not smoke cheap bidis or the “hubble bubble” (hookah) like his father. In case of drinking tea, Bakha does not pour it on saucers and drink it with loud slurping sounds. Like the sahibs, he prefers to drink it straight from the cup. Again, servants are presented as mentally dull and unreceptive to books, theatres, pictures and music which are considered as signs of “true culture”. The attitude of the author/narrator/masters is therefore one of derogation and condescension towards the servants. In a crude simplification we can assert that the servant’s deformed body represents a lack of true culture and vice versa. At times, the authors ascribe certain servants as capable of appreciating these things like Munoo or Bakha. The former while pulling Mrs Mainwaring’s rickshaw at the bazaar in Shimla appreciates the fine shops and their sophisticated luxuries (Coolie 268). But these are mere exceptions. Ultimately as Elizabeth Langland notes that there will always be a gap between the middle class master and the lower class servant, a case of “simple elegance versus vulgar display”.⁸¹ She agrees with Leonore Davidoff’s assertion: “Although the system of etiquette [and culture] was highly formalised, its details were constantly changing . . . to mark the knowledgeable insider [the master] from the outsider [the servant]”.⁸² No matter how much Bakha tried, or for that any servant, they would always fall short of the ideal culture as exemplified by the middle class, including the authors.

Like Sera Dubash (in The Space between Us) the middle-class finds “something subtly repulsive about the working-class [servant’s] body” and this metamorphoses into a fear that servants would “sweep all culture and decency out of existence”.⁸³ This is “a fear fuelled by the growing prosperity among certain sections of the working class”.⁸⁴ So the literary texts try to restrain this slide by highlighting bodily differences to compensate for the toning down of the class differences. The author/narrator/master’s obsession with the smell of the servant’s body is a natural corollary of such anxiety.

At times, the author/narrator use other subalterns for setting up this dirty “Other” as is evident from this observation of Agastya of the common people waiting at the

Collector's office: "A jumble of white khadi and red teeth, the scent of hair-oil distracting the nose from the stench of urine, a few black eyes glancing at Agastya oddly" (English 21). Similar is this observation from Attia Hosain's Sunlight on a Broken Column: "Village women squatted in the courtyard and their children sat by them silently or stood and stared without playfulness while flies settled around their eyes and mouths. A stale smell of oil came from their bodies. A woman nursed her baby, her coarse shirt pulled away from her heavy breast and the ragged *dopatta* barely covering her" [italics author's].⁸⁵ The village women may not be servants as such. But it hardly matters since the text needs an "Other" for its privileged masters and when servants are not available other subalterns would suffice. Let us examine some more examples from other writers to be able to gauge the pervasiveness of such a hierarchy of body with the middle class always coming on tops. In Navtej Sarna's story "Madame Kitty" the middle class narrator describes his first meeting with Madame Kitty, a prostitute turned nurse. "The first thing about Madame Kitty that hit me was her very strong perfume. It seemed to enter the house in front of her like a shield. And when she sat down, comfortable and confident, in the armchair to which I had pointed, the scent spread itself thinly across the room, curling into each corner" [emphasis added].⁸⁶ Here we see the marking of subalterns like Madame Kitty by her preference of strong scent and her overuse of the garish red lipstick. The protagonist, (invariably middle or upper class) is not prone to such faux pas particularly in the use of clothes and other accessories. Let us take two examples from Anita Desai's In Custody where the middle class protagonist Deven displays good sense in both clothes and etiquette of eating. "He [Deven] had tossed it [the pale green nylon shirt] on to the floor in an obligatory fit of temper . . . how could they have chosen such a cheap garment for their son-in-law?" [emphasis added].⁸⁷ Again, in the following example describing a feast, we find traces of Deven's good breeding:

. . . when trays of food were brought up by several young men in filthy pyjamas, tattered vests and with waiters' napkins slung over their shoulders . . . [Nur] ate what seemed to Deven unwise quantities of very rich and greasy dishes . . .

Nur eating was not at all a dignified or impressive sight: he plunged his hands into the food, lowered his face into it, lifted handfuls to his mouth from where it dropped or leaked on to his lap . . . Deven tried to avert his face and concentrate on the plate of food which someone had thrust roughly at him . . . (Custody 51)

For all of Deven's faults and shortcomings, he remains the epitome of good sense and breeding in the novel which is missing from most of the other characters including Murad, his rich friend. In the representation of the servant's body as physically repulsive, disease plays a significant role. The body of the servant, particularly its affliction by disease and his/her attitudes to it form another important distinction in the process of othering. Disease was associated to notions of cleanliness and purity which became pronounced with the arrival of Victorian or Western concepts of sanitation and physical culture. More often than not, Indians (particularly servants) were shown as afflicted with diseases and this was ascribed to their dirtiness, food habits and apparently natural laziness. Of course, such loathing had its colonial origins as seen in Mulk Raj Anand's famous scene in Coolie where the Bank Manager visits the house of his Indian subordinate Babu Nathoo Ram. Repulsion, and at times, sympathy, is the effect of such descriptions. Here we have to take note of the fact that stereotypes about servants are neither exclusive nor fixed. It has been or could be used in case of others, including other subalterns. Besides colonial stereotypes about domestic servants often coalesced with the pre-colonial ones, namely the Hindu caste taboos. And these have very often become a fixture of the Indian, and not necessarily Hindu, domestic scene. It could be openly so in Mulk Raj Anand's description of Rakha, Bakha's younger brother.

. . . [Rakha's] dirty face on which the flies congregated in abundance to taste the sweet delights of the saliva on the corners of his lips. . . . He was the vehicle of a life-force, the culminating point in the destiny of which would never come, because malaria lingered in his bones, and that disease does not kill but merely dissipates the energy. He was a friend of the flies and the mosquitoes, their boon companion since his childhood. (Untouchable 75)

Rakha starts eating food without washing his hands and that infuriates his brother who shouts at him. "At least wash your hands, you wild animal!" said Bakha irritated by the sight of his brother's running nose" (Untouchable 75) [emphasis added]. That Bakha should be so conscious of personal hygiene unlike Rakha is not a mere coincidence. Right from the beginning, the narrative of Untouchable stresses the difference between Bakha and the other outcasts who are dirty. Bakha feels superior to them except his close buddies like Ram Charan and Chota who are also worshippers of fashion and of the British way of dressing and life.

In our introductory chapter we have already seen how the servant Nando is presented as diseased in Amit Chaudhuri's Freedom Song. Jamun's aya, in Upamanyu Chatterjee's The Last Burden is also infected with tuberculosis and dies a pathetic death. Her affliction and subsequent neglect by Jamun's parents is the occasion for such long remembrance by Jamun. But in the course of his narration, Jamun the middle class narrator does not fail to reproduce the expected response of servants to disease.

Shyamanand objects to Aya's continuance in the house and her unconcern for the doctor's injunctions. "She could transmit her tuberculosis to us, to Jamun. She cooks our food. She coughs incessantly, a parched, corrosive hawking, as though sand and bonedust gnawed at her windpipe. She's though flesh. Her skull's peeping out from beneath the pleats of skin. She hasn't dropped any of the taboos – bidis, rice, potatoes, sugar – doesn't take her medicines systematically. Ye pules nonstop that we don't look after her property, that we are killing her. Can she or can't she conduct herself like an adult, a sixty-five-year old? She is disintegrating. She must be admitted to a hospital where she can't be fussy". (Burden 87)

Aya, like all servants, smokes bidis and ignores her disease. Her irrationality or childlike behaviour to her disease compares unfavourably to Shyamanand's analysis of the disease and the steps taken to prevent it. Aya's attitude is similar to that of the maidservant Saraswati. "She [Saraswati] would not take medicines. Stubborn, pig-headed, stupid woman. Instead, she ate the bitter tulsi leaves of the tulsi plants that grew in pots on the terrace. Bitter, bitter leaves" (Strange 84). Again, in Jhumpa Lahiri's story's "A Real Durwan" we find the central protagonist, Boori Ma, a maidservant afflicted with bedsores from sleeping on thin worn out mattresses. Even though it is plainly obvious and Mrs Dalal, one of the tenants of the apartment building points it out to her, she refuses to believe it. "It was true that prickly heat was common during the rainy season. But Boori Ma preferred to think that what irritated her bed, what stole her sleep, what burned like peppers across her thinning scalp and skin, was of a less mundane origin".⁸⁸

Deidre Ortiz, in her critical essay "The Thematic Significance of Disease in *Jane Eyre*" shows how disease is used as a marker to differentiate the heroine Jane Eyre from the lower class through her immunity to diseases. Though diseases like tuberculosis affected all classes, it is through Jane's innate ability to resist disease that marks her out

from the lower classes even when she is forced to live amongst them.⁸⁹ The servant's disease and his neglect is also a familiar trope in fiction eliciting sentimental tears from the middle class readers. And it has remained so. The sentimental value of the servants' sufferings increases manifold when they are portrayed as old and afflicted. If we take the case of Munoo in Anand's Coolie we have a classic example of servant being diseased. Munoo contracts the deadly tuberculosis and his pathetic death serves as an instance for drawing out the sentiments of the sympathetic reader. To cite an example, we can turn to Manil Suri's The Death of Vishnu (2001). The novel, a tearjerker, portrays the shabby treatment of Vishnu, a servant or odd-job man at the hands of the middle class tenants living in a Bombay apartment. Vishnu suffers from a serious disease and his suffering and subsequent death provides a platform for the author to showcase the middle class callousness and an appeal to the readers for sympathy. In fact, his disease fascinates one of the tenants, Mr. Jalal so much that he comes and sleeps next to him.

He [Mr. Jalal] would climb down the stairs late at night and sit in the dark next to Vishnu. . . . Mr. Jalal would move his fingers over Vishnu's nose, his eyelids, his lips. The skin would feel hot against his cool fingertips, and he would try and read Vishnu's expression using his sense of touch. . . . was Vishnu still suffering, or had he transcended it, gathering momentum from its throes to launch himself to a higher, more tranquil plane?⁹⁰

Jhumpa Lahiri's Boori Ma is afflicted with a swollen knee and the impact of her being thrown out of the building where she lived and worked is heightened by this fact. Such pathetic suffering and death can also be seen in the death of Bhima's daughter and son-in-law from AIDS (Space 141-155).

V

Next to the ugly and depraved servant, no other representation of the servant dominates the literary scene more than that of the aged/ seemingly ageless servant. To understand the reason behind such recurring representation of the aged servant we must also take into consideration the underlying feeling of fear and anxiety about servants. Of course, such fear of the middle and upper class is not restricted exclusively to servants but extends to the lower class. In fact, the fear of the outsider is common to all communities. What is unknowable is to be feared. But in the case of servants, this fear is

perhaps unreasonable considering the fact that servants live in such close contact with the masters and should become automatically familiar figures. What make this fear complex is the compounding of uneasiness and guilt of the middle class at having exploited the servants. One of the ways in literary accounts of coping with this fear is to make sure that the servant's body "is transformed from a very far distant and often threatening Otherness into figures that are relatively familiar".⁹¹

We have already referred to Nando who "looked much the same" (Freedom 33) and most probably would remain the same. From Upamanyu Chatterjee's The Last Burden we have Jamun's description of his childhood aya: "Aya died of diabetes, tuberculosis and neglect in a rundown charitable hospital. Jamun was eighteen then, and she ageless. She had never known the date of her birth, and had computed her years by the earthquakes and famines that she'd witness" (Burden 86) [emphasis added]. If we turn to Rushdie's The Moor's Last Sigh we find the following example: "I [the Moor] was sustained in that null time at the beginning of the 1980s by Ezekiel, our ageless cook . . . where he [Ezekiel] squatted, grizzle-chopped and grinning gumily, tossing parathas optimistically in the air" (Moor 272-73) [emphasis added]. This kind of representation of servants is highly effective for a number of ways. It hides the scars of poverty/deprivation and, most importantly, forecloses the possibility of development in servants. Servants, like the natives in Orientalist discourses, are always seen as already complete or childlike and therefore incapable for further growth. Swapna M Mukherjee rightly remarks in this context that:

. . . the latter [servants] situated at the receiving end, always to be looked after, taken care of, and directed towards "meaningful" and "worthwhile" activities. By assigning the servants to the position of children, they were denied the status of a mature adult. They were regarded as incapable of taking responsibilities and always susceptible to potential slippages – committing crimes, ignoring orders, or engaging in some other forms of wrongful activity.⁹²

Saraswati in A Strange and Sublime Address is seen as ageless as the furniture. If Hakiman Bua is the faithful old servant in Sunlight on a Broken Column, then Mary Pereira "retired in her white-old age, once more happy as an ayah with a baby to raise" (Midnight 547). Old, ageless, immature, childlike are some of the common building blocks with which the Indian English writer constructs the servant. Even sympathetic writers like Mulk Raj Anand are infected with this immaturity of the servants. In

Untouchable Bakha's search for a way out for his outcaste condition ends with his meeting with the Mahatma and the poet Iqbal Nath Sarshar and the lawyer R. N. Bashir. It is interesting to note that Bakha for all his feelings of frustration and anger is not given the privilege of chalking out a plan for resistance. The ending of Untouchable for all its optimism is vague and this is necessarily so for the author cannot or will not think of successful resistance by the subaltern. Here it must be noted that the middle class narratives cannot take cognizance of even the daily acts, however primeval and secondary, of resistance by the servants. Take Munoo, for instance, who unlike Bakha, belongs to the upper caste and is educated till class five. He is exposed to a wide range of subjection such as domestic servitude, cottage industry and industrial labour. But like Bakha he too is not allowed the luxury of understanding his oppression. That is reserved for middle class reformers like Mohan who instructs the coolies to go back to their lands and work. Mohan explains that it "is my object to make you people realize that if you work, you should have a share in the things that you produce with the sweat of your brow" (Coolie 275). Mohan informs the coolies that they "are superior to all these colonels and generals and maharajahs" and that they should not accept their subjection (Coolie 279). The author informs us through the impressed coolies that Mohan is not only from a high-class family, but also a learned man who had been to England. Mohan is allowed to voice the way out for the coolies while Munoo and others are there to suffer and illustrate Mohan's wisdom. The reason is not far to see. Servants are never seen as conscious individuals capable of independent thought, understanding their own realities and of effective resistance. In this context we can refer to the words of Shahid Amin while writing about the Gandhi-darshan motif in nationalist discourse: "To behold the Mahatma in person and become his devotees were the only roles assigned to them [subalterns], while it was for the urban intelligentsia and full-time party activity to convert this groundswell of popular feeling into an organized movement."⁹³

Seen in the light of this comment, Bakha's darshan of Mahatma and his subsequent confusion is another example of the middle class's assumptions about the immaturity of servants. It is difficult not to conclude that for all the sympathy that middle class authors like Anand, servants like Munoo or Bakha are not allowed to understand their plight nor chalk out resistance. This inability of the servants to understand their exploitation and to organise collective resistance would be discussed more in the succeeding chapter on labour. This stereotype of the servant as a child is not recent as in

colonial times we have writers like Flora Annie Steel and Grace Gardener who had remarked: “The Indian servant is a child in everything save age, and should be treated as a child; that is to say, kindly, but with great firmness.”⁹⁴

In Pankaj Misra’s novel The Romantics (2000), we find that “Shyam [a servant] kept dropping perfectly shaped chapatis into my [Samar, the narrator-protagonist] brass thali, his face almost demonically intense in the glow from the chulha fire”.⁹⁵ Shyam is represented not only as physically deficient but also mentally underdeveloped as is evident for his taciturnity. He would repeat without regard to context a cliched proverb in Hindi. “‘Greed,’ he [Shyam] would mumble, ‘is the biggest evil. It eats away man, destroys families, sunders son from parents, husband from wife . . .’” (Romantics 11). These words of Shyam are repeated out throughout the narrative and at times serve as an ironical commentary as for instance when Mrs Pandey’s son Arjun is beaten badly by Rajesh for trying to mortgage Mrs Pandey’s house. When Samar sees the badly bruised Arjun, and talks with Mrs Pandey about his wounds, Shyam “kept nodding and saying, ‘Greed is the biggest evil. It eats away man . . .’” (Romantics 99). Again, while Samar is struggling for a meaningful though illicit relationship with Catherine, Shyam’s repeated proverb on greed seemed to contain “a special reproach” (Romantics 154) for him.

An additional knock-on effect of such preference for representation of old or very young servants by Indian writers in English is the sympathy the author can extract from the readers. The presence of servants in such works is merely to elicit sympathy from the readers and what easier way than to make them as young or old and ill-treated. Khair accuses them of being writers of eternal epics of suffering and ignoring the potential and achievement of servants and other subalterns.⁹⁶ Bakha, Munoo, Velutha, Vishnu, Bhima – the pedigree of suffering servants is quite old in Indian fiction in English.

The representation of maidservants being represented primarily as old ayas or physically unattractive in Indian fiction in English is connected with the deep-seated fear of the middle class about the servants’ sexuality. “Hidden behind much of the anxiety surrounding the physical appearance of the servant were indications of a sexual fetish”.⁹⁷ Elisabeth Jay highlights the fear of the sexuality of female maidservants such as housekeepers.⁹⁸ They could upset the established social order and expose the family secrets. Indian novels in English betray an anxiety with regard to the sexuality of

servants. This fear of transgression of class and caste through sexual relationships is not expressed directly in most novels. It is only in a handful of works that we find such references to master-servant sexual contact. Here it must be remembered that very often maidservants are “seen” as a seductress. This depiction of loose moral in maids helped the texts to construct the “chaste” identity of the middle class women. Moreover, it was easier and safer for middle-class narrative to include servants as markers of loyalty and sacrifice than as embodiment of sexual impurity. Maidservants, particularly the young, posited the biggest threat to morals of the male members. Ismat Chughtai’s story “Lingering Fragrance” shows how maids are recruited for the sexual initiation of the sons of the aristocratic families. We would be hard pressed to find an equivalent in Indian fiction in English so frank admission of such exploitative practices. On the other hand, Indian fiction in English readily assumes that maids, on account of their low class and/or caste are sexually loose as this account shows:

She [Savitri] was a good worker, perhaps a little too sweet-tongued, a little insincere in her willingness. “You must watch her,” a neighbour had told my mother. “She maybe a thief – not big things, just little ones; knick-knacks; a pen – though a pen can be expensive.” She also might be a part-time prostitute – difficult to tell. There was an independence about her, something in her movements (Strange 138-9) [emphasis added]

Upamanyu Chatterjee deals somewhat more clearly with the possibility of master-servant sexual relationships. In English August, we have one of Agastya’s friends Mohan who has a sexual relationship with his tribal maid and loses his arms in an act of revenge by the tribals. The conversation between Agastya and his friend Mandy or Madan Bhatia about Mohan’s action deserves a closer look:

The chowkidar said that the woman [maidservant] was some kind of whore, as loose as a tooth about to fall, and I [Madan] suppose Mohan missed Rohini or something like that.

“Don’t be silly, Mandy, you and I [Agastya] have been lonely and horny too, here in Madna. But you wouldn’t fuck our cook, not even if she looked like Khajuraho and sat down beside your plate while you had lunch and shaved her pussy in front of you.” (English 267)

If Madan’s words are reflective of the middle class preconception about the immorality of servants then Agastya represents the middle class prejudice against sexual contact with servants. Agastya’s view comes as a surprise considering that he is shown as

quite liberated sexually, masturbating and fantasizing about women, including his friend Dhrubo's mother. Tabish Khair warns against reading this act of violence against Mohan as retaliation for sexual exploitation. "The vengeance wrecked upon the Babu [Mohan] by the tribals and the Naxalites is read more in terms of traditional Indian attitudes to sex on the part of the Coolies [including servants] rather than that of class-caste exploitation and protest".⁹⁹

In other words, sex between the master and the maid, even in the literary texts, is to be read in the context of class and caste contexts. Unlike Agastya, the middle class protagonist of The Last Burden, Jamun, enjoys a sexual relationship with his maid Kasibai. Jamun discloses that "Kasibai has unclenched him, made him feel opulent, as though his juices – his lymph, his spittle – were inestimably precious" (Burden 283). This sexual compatibility of Jamun and Kasibai does not count for much or at least it does not lead to any emotional ties between them. For Jamun, Kasibai is by nature sexually promiscuous and aggressive. Again, in Abha Daweswar's Babyji, Rani, the maid exposes herself in a sexually aggressive manner to Anamika in the very beginning of the novel. "Her [Rani] skin was dark . . . in an exaggerated gesture she turned, lifted her sari all the way up to her bare ass, and jiggled her backside."¹⁰⁰ This has to be kept in mind while reading the later relationship between Rani and Anamika.

What is interesting in these accounts of sexual liaison between employers and servants was the highly gendered nature of the discourse. In the case of the male employer engaging with the maid, the maid was always the temptress, the fallen woman. On the other hand, when the mistress had a relationship with a servant, she herself was always portrayed as the aggressor, the seductress . . . Whether as a maid or a mistress, no matter to what caste or class a woman belonged, her eroticism and sexuality were always at issue.¹⁰¹

Thus, both Kasibai and Rani are shown as sexually aggressive. If we turn to Ginu Kamani's story "Maria" we find the same stereotyping of maids as sexually active. The narrator who is a young girl informs us that "Maria had children of her own in a village far from Bombay, . . . [and] the children were grown up, . . ." ¹⁰² Later on we are shown that Maria sleeps with the cook, "a dark puff-faced, moustachiod man who resembled like a bandit" and for which she is thrown out of her job. Meenakshi Mukherjee while discussing U. R. Ananthamurthy's Kannada novel Samskara (1965) writes that in Indian

novels images of “outcaste or lower-caste [class] women are often endowed with a greater sexual vitality than their high-born counterparts”. Mukherjee goes on to add that this difference in sexual attitudes could be attributed to socio-economic factors. The notions of impurity, chastity etc are more strongly entrenched in the higher castes/classes and the strict adherence of such taboos prevent spontaneity. The corresponding lack of such taboos may aid in the easy familiarity and greater sexual freedom of the lower caste/class women. But Mukherjee cautions against such simplifications by adding that the “easy availability of lower-caste women may also have imbued them with a greater erotic aura in the male imagination”.¹⁰³ If we read Upamanyu Chatterjee’s Weight Loss or his earlier work The Last Burden we would find Mukherjee’s comment is apt. Even in Chatterjee’s first novel English, August we find that maids are represented as morally loose. Plus there is a close association of dirt with sex. “Dirt as a signifier of sexual desire gains its erotic momentum from the presence it brings to the corporeal surface, elevating the value of display and rejecting other sources of desire which stem from subjectivity”.¹⁰⁴ In Weight Loss we have Bhola who fetishizes everyone from teachers to roadside sadhus to servants. He fantasizes first about the family cook Gopinath and then becomes obsessed with a vegetable-vendor and her husband. “He [Bhola] did visit Gopinath and lived together, he became his servant’s servant and his cook’s cook, all in the prodigious and enduring fantasy that he, in haphazard fashion over the ensuing years, detailed in the back pages of his school exercise books, in the unused diaries that his father gave him for his Maths roughwork and in the hand-me-down class texts that he inherited from his elder brother”¹⁰⁵ This last obsession spans the length of the book and most of Bhola’s life. He even ends up studying at a college in an obscure hill-station hundreds of miles from his home because he wants to be near the couple. Bhola’s attraction to his servants and dirty subalterns or even Jamun’s sexual attraction towards Kasibai is tinged by this middle class paradoxical abhorrence as well as fascination for dirt. Indian novels in English invest maidservants “with the ‘dirt’ of sexual rapaciousness” or represents the “servant’s vigorous exterior” signifying “an empty interior space and appetite waiting to be filled/fed by the [middle-class master]”.¹⁰⁶ However, we have to note that for all his frankness, surprisingly Upamanyu Chatterjee does not write about the sexual liaison between male servants and the mistress or any women of the master’s family.

Sexual prudery so far as servants are concerned is not limited to the Indian English fiction. Sexual relationships with servants disturb the “necessary order of the house”; such relationships foregrounds servants whereas “silence and invisibility in its servants” is the requirement. Stevens, the butler and protagonist of The Remains of the Day disregards Miss Kenton’s interest in him as he feels, like his employers that liaisons between servants are distractions.¹⁰⁷ It is interesting to note that even Richardson’s Pamela frowns upon such liaisons with other servants: “[Harry, a servant] call’d me his pretty *Pamela*, and took hold of me, as if he would have kiss’d me; for which you may be sure I was very angry . . . I kept all the Fellows at a Distance. And indeed I am sure I am not proud, and carry it civil to every body; but yet, methinks I can’t bear to be look’d upon by these Men servants . . .” (*Pamela* 17)[italics author’s]. But both Pamela and the author agrees to the affair of the servant with the master.

It is noteworthy that even for the ancient Greeks sexual contacts with servants needed a strict vigil for it meant a loss of social prestige. Sexual relationships, though not as looked down as it is in contemporary times, has always been site for tension since it implied the collapse of class, race (and in India, caste) barriers. The representations of servants and their bodies were influenced by this tension. Michel Foucault refers to Artemidorus’s Oneirocritica (The Interpretation of Dreams) written in the second century A.D. to point out that all was not well even in that hoary past.

The sex of the partner makes little difference of course; girl or boy, what matters is that one is dealing with a slave. . . [However] To place oneself “beneath” one’s servant in a dream, thus overturning the social hierarchy, is ominous; it is a sign that one will suffer harm from this inferior or incur his contempt. And, confirming that it is indeed a question here, not of an offense against nature, but of an attack on social hierarchies and a threat against the proper ratio of forces.¹⁰⁸ [emphasis added]

If we read the Arthashastra we find that the punishment of the master raping and having sexual relations with his servants was lenient compared to the capital punishment awarded to women having sexual relationships with servants. The Arthashastra mentions that “A woman shall not have sexual relations with a slave, a servant or a pledged man”.¹⁰⁹ The fear of sexual miscegenation was more in the case of women of the house than the men. The varying relationship between the men and the women with their servants pointed towards the patriarchal oppression of women. But the point to be noted

was that there existed physical relationships, forced or otherwise, between masters and servants, mistress and servants.

Indian novelists in English may have become increasingly bold in depicting sex, particularly between the masters and the servants. We must not forget that even in the first Indian novel in English, Rajmohan's Wife, there is a mention of servant-mistress sexual relationship.

It is a notorious fact that many eminent zemindar families in Bengal owe their rise to some ignoble origin. Bangshibadan Ghose lived as a menial servant with an old zemindar of East Bengal whose name and family are now extinct. ... This crafty person perceived his advantage too clearly to neglect it, and lord of his mistress's [Karunamayee] bosom, he saw no reason [why] he should not be the same of her fortune. It was an easy achievement and his progress from the rank of Khansama to that of Sardar Naib was rapid. (Rajmohan 14-16)

Compared to Upamanyu Chatterjee, Mulk Raj Anand is more restrained. He has shown Munoo as sexually attracted not only towards Lakshami, Hari's wife, but also towards Mrs Mainwaring. However, Munoo is more confused than aroused in his sexual feelings. Besides he has been kept physically chaste by the author. With Mrs Mainwaring, the feelings are to some extent mutual though she does not yield to his charms so readily than with the other men. Anand does not show Munoo as having sexual relations even with a courtesan when his friend Ratan takes him to visit Piari Jan. Even the latent sexual vibes between Munoo and Lakshami, particularly when Munoo comes back, frustrated and sexually aroused from the visit to Piari Jan is left vague and undeveloped (Coolie 215-16). It is as if the author could not make his servants sexually active without losing his readers' sympathy.

[Bakha] at first felt a thrill of delight, then a sensation more vital . . . An impulse had arisen like a sudden gust of wind to his brain, and darkened his thoughts. He felt as if he could forcibly gather the girl in his embrace and ravish her. Then he put his hand across his eyes and shuddered in horror at the thought. He had cursed himself for such a vision. His reputation as a docile, good, respectable boy seemed at stake . . . Nevertheless, the picture had persisted. The more he tried to blot it out, the more definite it had become, until, when he had ceased to bother about his sensual feelings, his phantasy had vanished. (Untouchable 79)

We can apply in Anand's case Meenakshi Mukherjee's words about Saratchandra. Anand always saved his servants from physical impurity. And this meant a lot to the middle class reader for whom all human qualities are nullified without chastity. Since Anand left the "basic values undisturbed, he was permitted by his readers to critique certain other aspects of social behaviour".¹¹⁰ Anand, however, can be credited in showing realistically about servants joking or making lewd remarks as is evident from Munoo's fight with the other servants in Nathu Ram's house when he is teased for having sexual relations with his mistress, Bibiji. In Roy's novel, we have perhaps the rare physical master-servant relationship shown as free from either anxiety or fear of moral corruption. Velutha's affair with Ammu is given the trappings of perfect physical union. But here too, we must remember that Ammu is not technically his employer. And their physical relationship is endowed with romantic and mystifying aura. Thus, most Indian English writers shy away from writing about the sexual relations between the servants and children and women. Again we have the sexual encounter between Jasmine and her white employer in Bharati Mukherjee's short story "Jasmine". The heroine feels neither compunction nor any sense of being exploited: "She [Jasmine] felt so good she was dizzy. She'd never felt this good on the island where men did this all the time, and girls went along with it always for favour . . . she was a girl rushing wildly into the future".¹¹¹ In Shama Futehally's "The First Rains", we have the sexual relation between the young maid Sarita who falls in love and gets pregnant by her master. She is betrayed by him and commits suicide to escape social ignominy.¹¹² Futehally's story like many others uses the maid's exploitation to criticise the patriarchal oppression. And the best way to do it was to make sure that the maid is a chaste, unsuspecting victim who is forced by her feelings of love for the master to take the drastic step.

VI

It is all too easy to generalise from the discussion done so far that all Indian authors in have portrayed servants as always physically gross or defective. However, it is not so and novelists like Mulk Raj Anand or Arundhati Roy have presented servants sympathetically by making them handsome. To take the case of Anand's Untouchable, we can refer to innumerable examples highlighting Bakha's handsome and superb physique. In the very beginning of the narrative we encounter the authorial comment that

Bakha is “a young man of eighteen, strong and able-bodied” (Untouchable 2) quite unlike his younger brother Rakha who is “a short, long-faced, black, stumpy little man” (Untouchable 28). Bakha is no doubt the focalizer of most of the events that occur or take place in the novel as it tries to encompass the routine humiliation and subjection that he and other outcasts suffer. But as the narrative unfolds, it is packed with authorial comments such as these when Bakha starts working in his dirty job: “He [Bakha] wrinkled his dark, broad, round face with the feeling of pain that came into his being and made his otherwise handsome features look knotted and ugly. . . . The high cheek-bones of his face became pallid with sullenness” (Untouchable 5) [emphasis added]. Three pages later we find another such authorial comment: “For he [Bakha] looked intelligent, even sensitive, with a dignity that does not belong to the ordinary scavenger, who is as a rule uncouth and unclean. It was perhaps his absorption in his task that gave him the look of distinction, or his exotic dress however loose and ill-fitting, that removed him above his odorous world” (Untouchable 8) [emphasis added].

As Bakha works at his dirty job, the author cannot stop from rhapsodizing on Bakha:

. . . [Bakha’s] dark face, round and solid and exquisitely well defined, lit with a queer sort of beauty. The toil of the body had built up for him a very fine physique. It seemed to suit him, to give him a homogeneity, a wonderful wholeness to his body, so that you could turn round and say: ‘Here is a man.’ And it seemed to give him a nobility, strangely in contrast with his filthy profession and with the sub-human status to which he was condemned from birth. (Untouchable 12) [emphasis added]

Even his gait was “a bit like an elephant’s, on account of his heavy, swaying buttocks, and a bit like a tiger, lithe and supple” (Untouchable 26). “Bakha also differs from the general run of sweepers in that he is clean, is a champion at all games, has principles and a sense of duty.”¹¹³ The authorial voice spares no opportunity in presenting Bakha as a handsome subaltern. Anand explicates it clearly when he says that there “was a discord between a person and circumstances by which a lion lay enmeshed in a net while many a common criminal wore a rajah’s crown” (Untouchable 85). Bakha is a tiger, a lion trapped in the net of caste and religious taboos and hence no less dignified as a (middle class) man. Unlike his friends Chota and Ram Charan, Bakha “had matured. He had learnt to scrub floors, cook, fetch water besides doing his job cleaning the latrines

and carting manure for sale to the fields. And in spite of the poor nourishment he got, he had developed into a big strong man, broad-shouldered, heavy-hipped, supple-armed, as near the Indian ideal of the wrestler as he wished to be” (*Untouchable* 111) [emphasis added].

Tabish Khair compares this strategy of making the servant as handsome in order to make him/her narratable with the process labelled by D. D. Kosambi as the “Golden Womb” (*hiranyagarbha*) ceremony. The latter had pointed out this process was used to assimilate the tribal chief/king and his related nobles to the upper caste through a rebirth ceremony.

A large vessel of gold was prepared into which the chieftain would be inserted doubled up, like the foetus in a womb. The Brahmin ritual for pregnancy and childbirth was then chanted by the hired priests. The man emerged from the “womb of gold” as if reborn, having also acquired a new caste, or even a caste for the first time; this was not the caste of the rest of the tribe when they were absorbed into society, but one of the classical four castes, usually kshatriya, with the *gotra* of the brahmin priest.¹¹⁴ [italics author’s]

Citing Kosambi, Khair adds that a “tribal individual is set apart, promoted into an accessible, upper category and hence, made ‘narratable’ while the tribal masses sink into the lowest economic levels and remain unnarrated”.¹¹⁵ Khair points out that this process is similar to what the Indian novelists in English have done in investing the subaltern servants with middle class virtues to make them admirable. This strategy was necessary while portraying overwhelming degradation and poverty. The Indian novelist in English always found it problematic since he/she has to represent debased subalterns and yet make them appear sympathetic to her primarily middle-class readers. Bakha is not only handsome, but also hardworking, clean or at least with a sense of hygiene. But this does not mean that all the outcastes are also admirable. Bakha’s sterling qualities are heightened by constant comparison to the other outcastes including his lazy father and dirty brother. Saros Cowasjee writes that:

If Bakha is pictured as a male god, his sister Sohini is portrayed as a goddess with a “sylph-like form”, “full-bodied”, “well-rounded on the hips, with an arched narrow waist” and “globular breasts”. Her figure could have vied with the sculptured images of Konark or Khajuraho, but she has been condemned by birth to walk the path of the outcastes and to suffer their mortification. Bakha and

Rakha are by no means representative of their class: the true outcaste (if there is such a thing) is Bakha's brother, Rakha, with his grimy flannel shirt and running nose. Living in the midst of dung he is a human being, but one who belongs to a "world where the day is as dark as the night, and night pitch-dark". Rakha is a living death as opposed to his brother who is life in death.¹¹⁶

Sohini is not only physically idealised but cultured and chaste (very like a Brahmin or upper caste woman) unlike Gulabo, the lower caste washerwoman who may not physically unattractive but is sexually promiscuous. When Lachman, the water carrier cracks jokes with her, "She [Sohini] had responded with a modest smile and a subtle look in her shining, lustrous eyes" (Untouchable 22). Interestingly, another servant character, i.e. Lachman, a Hindu and Brahman water-carrier, has been also idealised. "He [Lachman] was a young man, about twenty-six, with the intelligent though rather rugged features of the Brahmin who has come down in status" (Untouchable 22). Later on we would see that Bakha's close and understanding friend Chota is also not rendered physically repulsive. In fact, Chota, a "regular featured lad was the smartest fellow about the lane, with his neatly oiled hair, khaki shorts and white tennis shoes" (Untouchable 26). Of course, we have Richardson's example of Pamela who has been portrayed so favourably with "fair soft Hands, and that lovely Skin" (Pamela 69).

The description of Bakha or Sohini as physically attractive is interestingly paralleled by Munoo's description. "His olive face was flushed. His dark brown eyes were strained. He felt as if all the blood in his supple young body had evaporated as sweat and left him dry" (Coolie 5) [emphasis added]. Munoo, like Bakha, is also highly conscious of cleanliness and hygiene. This is shown by his disgust when he sees his first employer, Nathoo Ram's wife, Bibiji making tea with the same water that has been used for boiling eggs: "Even in the hills that was considered unhygienic" (Coolie 20). As mentioned earlier, Munoo is not only educated to a certain degree but also refined and cultured unlike the other coolies and this is emphasized emphatically by the author. While pulling the rickshaw of Mrs Mainwaring, Munoo dreams about the fine things seen in the bazaar and appreciates them unlike the other coolies. "Munoo responds to the beauty around him as he pulls his mistress's rickshaw along the mall and sees the world of the upper classes of society. He wishes he too could belong to this society."¹¹⁷ Though Munoo works along with other coolies in pulling rickshaws, he looks down upon them for their ignorance and insensitivity. "The other coolies seemed apathetic and he [Munoo]

was rather irritated by their lack of interest in this, to him, exalting atmosphere of European grandeur. He even criticized them as uncouth rustics in his mind and, recalling that he could read and write and could have become a Babu or a Sahib if he had not been an orphan, felt superior” (Coolie 268).

Even Bakha, for instance, appreciates learning and bribes the two young high caste brothers for teaching him. Unlike the other lower castes he wishes to study:

Bakha noticed the ardent, enthusiastic look that lighted up the little one’s face. The anxiety of going to school! How beautiful it felt! How nice it must be to be able to read and write! One could read the papers after having been to school. One could talk to the sahibs. . . . He had often felt like reading Waris Shah’s *Heer and Ranjah*. And he had felt a burning desire . . . to speak the *tish-mish, tish-mish*, which the Tommies spoke. (Untouchable 30) [italics author’s]

Anand identifies culture – books, theatres, pictures, music, proper dress – with civilization and uses it as a standard against which the other servants are seen as uncouth and vulgar. He, of course, wishes to make all the servants and lower castes/classes to appropriate this culture of the upper/middle classes. Ultimately, Anand does not subvert the class distinctions; he only points out that it is possible that the lower class can be more like the middle classes. Here we have to remember that Anand does not see all upper/middle classes as having accomplished this culture any more than he sees all subalterns as aspiring for this culture.

Another sympathetic depiction of the subaltern is Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things in the form of Velutha. Strictly speaking, Velutha is not a servant for he works outside and is not permitted within the Ayemenen household. He is trained as a carpenter but mends “radios, clocks, water-pumps. He looked after the plumbing and all the electrical gadgets in the house” (God 75). Mammachi hires him in her pickle factory as carpenter and to look after general maintenance. But like Vishnu (Death of Vishnu) and several other servants, he does indeed perform some of the odd jobs that would normally be performed by domestic servants. Baby R. Agrawal and Lakshmi see Velutha as “the second coming of Bakha. Bakha and Velutha have strong similarities though born in different literary climes. Bakha . . . [is] an untouchable. . . . Similarly Velutha belongs to the low caste. . . . Both Bakha and Velutha have strong physical prowess. . . . Both

Bakha and Velutha have strong attachment to the work: in fact they are work-alcoholics.¹¹⁸ Both Agrawal and Lakshmi feel that the author had given a “beautiful description of Ammu’s sexual attraction to her lover Velutha. . . . Here lust kindled from both sides, no one had trapped anyone.”¹¹⁹ They refer to Ammu’s becoming aware of Velutha’s superb physique: “She saw the ridges of muscles on Velutha’s stomach grow taught and rise under his skin like the divisions on a slab of chocolate. She wondered at how his body had changed so quietly, from a flat muscled boy’s body into a man’s body. Contoured and hard” (God 175). In other words, Ammu is attracted by Velutha’s physique. Unlike the cook Kochu Maria, Velutha no doubt is strikingly handsome “with high cheekbones and a white, sudden smile” (God 175). His physique is also superb as the earlier quotation had illustrated.

It is not difficult to understand why Ammu falls in love with this man, and not with his handicapped brother, Kuttappen or even with Comrade Pillai. There may be nothing singular in people falling in love cutting across class or caste lines. Just as there is nothing wrong in Ammu falling for lower caste/class Velutha or that they see each other as their soul mates. But falling in love is no more a “natural” feeling than feeling angry or bored. The moot question is why in Indian fiction in English, romantic (and the most ideal form of) love is always inevitably shown to happen between physically attractive individuals. For Khair, “this unifying affair remains cosmetic in more than ways than one”. He asserts that such affairs are not implausible. But the motivations of the characters are not “properly explored and depicted” which makes the affair seemingly improbable. If we read the novel, then the first realization of Velutha that Ammu is interested in him (God 177) cannot be regarded as the point where he or Ammu first become aware of their passion. Khair points out that this recognition scene succeeds an earlier scene where Ammu gets angry with Rahel when the latter points out the presence of Velutha in the Travancore-Cochin Marxist Labour Union protest march (God 71). “It is almost as if the motivation of the act, its point of genesis, has to remain blurred of necessity”.¹²⁰ The truth is that there are compulsions that force the author to depict Velutha as physically attractive.

This process is not singular to Roy or only novelists only but also to the representation of other subalterns. Take for instance, Amitav Ghosh’s The Hungry Tide (2004) where the young American of Indian origin and ceteologist, Piyali Roy falls in

love with the subaltern Fokir. This attraction is remarkable because of the presence of another and more sophisticated contender for Piya's attentions, Kanai Dutt, the metropolitan Indian. Compared to the illiterate Fokir, Kanai is well-off, literate and certainly not insensitive. But Piya falls for Fokir or at least is well-disposed towards him right from their first meeting. Their attraction, at least on Piya's side is made acceptable by the narrative by making him not just any other fisherman. Witness the description when Fokir first appears in the narrative and to Piya: "His [Fokir] frame was not wasted but very lean and his long, stringy limbs were almost fleshless in their muscularity. . . . Yet there was a defiance in his stance at odds with the seeming defencelessness of his unclothed chest and his protruding bones".¹²¹ Fokir like Velutha is not only physically attractive but sensitive and caring. When he meets Piya, he treats her with respect and care:

Her presence seemed to make him suddenly self-consciousness. He reached for the cloth tied around his head and yanked it down. It sprang apart and fell open around him, unrolling over his body like a curtain. When he had fastened it at the waist, she saw that the twist of cloth that she had taken to be a turban was, in fact, a rolled-up sarong. There was a consideration in the gesture, an acknowledgement of her presence, that touched her: it seemed like the first normal human contact she had since stepping on the launch. (Tide 67) [emphasis added]

Later on when she takes bath in his small boat, he tries to give her privacy:

It took her a while to understand that he had created an enclosure to give her the privacy to change her wet clothes. In absorbing this, she was at first a little embarrassed to think that it was he rather than she herself, who had been the first to pay heed to the master of her modesty. . . . the idea seemed quaint but also, somehow, touching. It was not just that he had thought to create a space for her; it was as if he had chosen to include her in some simple, practised family ritual, found a way to let her know that despite the inescapable muteness of their exchanges, she was a person to him and not, as it were, a representative of a species, a faceless, tongueless foreigner. But where had this recognition come from? (Tide 71) [emphasis added]

The narrative does not inform the reader wherefrom the "recognition" comes from. There is a kind of mystery that has been built around Fokir and he is not the typical fisherman. "She had been somewhat intrigued by this for, in her experience, people almost automatically went through a ritual of naming when they were with stranger of

another language. Fokir was an exception in that he had made no such attempt” (Tide 93) [emphasis added].

Thus, Fokir is not only singled out by his physique but also by his manner. If we glance at the novel and others like Coolie, we will find that it does not necessarily subvert the hierarchy of middle class values attached to the body. In these novels only Velutha, Fokir, Munoo or Bakha are allowed the saving grace of physical attractiveness. For the rest of the servants, the deformity of the body is still equated with wickedness. We have already seen in the earlier section how Anand’s sympathy for the down-trodden does not extend to other servant-boys of Sham Nagar. If Varma, Lehnu, suffer such misrepresentation in Coolie then Rakha, Ram Charan, and others are painted as physically deficient in Untouchable. In The Space between Us, Bhima’s husband Gopal, granddaughter Maya are portrayed as good looking but not so the other subalterns. Shyam the neighbour of Bhima in her slum is “pockmark-faced” and reminds her of a “cobra” (Space 54) while the other women of the slum are referred to as “eagle-eyed” with “paan-stained teeth and gossiping tongues” (Space 57). In sharp contrast, Rajeev, the coolie who helps her with shopping “is a tall, stooped man of about fifty, with a long handlebar moustache” (Space 96). Needless to add, it is Rajeev who fights to protect Bhima when she is humiliated by the baniya. Another person who helps Bhima at the hospital when her daughter and son-in-law are dying of AIDS in a government hospital is Hyder. Witness Hyder’s “gentle, curious face” (Space 139) and “sweet, pensive face” (Space 156). The ideal of detachment and of stoic suffering and in whose memory Bhima sacrifices her last money is none other than the balloon seller who is an “old Afghani, a Pathan. A tall, dignified man” (Space 133).

Moyra Haslett points out that it is with the impact of Rousseau, and the “Romantic modes of feeling,” that “there was an corresponding increased interest in nature, the valourisation of the untrained spontaneity, and the fascination with the primitive, the uncivilised, natural man”.¹²² The celebration of the “natural” untaught genius may enable many servants/lower class actors to occupy the narrative space of the middle class discourse but there is a danger of fetishizing their poverty. E. M. Forster words in the Introduction to Untouchable are worth reproducing here: “I remember on my visits to India noticing that sweepers were more sensitive-looking and more personable than other servants, and I knew one who had some skill as a poet.”¹²³

Fokir, Velutha, Munoo and Bakha have also been romanticised as natural figures. “As he [Velutha] rose from the dark river and walked up the stone steps, she saw that the world they stood in was his. That he belonged to it. That it belonged to him. The water. The mud. The trees. The fish. The stars. He moved so easily through it” (*God* 333-4). Such positive representations of servants may seem odd in Indian fiction in English which is proliferated predominantly by negative stereotypes of them. To understand the presence of such paradoxical images we can recount the following words of Sander Gilman:

Because there is no real line between self and the Other, an imaginary line must be drawn; and so that the illusion of an absolute difference between self and Other is never troubled, this line is as dynamic in its ability to alter itself as is the self. This can be observed in the shifting relationship of antithetical stereotypes that parallel the existence of “bad” and “good” representations of self and Other. But the line between “good” and “bad” responds to stresses occurring within the psyche. The paradigm shifts in our mental representations of the world can and do occur. We can move from fearing to glorifying the Other. We can move from loving to hating.¹²⁴

This hierarchy of the servant’s body as intrinsically inferior to that of the master holds true even in those novels where some masters are portrayed as ugly. This is so because there the author portrays only the bad masters as ugly while those with good features are shown as loving masters. If we take Anand’s *Untouchable* we would find that the people who oppress Bakha the most are all shown as physically deficient. Take the case of Pundit Kali Nath, who is described as ugly. “The Pundit [Kali Nath] hesitated, twitched his eyebrows and looked at the group frowning with the whole of his bony, hollow-cheeked, deeply-furrowed face. . . dry-as-dust-self . . . a want of vigour in his lanky little limbs” (*Untouchable* 18-19) [emphasis added]. This is the pundit – the representative of the caste hierarchy under authorial attack – who tries to molest Sohini and insults Bakha. Witness the description of another caste Hindu, namely the Hindu Lalla who slaps Bakha for having touched him by accident:

He [the Lalla] stood where he was, though aware that he would be forced to move by the oncoming vehicle, as for the first time for many years he had had an occasion to display his strength. He felt his four-foot-ten frame assume the towering stature of a giant with a false sense of power that the exertion of his will, unopposed

against the docile sweeper-boy, had called forth. (Untouchable 45)
[emphasis added]

Compared to him Bakha's "fine form rising like a tiger at bay" (Untouchable 56) strikes a very contrasting form. Bakha is shown as physically superior to the caste Hindus who surround and torment him for "one push from his [Bakha's] hefty shoulders would have been enough to unbalance the skeleton-like bodies of the Hindu merchants" (Untouchable 39) [emphasis added].

Of course, all the caste Hindus have not been portrayed as physically deficient. Havildar Charat Singh, who shows generosity to Bakha by giving an almost new hockey stick, is shown as physically fit. Charat Singh is the champion goalkeeper in hockey and his body marked with bruises. Excellence in sports requires vigour and vitality and this signified or reflected a good heart. Generous masters are thus handsome and brave. Here we can recount Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's words while discussing class and caste ramifications with respect to a classic story by Mahasweta Devi. Spivak first appreciates Anna Davin's words that in the case of class-manipulation, "poverty [is] the fault of the individuals, not an intrinsic part of a class society".¹²⁵ Then Spivak goes on to add that in "the case of caste-manipulation, the implicit assumption is the reverse: the Brahmin is systematically excellent, not necessarily as an individual".¹²⁶ Applied to Indian fiction in English, it would mean that some of the representations of masters are bad and that they are of the higher class/caste does not mean that all upper/middle class are bad. Anand, Desai, Hosain, Chatterjee, Chaudhuri, Roy or most Indian English novelists refrain from positing structural oppression no matter how hard they tried to show that servants are oppressed.

If we glance at Bankimchandra's Rajmohan's Wife, we find such distinction of the good and the bad characters using physical denominators. For instance, while Madhav, the good master "was a remarkably handsome young man . . . [with] clear placid complexion", on the other hand, Mathur, the villain, "was too stout that he could not be said to possess a good figure. His complexion was dull and dark. There was no feature on his face which would give him the least claim to handsomeness. On the contrary he had something positively unattractive about him" (Rajmohan 6). This was so because Bankimchandra, and in fact most of Indian writers in English, like Dickens, are particularly susceptible to sentimentalizing and idealizing the poor servants while making

the masters ludicrous and villainous. Let us consider this description from Attia Hosain's short story on servants, "White Leopard". "Mr. Bell was an obsequious man with a long, drooping moustache, white against his dark face. He walked heavily with his feet wide apart because of the fat that wrapped its folds around him and squeezed his breath from his body so that he wheezed constantly".¹²⁷ Here Mr. Bell is none other than Bela Ram, a low caste cobbler, and now a successful businessman. He has also tried to ascend the social ladder by converting into Christianity and donating to the church school. But he is not a good master as he "was bad tempered and shouted too much at too little provocations" (Phoenix 188) at his servant or peon Shambhu. Thus the master is presented as not only ugly but also bad. But there is no physical description of the narrator who takes good care of her servant Shiv Prasad, Shambhu's father. Unlike the modern masters like Mr. Bell who are guided by monetary considerations and prepared to send their servants like Shambhu to jail for trying to steal twenty rupees, the relationship (older and feudal) between the narrator or her uncle and Shiv Prasad is one of mutual trust, obligation and love.

This can be further exemplified by some examples from other novels like Anand's Coolie where Munoo is shown as exploited at the hands of ugly, sadistic masters while handsome masters help him and show him kindness. We can start with his first job as the servant in the house of Babu Nathoo Mal, Sub-Accountant, Imperial Bank, Sham Nagar. Munoo's first encounter with him in the bank presents an opportunity for the author to describe him as ugly: ". . . before a huge table, on a chair much too big for him, sat a little man [Babu Nathoo Mal] with an irregular, sallow face, quite vague except for a flat nose, the white spots on his cheeks, and a thin drooping black moustache, of which each hair seemed to stand out distinct" (Coolie 10) [emphasis added]. A few pages later, we are again presented with "Babu Nathoo Ram, square-shouldered and bandy-legged . . ." (Coolie 17) [emphasis added]. This sort of physical denigration is repeated again and again till the reader is forced to admit that his ill-treatment of Munoo is definitely linked to his physical deficiencies. "'Why, ohe you son of a bitch!' squeaked Babu Nathoo Ram lifting his thin, bony hand, . . . Then, contorting his face so that his forehead was knotted into a curious twist, and dilating his lips to reveal the red gums over his badly spaced teeth . . ." (Coolie 18) [emphasis added]. A few pages later we find that "Babu Nathoo Ram stirred himself to alacrity. Pale, haggard and stooping, he walked into the sitting-room with a weak smile of fear on his face. He was a hen-pecked husband . . . The burra

babu eyed him, as, with a yawn and stretching of his arms, he brought his lustreless skeleton to rest on the lotus seat like an emancipated beggar” (Coolie 25) [emphasis added].

It is not merely Nathu Ram who escapes with such harsh treatment from the author. His wife, Bibiji, who also oppress Munoo, is also marked as physically ugly:

She [Bibiji] had a dark face and without any set form, except that which the tired smile of her thin lips gave it, and a sharp nose over which her brown eyes concentrated in a squint and her forehead inclined with wrinkles. Her stern, flat-chested form was swathed in a muslin sari. . . . Bibiji retreated and exclaimed in a hard, rattling voice . . . her long neck stood out before his eyes like a hen's. (Coolie 12-3) [italics author's][emphasis added]

In contrast to the oppressive Nathu Ram, his younger brother, Prem Chand who treats Munoo kindly is represented in a much better way: “Thus emerged the chota Babu, a handsome, well-built young man, easy-gaited and loose-mannered . . .” (Coolie 18) [emphasis added]. Munoo’s “mind wandered from the chota Babu’s beautiful white body, glistening with water, to the clothes that would adorn it soon, the wonderfully cut silk clothes” (Coolie 30) [emphasis added]. Prem Chand gives Munoo sweets, a razor and treats him with kindness. The masters who treat him well later on in the narrative include Captain Mainwaring who “was a beautiful, fair-haired, blue-eyed young man, with a modest, easy manner and an ever-ready smile on his face” (Coolie 269) [emphasis added]. Even Prabha, his second and kind employer is described as “a broad-shouldered, tall, gaunt man . . . who seemed more a soldier than a business man” (Coolie 61). He has a “brave face, adorned with a well-groomed black moustache” while his business partner Ganpat who would cheat him and ill-treat Munoo has a “dark-brown, goat-like face, hollow-cheeked and pinched” (Coolie 62). Even though Mrs Mainwaring treats him relatively well, it must be remembered that she is described as some kind of freak with her Anglo-Indian features. Her obsessive fear of physical relationships alternating with promiscuity and her hypochondriac behaviour all makes her perfect for the kind of foolish woman who makes Munoo pull the heavy rickshaw to the point of contracting the deadly tuberculosis.

Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things written six decades later follows a similar trajectory. The members of the Ayemenem who ill treat Velutha and cause him

death are all physically gross such as Mammachi and Baby Kochamma. Even Comrade Pillai, Inspector Thomas Mathew, Kochu Maria, who all share a hand in Velutha's death are also described as physically repulsive. The only persons, spared of such repulsiveness are the ones who love Velutha, i.e. Ammu and her twins. Ammu, for instance, is described as a model of womanly beauty, even though she is a widow (God 222-3). In sharp contrast is the following description of Baby Kochamma early in the novel when Rahel returns to Ayemenem house to find her living with Kochu Maria:

Yellow slivers of cucumber skin flecked her [Baby Kochamma's] bosom. Her hair, dyed jetblack, was arranged across her scalp like unspoiled thread. The dye had stained the skin of her forehead a pale grey, giving her a shadowy second hairline. . . . she had started wearing make up. Lipstick. Kohl. A sly touch of rouge. . . . her lipstick mouth had shifted slightly off her real mouth. (God 21)

Or we can consider this description of Comrade Pillai, one of the people who contribute to Velutha's death:

In his late thirties, he [Comrade Pillai] was an unathletic, sallow little man. His legs were already spindly and his taut, distended belly, like his tiny mother's goitre, was completely at odds with the rest of his thin, narrow body and alert face. As though something in their family genes had bestowed on them compulsory bumps that appeared randomly in different parts of their bodies. (God 272) [emphasis added]

Roy's novel, no doubt tries to present the exploitation of subalterns like Velutha due to structural inequalities in society. But, the impression created is that subalterns including servants are ill-treated due to the "character disorders" of the masters, and can be over come by the "warmth [and love] of those figures that the reader is supposed to identify with",¹²⁸ in this case, the twins and Ammu. Likewise, in both Coolie and Untouchable there are good masters who treat both Munoo and Bakha well. We can recount here Theodor W. Adorno's words used in another context: "The standard device employed is that of spurious personalization of objective issues. The representatives of ideas under attack . . . are presented as villains in a ludicrous cloak-and-dagger fashion, whereas those who fight for the 'right cause' are personally idealized."¹²⁹ Adorno goes on to comment that this not only distracts from any real social issues but also enforces the psychologically extremely dangerous division of the world into black and white. In our case it would mean masters are either good or bad and the former are always represented

as physically attractive while the latter's repulsive physiognomy reflects their cruel nature.

We can also add that servants and bad masters can be recognized not only by their deformed bodies but by their English. Here we can recount Ipsita Chanda's brilliant analysis of Arundhati Roy's ascribing incorrect English to Comrade Pillai. "It would be reading too much to categorize the traditional world that does not traffic in English, or at least fails to do so if it tries, as evil. Yet it is this world, cunning, conniving, hypocritical, and without a facility for English, that oppresses both Velutha and Ammu and her children, in various degrees." Chanda notes that Roy criticizes "the failed anglophiles [like Comrade Pillai] . . . because they have tried to internalize the language and failed, yet do not know the extent of their failure – or they have internalized too well like Chako, the Rhodes scholar uncle," But surprisingly "there is an ambiguous silence about Rahel, Estha and Ammu, their mother, whose choices in life, it might be said, led to the children's language ability."¹³⁰ Chanda's remark highlights the politics of language in Indian fiction in English. The point is that whenever Indian novelists in English wanted to portray either servants as bad or even masters as evil, they resorted to staging incorrect use of English, besides making their bodies grotesque. If we see other novels we would find that very often servants (and sometimes the bad masters) are portrayed as speaking incorrect English and this is somehow linked with their lack of culture or their innate evil nature. Here once again we can refer to Meenakshi Mukherjee's comment on how Bankimchandra distinguished between the refined Madhav who reads English books and the villainous Mathur who did not know English.¹³¹ This sort of stereotyping extends to even recent works like Thrity Umrigar's The Space Between Us or Adiga's The White Tiger. In the first we find that the unsympathetic Dr. Kapur who operates on Gopal was "a man of medium height with coarse gray hair and bags under his eyes. One end of his eyeglasses as held together with dirty-looking medical tape" (Space 215). Dr. Kapur speaks in an irregular manner repeating the expression "per se" in almost every sentence. Physical grossness is matched with that of linguistic incapacity particularly in English. In Adiga's The White Tiger Mukesh, one of the bad masters who humiliate and abuse the servant-protagonist Balram Halwai, "was small, and dark, and ugly". On the other hand, Ashok, the only good master is educated in America from where "he had brought home from New York, . . . his accent" and is "tall, and broad, and handsome, like a landlord's son should be."¹³² When it came to positive representations of servants then the authros

resorted more to the third person omniscient narration. For instance, if we glance at Anand's novels, we find that even when the focalizer is the servant Bakha and Munoo, the author is always the intrusive narrator. Even in Roy's novel, the reader is never given the chance to know Velutha's feelings, except on rare occasions such as after being found out and abused by Mammachi for having physical relationship with Ammu (God 284-85).

The inability of the Indian writers in English to portray the reality of domestic servants is due to what Chanda terms a "quintessentially liberal-modern-Western"¹³³ concept of humanity propounded by these texts and their authors. This reality, "put into circulation in India through the colonizing structures", is the culture of a "modernity" that asks for progress, agitates for rights of Untouchables, women, and minorities, but more often than not in a language and from a conceptual repertoire inaccessible to those groups."¹³⁴ Thus the reality of outcastes, domestic servants "who live, breathe and survive despite the so-called Worse Things" is inaccessible to an "English-educated writer". Due to the English language a "cultural distance" separates the writer "from the existing oral milieu", and this grows more in "semi-urban areas".¹³⁵

Thus, even sympathetic writers have failed to treat them with any deeper understanding. The sympathetic depictions of servants always portray the deserving which from the middle class viewpoint mean hardworking and good looking. These, in turn, exclude those who are seen as a threat to the middle class and its values. Tabish Khair points out that for a servant like Bakha to enter master's (middle class) discourse, he has to be not only good looking, but possess middle class virtues such as cleanliness, culture and hard work.¹³⁶ Thus, servants are condemned to be represented as demons and repulsive cheats like Nando or hard working and attractive like Bakha; but never to be represented as normal people with complexities.

To sum up, the representation of the servant's body in Indian fiction in English is not free from ideological manipulations. These manipulations are seen in the kind of effects that is produced by the representations of the body of the servant. The texts under consideration endeavour toward fixing the master's body in a commanding position while silently excluding that of the servant. Thus, servants' bodies are presented, more often than not, as deformed, diseased or ageless and such like. This is so because the power of

describing and naming in the narrative rests with the middle class author/narrator/master. The “bodies of subordinated groups [including servants] were more visible to those who ruled, owned or controlled them, and could therefore be made known to a wider ‘public’ through representations of different kinds in private and public communications (mostly printed)”.¹³⁷ Needless to add, fiction is one such public communication.

There is a possibility of the reverse gaze and this is one possibility that most Indian novels in English seem to ignore. Since the servants themselves are denied a voice in the narratives and the fact that rarely do servants write such narratives, it is difficult to construct such alternate accounts. To sum up, the body of the servant is never simply there; it is not an indisputable given in the literary texts. It is the key site in which the upper/middle class master not only constructs the identity of the servant but also his own. The body of the servant is thus shown but inadequately in order to deny them their legitimate place in the domestic sphere and by extension in the public sphere at large. We have seen “the ways in which the bodies of . . . [servants] had been the focus of exclusionary practices, providing the rationale for the presentation of . . . [servants] as lesser, weaker, polluted, belonging essentially to the private sphere”.¹³⁸

We have seen that the body of the servant is central in the literary texts but only as a marker of difference and identity. Indian fiction in English constructs a dichotomy between the masters and the subaltern servant and this is drawn through the construction of the latter’s body. This is not to argue that the servant’s body “is itself *the* generator of difference, but rather the bodily characteristics are imbued with social meanings . . . [for in] society, the body is inscribed in such a way that categories of person come to be read off from physical characteristics” [italics author’s].¹³⁹ Servants are always, inevitably represented in a particular manner so as to erase their presence in the literary texts. Our reading of the literary representations of the servant’s body does not seek to criticise the Indian writers in English for portraying servants as ugly, or diseased. It may be historically true that servants, at least some if not all, are indeed ugly, diseased or sexually deviant just as majority of the masters could be handsome or display relatively better physical condition. Stereotypes or constructions about servants by the masters/narrators/authors need not be exclusively false. But it would be a gross mistake if we ignore the fact that it is mostly servants who end up being represented in literary texts as physically deficient and this is interminably linked with real/imagined cultural lack.

Middle class domestic accounts as presented in Indian fiction in English naturalized the representation of servant's physical deformity as corresponding to a lack, a depravity. These literary representations of servants are presented not as mere representations, but as natural depictions. These social myths and constructions about servants, not restricted to literary texts alone, perpetrate and justify their societal neglect and exploitation in the texts as well as outside. But it is not merely their bodies that are erased in Indian English fiction. Their labour is likewise erased or overlooked. In fact, the marginalization of the servant's body is the initial measure towards the erasure of his labour. This aspect of the servant's marginalization, however, we will discuss only in the following chapter.

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CHAPTER FOUR

MARGINALIZATION OF SERVANTS' LABOUR

Their [servants'] share is but the work of the house, they do not share in the pleasures and delights of a home.

-- Faye Dudden

I

In the preceding Chapter we had observed how the body of the servant was erased in Indian English fiction. A similar silence on labour performed by domestic servants exists in these literary texts. This is in spite of the fact that servants' labour plays a significant role in the running of the Indian upper/middle class domestic sphere which these texts are assumed to represent. Based on the earlier review done in Chapter One, we can safely assert that Mulk Raj Anand is one of the rare exceptions who tried to depict servants and their labour rather extensively. Coolie and Untouchable are two of his works where he tries to sympathetically draw the servant class. Of the more recent Indian writers in English, only Thrity Umrigar's The Space Between Us and Arvind Adiga's The White Tiger deal with the trials and tribulations of servants, Bhima and Balram Halwai respectively. There may be servants at work in the novels of Amit Chaudhuri or the short stories of Attia Hosain and Shama Futehally. But overall, there has been a severe dearth in the acknowledgement of servants' labour in Indian fiction in English. The servant is reduced to a "thin and functional figure" by making his/her presence pertinent only for "the performance of peremptory aesthetic duties" thus ensuring that we witness "very little of either the heroism or the sufferings of the working class".¹ This is all the more surprising for the servant and her/his work has been one of the most hotly debated issues in reformist literature whether in eighteenth and nineteenth century England or in colonial India. Domestic manuals such as Flora Annie Steel and Grace Gardener's The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook (1909) were little else but servant management handbooks.² This reformist zeal is seen in literary representations in early Indian fiction written in English and other Indian languages. Sara Dickey points out rightly that domestic service is not merely a "form of labor," but "a highly personalized and often contested arena in which many inequalities are brought to bear, including nationality, race, ethnicity, class, gender, and/or sexuality, among others." She goes to state further that it "not only reproduces preexisting inequalities, it may also contribute directly to the creation of inequalities, due to the stigma frequently associated with paid household work."³ The real issue is not merely that servants or their labour are ignored in the literary texts. It is that Indian English fiction ignores or marginalizes them while representing the Indian upper/middle class domestic reality whereas the truth is that they

are indispensable to it. There is a falsification of the reality presented and it is this that the present chapter attempts to expose.

Rosie Cox hints that the marginalization of domestic servants' labour occurs due "to the long-standing assumption that domestic work is women's work: the low status attaches to all domestic labour and the poor pay and treatment of domestic workers that goes with it." The typical attitude was "that all domestic work was unskilled, that it was easy to do" and that it is "trivial against the Herculean achievements of men in public". Since "domestic workers' abilities are taken for granted rather acknowledged or praised", it is the reason why "even studies of domestic life and labour have been disparaged as petty or laughable".⁴

That servants in India generally work hard in reality hardly needs any corroboration. V. Tellis-Nayak writes about the hard and long hours that domestic service entails.

She [the servant] wakes up at least with the earliest riser, generally before six, and retires around nine-thirty. During the intervening fifteen or more hours she has very little aimless time. In mid-afternoon, activity slackens, and the mistress may indulge a nap or light activity. The servant herself may be allowed to nap; more often, however, she must remain vaguely in attendance, perhaps washing her own clothes or doing light chores. . . . Many a mistress is convinced that letting a servant sleep during the day or allowing her to do nothing is liable to "spoil her" or to "make her lazy". . . . she assumes additional responsibilities on the occasion of feasts, celebrations and emergencies.⁵

Needless to add that unlike the developed countries like the USA where there are strict legal and clear cut provisions for working hours, Indian domestic servants are still at the mercy of their masters for leisure and paid holiday even in the twentieth first century. Some servants, particularly the full timers, holidayed only with the master thus completing their total submission. In Upamanyu Chatterjee's The Last Burden Jamun reminisces how his aya had never holidayed or taken time off to visit relatives except with Jamun's family.⁶

What merits our attention here is that this hard labour, a part of the lived reality of the ubiquitous Indian domestic scenario, occupies little or no space in Indian fiction in English, a realm purportedly devoted to portraying Indian realities. Nevertheless most novelists make passing mention of servants ostensibly to make their work look authentic to (and/or exotic enough for) the predominantly westernized reader. It may seem paradoxical that writers prefer to represent the Indian domestic sphere (predominantly of the upper/middle classes) and yet somehow overlook the ubiquitous servant's labour. To understand the phenomenon of the presence of servants in Indian English fiction even though it avoids discussing labour we could turn to its early English models, particularly of the nineteenth century. Nineteenth century Victorian fiction preferred servants for representation as opposed to other forms of labour, notably industrial labour. It refused to "grapple with the new and exotic industrial worker, no longer ruled by custom and deference but by the cash nexus."⁷ Agreeing with George Orwell's comment on the absence of servants in Dickens' novels, Robbins further adds that the working class is, in fact, not represented in the nineteenth century novel.⁸ The Victorian novel made sure that the servant enjoyed "little or no existence apart from her or his effect upon the destiny of the masters" by filling the "considerable textual space allotted to them" with "the same repertory of comic gestures and devices".⁹ Servants are presented as gossiping and performing only those chores that the plot's exigencies demanded. Be that what it may be there is a considerable decline in the presence of servants in English fiction after the Second World War. This could be the immediate fall-out of the decline of the servant culture in the West due to the rapid industrialisation and technological advancement, though some would argue that servants are far from extinct.¹⁰

In this chapter we are going to examine whether the same accusation is true of Indian English fiction. It may also be true of fiction by "bhāsā" writers though it is not possible to do proper justice to such a thesis here. This commonality among the fictions in different Indian languages in respect to marginalization of servants need not come as a surprise for the Indian novel, at least in its early beginnings, was consciously modelled on Victorian fiction. It may also speak volumes about the affiliations of these writers who are no doubt divided by language, but united by class and caste. The absence of other forms of labour, notably industrial labour in Indian English fiction has been noted by Tabish Khair.¹¹ What needs closer scrutiny in our study is the politics of erasing from the

narrative fiction the performance of domestic chores. Such representations are no doubt influenced by and/or contribute to the social formations or common knowledge such as stereotypes. Dieter Riemenschneider remarks that “analyzing the problem of human labour as depicted in literary works may offer an important insight into ideological aspects of such works and also into their artistic achievement.”¹² Thus, the representation of domestic labour done by servants is not untouched by relations of power. The ideology behind such representation or erasure is to ensure that the domestic labour remains unproblematic or free from the taint of exploitation. We need to examine in these novels the different strategies of appropriating, erasing and re-presenting the labour of servants. In each of the sections we would take up these strategies such as directly occluding the labour or stereotyping servants. Servants, in Indian fiction in English, are repeatedly portrayed as shirkers, who need to be kept under strict supervision to render any service. They are recalcitrant rogues who would steal at the slightest opportunity. At times, servants are represented as willing workers and pathologically loyal to their masters. In all these representations, though conflicting, there is a common objective of rendering the servant’s labour superfluous or unreceptive to market forces. Authors and critics of Indian English fiction have taken note of how the domestic labour of middle class women have been sidelined and appropriated by patriarchal ideologies. The aim of our study is to problematize domestic labour even further by pointing out even more layers of subalternity, particularly that of the servants, embedded in it.

II

Indian fiction in English, as a rule, while rendering the Indian domestic scene, tends to erase the servant or more particularly his/her labour, particularly the back-breaking physical labour of cleaning, washing, cooking etc., so subtly that it requires a reading against the grain to perceive such erasure. In the Introductory Chapter we have already referred to an illustration from Upamanyu Chatterjee’s *English, August*.¹³ Here the narrative deals with the favourite middle class ideal of simple living and high thinking. But this simplicity is a loaded term and should be taken seriously. August’s simple living includes the hard labour of the unnamed servant. For instance, the lawn with its trees is not the wild vegetation which would be found in natural condition. It

requires the hard work of the gardener or the domestic servant who doubles up in most families as the gardener. So the narrative's presentation of the lawn and its shade as simple is a slip that obscures the labour of the servant. To appreciate the beauties of nature – man made – without taking into account of the labour that has gone into its making is ethically wrong and is complicit in the making of the class distinctions.¹⁴ Like Haslett, we can also reproduce in this context Raymond Williams' remark that:

A considerable part of what we call natural landscape . . . is the product of human design and human labour, and in admiring it as natural it matters very much whether we suppress that fact of labour or acknowledge it. Some forms of this popular modern idea of nature seem to depend on a suppression of the history of human labour, . . .¹⁵

Haslett continues in the similar vein that the “absence of labour serves to occlude the kind of mundane exploitation which makes the land profitable for those who own it”.¹⁶ We can take another description from the same novel. “I [Agastya] want to lie in the winter sun on the roof of the house in Delhi, or that decaying mansion in Belhala, smoke, read a little, listen to a little music, have sex with someone, anyone, who would not exist before and after the act, and work only so I can do all the rest” (*English* 136).

This sort of lifestyle may sound very simple but would be based on the hidden labour of menials whether in Delhi or in Belhala. Such simple observations, if taken into account, would reveal that the life of Agastya and other middle class characters is marked by leisure that is based on exploitation and hidden labour of servants and other subalterns. If we turn to Upamanyu Chatterjee's other works we find the same attitude to servants' work. For illustration we can refer to the ruminations of Jamun, a middle class protagonist: “But marvellous, he [Jamun] ruminates, how sottishly, how each generation has its aya, how sequent ayas have always been a unit of the family . . . Burfi and he were fostered by one; . . . Pista was reared by a second, who, of course, also helped with Doom” (*Burden* 86) [emphasis added]. The hard labour of the maids or ayas, particularly the emotive, is glossed over in the domestic narrative by being summarily accounted for in three simple words “fostered”, “reared” or “helped” and then dismissed. Domestic labour normally covers the functions of the family which embraces an entire gamut of physical chores – such as child-care, service, cleaning, cooking for both daily as well

special occasions. Jamun being the narrator is able to encapsulate all this drudgery in a few lines and then moves into the present where he wishes to cadge some coffee from the aya.

Amit Chaudhuri, one of the new Indian English writers has been credited with faithful recreation of the tenor of middle class existence. He is a novelist who apparently “delights in the unfolding of the unobtrusive details of daily life, the unremarkable incidents that go largely unnoticed, and the humdrum affairs that scarcely find place in a conventional novel. He has a special gift for observing the details in any ordinary situation”¹⁷ A Strange and Sublime Address, Afternoon Raag, Freedom Song and A New World are some of his works depicting the ennui filled middle class existence in Kolkata. But the domestic scenes depicted in Chaudhuri’s works, superimposed with the leisure of the masters’ lives, glides over the hard work, the daily acts of cruelty and deprivation of the servants. Some textual examples can be taken up from his works to illustrate this point.

The morning passed in a wave of words Mamima brought his mother and Chhotomama cups of tea, which they stirred thoughtfully in the middle of a discussion; Saraswati went to the market and returned with a large, dark boal fish for lunch. The grown-ups never fell short of subjects for discussion; in the kitchen, as Saraswati worked, the pots and pans also held a different, but no less urgent dialogue.¹⁸ [emphasis added]

The hard work of the maidservant Saraswati is very effectively woven into the seemingly important social chatter and gossip – between two discussions Saraswati went to the market and bought a fish. Reducing her work with pots and pans to the level of “words” and “discussion” is not a coincidence but a clever narratorial device to occlude the servant’s hard labour which the parasitic middle class feeds upon. The labour is all the more to be noticed considering the advanced age of Saraswati and her low wages. The morning appears to pass in a wave of words, but only to the masters and not to servants like Saraswati. The masters may well have experienced their lives in this way, but their servants are less likely to have regarded theirs in a similar manner. This trivialization of the servant’s work is also evident in other examples from the same work where Sandeep, the young focalizer while on a visit to his relatives’ house in Kolkota describes the house

and its immediate surroundings. Sandeep “gradually adjusted his senses to Chhotomama’s house, to the pale walls, the spider-webs in the corners, the tranquil bedsheets on the old beds, the portraits of grandfathers and grandmothers, the fans that swung drunkenly from side to side – all so different from the quiet and perfected apartment he lived in Bombay” (Strange 4) [emphasis added].

Moyra Haslett points out that objects are seen from the servant’s perspective can be at great variance to that of the master’s.¹⁹ The “tranquil bedsheets” or the “quiet and perfected apartment” that appear to Sandeep may not be so to the servants who have to slog hard to keep it so. Besides, the narrative does not mention their contribution and it appears that the apartment has kept itself perfected. This is, perhaps the most familiar trope used by middle class to present artificial settings as if it were natural and erase the labour of servants.

Then she [Chhaya, the maidservant] would dip a grey rag into a pail, and sit on her haunches at the end of the room, and swish the rag around the floor. Carefully, deliberately, she would begin to advance to the other end of the room, swiping the floor with moist rag, her right arm moving regularly and automatically, like a fin, till she had reached the other end. Her odd movement forward on her haunches had an amphibian quality, half human and half of another world. It was laborious, and yet had the simplicity and poise of a tortoise’s amble . . . Then, at last, she would unbend her body and straighten her back. Most of the time she worked, her body was slightly bent, as if in obeisance to an invisible god. (Strange 10)[emphasis added]

Here we find one of the instances where the servant is shown working. Though there is an admission that her work was “laborious”, the description is such that the hard work and monotony is glided over by the addition of words like “simplicity” and “poise”. Then we have the comic description of Chhaya’s bent body as due to her “obeisance to an invisible god” and not to hard labour. Terry Eagleton has aptly remarked that much of what middle class ideologies say is true, and would be ineffectual if it were not. Middle class ideologies “also contain good many propositions, which are overtly false, and do so less because of some inherent quality than because of the distortions into which they are commonly forced in their attempts to legitimise oppressive social structures.”²⁰

For the young focalizer, Sandeep, his Bombay apartment may indeed appear quiet and perfected and that the morning deliciously fluid to his mother and Chhotomama. But this reality has been extended to accommodate the otherwise different lived reality of Saraswati and obliterate her hard work. At every point we see the fruits of labour, but the tediousness and the sheer effort is missing from the narrative.

Clothes hung from clotheslines in the terrace, and undulated like many-coloured waves, all at once, when a breeze blew from the direction of the railway lines. They were happy, cheerful flags that signified life in a house. There were trousers, shirts, petticoats, blouses, and magnificent lengths of saris, each with a different and striking motif, each a small waterfall of life and colour, unravelled to dry. Sandeep had often seen Saraswati unfolding these sinuous boaconstrictors of cloth (how wrinkled they looked, then, bad-tempered and wrinkled, and how rejuvenated they would look tomorrow, when they were ironed and given their customary face-lift), beating them against the air with a single electric movement to rid them of the last drops of water, then clipping them, her arms wide-apart, as if outstretched in a deep and satisfying yawn. (Strange 94) [emphasis added]

This is another detailed description of the common domestic landscape from the novel. But it is all too easy to mistake the focalizer Sandeep's image to be the real image, forgetting the hard back breaking work that lies beneath these clothes drying on the clothes-lines. The presentation of clothes as "cheerful", "happy" and Saraswati's work as "deep" and "satisfying" again ends up erasing the sheer back-breaking chore of washing clothes. This occluded labour is necessary to be kept in mind while dealing with the middle class life presented in these novels. It is this unseen and underpaid labour of the servants that makes it possible for the masters to indulge in leisure, and other activities. Bhaskar, for instance in Freedom Song, manages to take part in his socialist activities like selling Ganashakti, precisely because Haridasi is there to cook and give him his meals in time in addition to cleaning his clothes and the house. In fact the irony of his support for the Left cause in contrast to his family's dependence on the exploitative labour of under-aged servants is lost on Bhaskar.

If one deconstructs Bhaskar's party commitment regarding the proletariat, and asks the small question – what does Bhaskar have to say or think about these people, - old Durga, Nando, long-servers in the house, or the small girls Haridasi drudging from

early morning to night – one is surprised to note that he simply does not notice them at all. They remain “invisible” to the so-called Marxist, who remains rather comically busy selling *Ganashakti* and staging theatre on Russian themes.²¹ [italics author’s]

Here we must also not forget to add that this irony is also lost on the author too. In Freedom Song, we have other examples of how this erasing of the servant’s labour takes place. Witness the early morning exchange of pleasantries between Khuku and Mini:

“How are you feeling, Mini?” asked Khuku. “Did you sleep well last night?”

“I’m much better already,” she [Mini] said. “Your house is so beautiful and comfortable that I had no choice but to feel better!”²² [emphasis added]

This exchange comes barely few lines after Khuku had scolded her servant Nando as lazy for oversleeping and ordered him to make the morning tea. Nando’s work or that the maids, Uma and Jochna, is not credited anywhere in the novel by Khuku, or by the narrative. This absence would not have been so damning had not credit been heaped on or appropriated by Khuku.

The inability of the Indian writers in English to acknowledge the work of the servants faithfully is quite epidemic. Prinisha Badassy quotes Charles van Onselen remark that part of this blindness to the servant’s labour may be attributed to the fact that “domestic servants serve, they do not produce.” Since domestic servants are not “commodity producers”, it becomes difficult to evaluate them in “capitalistic terms”.²³ We can refer to Anita Desai’s Fire on the Mountain where the protagonist, Nanda Kaul, cribs about her lifelong drudgery as the wife of the Vice-Chancellor of a University: “There had been too many guests coming and going, . . . Too many trays of tea would have to be made and carried to her husband’s study, to her mother-in-law’s bedroom, to the veranda that was the gathering-place for all, at all times of the day. Too many meals, too many dishes on the table, too much to wash up after” [emphasis added].²⁴ Here Nanda appropriates the credit for working, cooking, arranging parties etc for the family whereas the truth is that it is her servants who had done the hard work. It is these unnamed servants who “would have made and carried” the “trays of tea”, cooked and

served the “many meals” and had “too much to wash up” later. Tabish Khair points out that:

[Nanda’s] constant self-centred references to the parties and household activities which she is fleeing from simply obscure the servant culture which enabled her to throw these huge parties and maintain her household. If anyone should have been exhausted by Nanda’s earlier life, it ought to be the servants (or *also* the *unmentioned* servants) – but, of course Nanda repeatedly takes credit for “working” for the *entire* (servants included) household.²⁵
[italics author’s]

Khair further remarks that Nanda’s constant cribbing against her earlier life filled with household chores and her expressed desire to trim her lifestyle to live with nothing has to be seen in the material context of her being the owner of an undoubtedly expensive hill station villa. It is to be noted that Nanda’s ideal of simple living, as it is for most middle/upper classes, includes the labour, hidden of course, of servants. Nanda Kaul’s edifice of refinement exemplified by her reading, “in small sips, bits and pieces from *The Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon*” (*Fire* 27) [italics author’s] of which she is so proud of and for which she disdains the uncouth Ila Das is possible because she has Ram Lal to cook and look after the domestic chores. The narrative is full of such slippages that it becomes very difficult to notice that at every step the servant and his labour are being marginalised. For instance, Nanda desires to lead a life of detachment: “I want nothing. Can I not be left with nothing? (*Fire* 17). Again, we can consider the following innocuous looking statement: “. . . she [Nanda] had an idea about its [house at Kasauli] sparseness, its cleanliness and austerity would please the Japanese lady of a thousand years ago as it pleased her” (*Fire* 29) [emphasis added]. In this context “nothing”, “sparseness”, “cleanliness”, “austerity” are loaded terms. Nanda’s house Carignano in Kasauli may seem to her austere and sparse compared to her earlier house, the Vice-Chancellor’s quarter in Punjab. But in “a country of considerable poverty”, sparseness would be quite different from Nanda’s hill side villa. As Khair adds rightly that the less fortunate Ila Das, “constantly brings out Nanda’s privileged position”.²⁶ Nanda may not be the narrator but nonetheless she is the focalizer of the novel. It is through her perspective that the narrated situations and events are presented and so are the perceptual or conceptual positions in terms of which they are rendered. In fact, works like *Fire on the Mountain* can be seen as continuing a trend in literature that is not dissimilar to the “Horatian’

tradition of the country-house poems” that became popular in eighteenth century England in “their celebration of contended frugality and retirement from a rich, corrupt and bustling (urban) world.”²⁷ Nanda Kaul wants to shut out all the worries, and horrible memories she had suffered in her long life as wife, mother and grandmother. Throughout the novel the author seems to concentrate on the oppression of women by patriarchal society. Nanda is oppressed by her unfaithful husband; her daughter Tara is brutalised by her husband which also traumatises their daughter and Nanda’s granddaughter, Raka. Preet Singh, a rustic in the village wants to marry off his seven year old daughter to “an old man in the next village because he own a quarter of an acre and two goats” (Fire 130). Ila Das is raped and killed by Preet Singh because she tries to stop him from marrying off his minor daughter. Ila was earlier neglected by her two brothers who first squandered their parental inheritance and then “pestered their mother and two sisters then, for the last jewellery, and soon had them driven out into rented rooms and boarding houses, finally to whatever roof charity would hold over them” (Fire 124). It is not that these women are all victims of men. But it would be wrong to conclude that women, irrespective of class, are oppressed in the same manner. Nanda, for all suffering, is not so helpless as Ila Das. Middle and upper class women always had the power, however delegated, over their servants, some of whom were male, and to appropriate their labour.

We can take another illustration from Anita Desai’s novel Fasting, Feasting: “Where, under the old tyrant, there had been nothing but dust and desolation around the big house, Mrs Joshi now had a bed of roses bloom in her front garden while at the back were beds of fresh vegetables, so profuse and luxuriant that their bounty was shared with all the neighbours” [emphasis added].²⁸ The narrative presents the beautiful rose garden and the bountiful vegetable garden of Mrs Joshi as accruing to her benevolent rule. What is glossed over is the labour of the servant(s) who must have slogged to produce its bounty.

Malasri Lal is right to point out that “religion and social practice compound to designate woman as the *Griha Lakshmi* (the prosperity of the household), a term that cunningly juxtaposes woman’s deification and her confinement in domestic space” [italics author’s].²⁹ However, she does not stress the point that such a construction may also conceal the labour of the servant. Most of Indian fiction in English may not be

concerned with the ideal of “griha Lakshmi” or perfect housewife as prescribed in domestic manuals. But even the representation of the average middle class housewife ignores the contribution of the servant. It is interesting to note that the instrumental functions performed by servants such as washing, cooking, cleaning and other such routine and mundane though back-breaking chores are erased more in literary texts. We do not intend to assert that only servants work in such upper/middle class families. The Indian family (middle and upper class) exploits the service of poor relatives, particularly widows and elderly spinsters in various domestic chores. In the large joint family, wives, daughters, poor relatives and servants are also placed in similar structures of abjection in the discourse of domestic labour. This can be illustrated with an example from Anita Desai’s Feasting, Fasting. Here, Uma is forced to drop her studies and look after her younger brother Arun. Being the eldest daughter, it is expected of her to help out in the domestic chores, particularly nurturing. Uma resists this traditional role which baffles her parents.

“But ayah can do this – ayah can do that –” Uma tried to protest when the orders began to come thick and fast. That made Mama look stern again. “You know we can’t leave the baby to the servant,” she said severely. “He needs proper attention.” When Uma pointed out that ayah had looked after her and Aruna as babies, Mama’s expression made it clear that it was a different matter now, and she repeated threateningly: “Proper attention.” (Fasting 30)

It is all too easy to see this as another example of how the patriarchal family system dominates women. However, this clash of values between the individual aspirations of Uma and the traditional conservatism of her parents is not so straightforward. It is true that Uma fails in almost every walk of middle class life. Her failure in studies leads her parents to withdraw her from school. In spite of her parents’ best efforts, she remains a spinster. First she is duped by the Goyals, a cloth-merchant family who take an advance of one lakh rupees as dowry and then break the engagement and refuse to return the money. She is then wedded to Harish who swindles her parents an amount of thirty thousand rupees to pay his debts and then runs away on the very first day of their marriage. Later they find that Harish is already married with children. Unlike her younger and more beautiful sister Aruna, Uma is resigned to live, lonely and unwanted, in her parents’ house. Meanwhile, Aruna gets a good husband and moves to

Bombay to live apparently better life. But this sort of picture of Uma is not altogether correct since she is not so helpless. Uma, for all her helplessness, rules over aya and the other servants including the cook and mali (gardener). Khair points out rightly the critics like Malashri Lal (in The Law of the Threshold) are wrong to concentrate exclusively on the oppression of women under a patriarchal system in the works of Anita Desai or for that matter of most Indian English women novelists. Such an attitude does not allow these critics the “space to explore the forms of privilege/displacement which exist outside (though *not* necessarily unconnected to) gender paradigms” [italics author’s].³⁰ The authors are wrong not because they concentrate only on the victimisation of the middle class urban women but because they posit this as the universal fate of all Indian women. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan remarks that Shashi Deshpande in That Long Silence “is able to extend their [women characters’] condition and draw them into solidarity, chiefly by marking similarities between Jaya and a variety of other female figures . . . among different classes of people. . . .”³¹ Rajan reads the suffering of all women at the hands of their men as a sign of the universality of women’s condition, irrespective of class. This is where the Indian writer sidesteps the labour of the maid and ends up with a wrong reading of the Indian reality. Tabish Khair illustrates this with the example of Gita Hariharan’s The Thousand Faces of Night. The exploitation of Sita and her daughter Devi, the middle class protagonists are different from Mayamma and Gauri – their two maids. Though all of them suffer at the hands of men, Gauri can have an affair and leave her husband because she is working and economically independent. “This difference of values and opportunities based on class realities, even within the same upper-caste environment, works its way into the narrative but is never consciously alluded to or addressed”.³² Usha Bande reads the character of Sita as oppressed in Desai’s Where Shall We Go This Summer?. The near mad behaviour of Sita is due to her location as a “new woman”, an educated Indian woman faced with oppressive domestic routine. Sita can see the social foibles but have no power to overcome them and achieve a sense of self-affirmation.³³ This sort of critical reading fails on one account and that is, it elides the hidden labour of the servants like Moses, Miriam, and other unnamed servants that a “new woman” like Sita employs. N. Neetha points out rightly that the “traditional image of women as tied to home and family is not true for the working masses, who form a majority of the population. . . . It is increasingly being recognized that women are no longer passive movers who followed the household head.”³⁴ Anita Desai, Githa

Hariharan, Attia Hosain, and other Indian women (and for that matter, Indian male) novelists in English, ignore the economic independence of the domestic maids.

The economic dependence of the [maidservant's] family on the domestics, has meant increased decision-making role for these women. . . . the worker status also ensures these women have decision-making power regarding their own marriages. The main source of dowry being their savings domestic work guarantee domestics some control over decisions related to marriage. Increased decision-making power with regard to age at marriage and selection of bridegroom was reported by most of the respondents, which reflects the changing power relations in these households.³⁵

Jamun, the middle class narrator tries to present his affair with Kasibai as a result of the latter's lascivious nature. But the fact remains that Kasibai is free, both economically and sexually than other middle class women, including Jamun's mother and is able to take lovers like Jamun even when her husband was still living.

Of course, we cannot accuse either Desai or other Indian novelists in English of entirely ignoring completely the contributions of servants. But here too it is noticeable that they highlight more the contribution of the servants in the case of the expressive functions; the portrayal of maids is more frequent than that of male servants. As mentioned earlier, literary servants, particularly maids are seen as understanding confidants and comfort-givers. Now the predominance of maids in such roles may partly be because of the increasing feminization of domestic service in India. It could be also due to the fact that middle class narratives find it easier to depict and control their portrayal within the narrative. After all, interpersonal relationships are built more with ayas than with the male domestics. This point would be discussed in more details later on in the chapter.

III

Positing the servant as a shirker and careless about his/her work has been one of the most common tropes in middle class domestic ideologies. This is reflected not only in literary works but also in the numerous pamphlets and reform manuals that circulated in

the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Let us examine the very first sentence in Anita Desai's Where Shall We Go This Summer?: "Moses [the servant] waited. Waiting was what he did most of his time: it was not only his prime but also his legitimate occupation".³⁶ Thus, the image of the servant as a shirker is presented in the very first line of the novel. Moses lets Sita's house on Manori island decay and when she sends him twenty rupees to arrange the house and buy some food, he promptly spends the money on buying a new "lungi". Desai confirms the impression of Moses as a lazy man by presenting him in the beginning and at the end of the novel as doing nothing but drinking liquor. Miriam, "Moses' wife who matched him inch for inch in height and breath and had, apparently, the same resources and habits of passing the time as he" (Summer 23). Desai does not restrict her bias only to Moses and his wife. "They [crows] even sat on the ledges and balcony rails of the flats, waiting for lazy cooks to throw out a bucketful of kitchen garbage into the alley . . ." (Summer 34) [emphasis added]. This apparently neutral description of the city life reveals the quick and easy assumption of cooks as naturally "lazy".

Amit Chaudhuri's Freedom Song likewise begins with a reference of Nando being scolded: "Get up, you lazy man! she [Khuku] commanded him. "Give us tea!" (Freedom 3) [emphasis added]. And the novel also ends with the reference of the servant Nando as a shirker: "She [Khuku] must remind that shirker [Nando] to put the tea in the flask the first thing in the morning" (Freedom 198) [emphasis added]. We can refer to one such presentation of servants as recalcitrant, good-for-nothing yet indispensable: "When Mini's sister has her fracture Anjali the maidservant puts her up and sits near her fanning till Mini comes back. "Two sweepers were hired, to their reluctance, from their neighbouring building (but made more eager by a promise of twenty rupees), to put Shantidi into a chair and then carry her downstairs" (Freedom 152) [emphasis added]

Let us consider this example from another novel of Amit Chaudhuri:

Chhaya and Maya would spend the morning sweeping and collecting rubbish. Their mother, a towering mild woman, cleaned the stairs; sometimes, her husband, that pudgy, well-behaved man in khaki shorts, stood in for her, loitering in the compound, decoratively wielding a jhadu. This small family, father, mother, and the two daughters, was employed by the Building Society.

What they did with the implements of their trade – bucket, rag, water, disinfectant, jhadu, broom – was a mystery. A combination of these things did not automatically add up to cleanliness.³⁷ [emphasis added]

Here the narrative reaffirms the general idea about servants who left to themselves would not work properly like the whole family of Chhaya and Maya. The narrator is unable to see “what they did”. The natural reluctance of servants to work properly implies that that they need to be kept under strict control. If we glance at Chaudhuri’s latest novel, A New World we can find these lines: “Later, the doorbell rang, and Jayojit’s mother could be heard opening the door and saying, ‘So late?’ A maidservant came in; she was trying hard to hide her guilty look, and went quickly to the kitchen to wash the dishes. . . . said Jayojit’s mother. ‘They’re just a bunch of shirkers who pretend to be friendly with each other’” [emphasis added].³⁸ Again, a few pages later in the work, we find the same complaint.

Apparently she [Maya, the maidservant] was supposed to come once over in the morning, to clean the floors, and once in the afternoon to wash the dishes. But she failed to turn up this morning. Her explanation was that the Mitras whose flat she worked in – she worked part-time in four flats in the building each day – hadn’t let her go.

“Their washerwoman didn’t come today, ma!” she protested.

Jayojit’s mother was certain she had been chattering downstairs with her friends. “Always acting the innocent,” she muttered. (New 31) [emphasis added]

Here Jayojit’s mother accusation about Maya’s gossiping is strengthened in the minds of the readers if we remember that one of Jayojit’s and the reader’s first image of the servants is that of idly loitering and gossiping in the beginning of the novel: “The two or three part-time maidservants who always sat by the entrance steps looked at the two arrivers causally” (New 5). At the end of the novel when Jayojit gets ready to return to America, he reminisces that:

His mother had complained to him again that every few days Maya pleaded absence from work, either because of some obscure excuse to do with the weather or the children’s health, or because one of the innumerable local gods that presided over the poor – kitchen god, fertility god – had a Puja imminent, and must be appeased. Given that his mother was exaggerating, he *had* noticed, in a dream-like way Maya’s impenetrable absences, and sensed that the

laws governing her life were other than those that pertained to what he called “ordinary” life. (New 184) [italics author’s]

Jayojit is shown as unable to fathom why Maya and other servants shirk their duties. Though he is able to grant them the license of leading a different life, yet the fact remains that the novel refers to servants as compulsive and incorrigible shirkers.

Literary servants, thus, are always presented as either under worked and/or unwilling to work hard. Let us see this example from Upamanyu Chatterjee’s The Last Burden where Jamun’s mother Urmila complains about their aya.

Yell myself [Urmila] hoarse for Aya, who shall never descend before seven – from time to time she shrills at me not to disturb her. . . . Put up with Aya’s gripes against her chums. . . . Aya might not have gone to the market at all – some tip-top alibi – her menopause that’s been obliging her now for some years, her kidneys, her breathing – meantime, she would’ve hobbled off for a matinee show – nothing in the kitchen to cook. (Burden 30-31)

We can take another example from A Strange and Sublime Address. In the section titled “Episode Concerning a House”, the mistress complains about her servant Ram.

“That boy [Ram],’ she said, “he’s useless.”
. . . he [husband] added, “He doesn’t have his heart in the job.”
“No,” agreed the lady. “Its clothes he wants – jeans, shirts. And visiting his father every weekend. I hate that father, he’s like a piece of cardboard.”(Strange 171)

In the lines above we witness not only the common complaint against servants that they don’t work, but also their constant demand for material things. This lazy nature of the servant Ram is confirmed later on by the narrative. She gives strict instructions to Ram to clean up the house while she visited her sister’s and then her brother’s house. But the moment she leaves, the narrative informs us that: “He [Ram] was glad to be left alone for these five hours. He felt like dancing with gladness. When he would go down to call the sweeper later, he would smoke a beedi and play a round of cards” (Strange 178). Thus the servant immediately decides to smoke a beedi and play cards when he is left alone instead of working as he had been instructed. This would be a clear cut case of the servant’s alienation from his work, but the narrative skips over and makes no further

investigation. Ram finds the house work tedious and finds relief whenever his mistress goes out. For him a round of cards or smoking a beedi are welcome distractions in an otherwise torturous life and feels light like an angel when he is left free. Or take the example from the section titled “Jadav” where we find the servant “Jadav standing in the doorway in pyjamas and a white vest, smoking a beedi and talking to the janitor who was swabbing the floor outside the flat wit a wet rag” (Strange 168). Later on we find that the plumber had left the bathroom in a mess with broken chips lying about even though he had promised to clean it up. Jadav too does not clean the bathroom implying clearly that he is nothing but a shirker who loves to gossip and who would not do anything unless supervised by his master. We can consider the case of Rehman’s reluctance to take out the garbage from the same novel. “O-ho! He [Rehman] thought, the garbage . . . Something like a black weariness and depression came over him, not because he had worked too hard that day and could work no more, but because the idea of now having to drop the bag of garbage down the garbage-chute seemed to him an idea of transcendental pettiness” (Strange 194).

To say there are shirkers among servants is one thing, to extend this into a generalization and to see servants as incorrigibly lazy or naturally shirkers, is quite another. This stereotyping is quite widespread and any glance at the innumerable domestic manuals meant to edify the upcoming middle class women in the last two centuries both in English and the Indian languages. We can take the following quotation from Attia Hosain’s short story on servants titled “The Street of the Moon”.

Kallo the cook had worked for the family for more years than he could remember. He had started as the cook’s help, washing dishes, grinding the spices and running errands. When the old cook died of an overdose of opium Kallo inherited both his job and his taste of opium. His inherent laziness fed by the enervating influence of the drug kept him working for his inadequate pay, because he lacked the energy and the courage to look for work elsewhere.³⁹ [emphasis added]

Apart from the generic name of Kallo, the servant has been also marked with characteristic servant-like habits such taking drugs like opium. But what’s most noticeable is the ascribing of “inherent laziness” to him. In Githa Hariharan’s work The Thousand Faces of Night, we find the following example. “A week later, Sita had the

house exactly as she wanted it. The cook (good, but inclined to be dirty if she was not carefully supervised) came twice a day to cook hot meals for Sita's lunch and dinner" [emphasis added].⁴⁰ Here the implication is clear. The cook is good in the sense that she is also clean. But this is only because Sita, the middle class mistress, is strict and insists upon cleanliness. Otherwise the narrative makes it clear that the cook would be naturally dirty. Here the narrative assumes complete rapport with the reader on the knowledge of natural laziness of the servants. The underlying refrain in these works was that unless there was constant and vigilant supervision, servants would naturally be prone to slackness or idleness.

Salman Rushdie's Shame (1983) deals with the eccentric family of the Shakil sisters. But, even in the midst of all the madness and eccentricities, the bias against servants stands as is evident from this observation:

The household servants were as under-occupied as he [Omar Khayyam]; his mothers had gradually become very lax about such matters as cleanliness and cuisine. The trio of menservants became, therefore, Omar Khayyam's first, willing subjects . . . lulled them into trances, learning, among other things, that the sexual drives which his mothers appeared to have lost completely since his birth had not been similarly stilled in these men. Entranced, they happily confessed the secrets of their mutual caresses, and blessed the maternal trinity for having altered the circumstances of their lives that their true desires could be revealed to them.⁴¹ [emphasis added]

What is striking though not peculiar to this novel is the statement that household servants are normally "under-occupied" and prone to lax behaviour unless kept under strict supervision of the masters. And this laxity is always in the matters of cleanliness and the preparation of food. Again the underlying assumption is that servants by nature are dirty and lazy, not to mention sexually deprived. The anxiety of the middle class masters/narrators/authors about the servants' sexuality has already been examined in the preceding chapter.

Another example from Freedom Song could be taken to illustrate the point further. "Khuku often thought that three servants were too many to have in the house; there was only herself and Shib; and these three, for large stretches of time in the day,

had nothing to do. Then they reigned like angels or demons without any inhabitation” (Freedom 71) [emphasis added]. To middle class masters the behaviour of servants is inscrutable and seen always as a threat to the life, property of the master and/or his middle class values such as cleanliness. This anxiety and tension of the middle class is reflected in the novels overtly or otherwise. Even writers who try to be objective or even sympathetic to servants are not unaffected. We can refer to one such observation by Amit Chaudhuri.

Haridasi, small Haridasi, barely four feet six tall, had cleared the dinning-table, first cupping her endlessly compliant palm and pushing bits of moist rice and salt that had littered the table into its dark cave, to rest between her heart line and her life line, collecting bits of fishbone as well as deposit them throwing the debris into the kitchen basin, though she had been told not to. (Freedom 28-9) [emphasis added]

The narrative seems to be rather objectively describing a daily act of cleaning of the dining table by the servant. But, even this seemingly “objective” and neutral observation is marked by the assumption about the servant’s irresponsible behaviour. Haridasi may appear to be small and compliant in doing all the chores. But for all her compliance she cannot resist throwing waste food in the wash basin, though she had been instructed specifically not to do so. This subtle denigration of the servant’s labour through portraying the improperly done chores is a narrative strategy to lessen the guilt of overlooking their labour. The narrative always presents the servant as incapable or unwilling to do their chores perfectly. It is another matter that their masters never seem to be satisfied with the servant’s work, and this in return calls for more supervision and further improvement. In short, since the servants are incapable of working properly they are not to be sympathised with. Kochu Maria, the cook in Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things, is dealt not with the same yardstick of sympathy by the narrative as the other subaltern, Velutha. Among her many faults besides her gross physical ugliness, is her clumsiness: “Kochu Maria sawed up the rest of the cake messily, laboriously, breathing through her mouth, as though she was carving a hunk of roast lamb” [emphasis added].⁴²

Kochu Maria has been portrayed as physically gross by the narrative as we have seen in the preceding chapter. Her labour is equally denigrated so that she would not be

sympathised with although it is no less true that her labour partly keeps the Ayemenem House running, leaving Mammachi somewhat free to work her cottage industry of pickle making. She may side with the higher castes against Velutha and thus contribute to the patriarchal domestic ideologies that keep the lower castes oppressed. She also might be unappealing unlike Velutha. Her labour, however, is no less valuable nor is she less exploited. But, this is unacknowledged and a sympathetic consideration is denied to her. Such a consideration of the economic factor is what Roy very cleverly sidesteps. Velutha, on the other hand, is an expert in whatever he does and hence referred to as Dr Velutha in the novel. Subalterns to be admired must be able to do things perfectly, to the satisfaction of the middle class masters. One interesting aspect of Roy's novel is that apart from Kochu Maria or Velutha, there's hardly any mention of other servants, particularly those of Ammu when she had been married to her planter husband in Assam. How Ammu treated her own servants is the question that has not been considered by the narrative. They could be allowed the luxury of sympathising Velutha for he is technically not their worker. Besides, the author has used their good-treatment as a foil to her criticism of the Ayemenem household. The same can be said about Munoo and Bakha, two of the sympathetic servant characters created by Mulk Raj Anand. This would be discussed more in the following section.

Let us examine a couple of examples from English August where this sort of denigrating the servant's work comes naturally to Agastya: "Dinner was unbelievable, the dal tasted like lukewarm chillied shampoo. The tang of flit in his nostrils, he was awed by the thought of months in which every meal would taste like this" (English 6). Several pages later we find another repetition of the same theme:

"Why is the milk brown?" asked Sathe, examining Agastya's breakfast tray . . . "The cook probably used his shit instead of sugar. Or its' dirt from the tray. You see, he doesn't have hands like rock, or a steely grip, and so on. The tray dances in his hands like Uri Geller or something, and the milk slops over. Then he slops the milk back into the glass" (English 276)

Agastya's constant cribbing against his servant Vasant's cooking reinforces and is reinforced by his denigration of Vasant. Such dislike for servants is assumed natural in most middle class discourse including Indian fiction in English. And the root cause

presented by such discourse is the apparently natural propensity of servants to cheat and shirk work, not to mention gossip. For Agastya, his caretaker-servant Vasant is a perfect example of the laziness and inertia that Madna and its inhabitants exhibited: “Vasant dawdled in the veranda, lazily viewing the world” (English 273).

At times, the labour of the servants is mentioned but not out of any sympathy for them. To take an example we can turn to where Jamun, a middle class master, recounts the hard work involved in shifting the cactus plant from their old to their new house (Burden 40). Here the narrative is interested more in showing the fickle nature of Jamun who avoids supervising the shifting though he was the first person who suggested in taking the cactus to their new home. Thus, the servants’ labour is not there for itself.

Among the work of servants, cooking for daily use is a primary chore. But this is always discounted in literary representations as compared to cooking for special occasions. The latter is always seen as a mark of social accomplishment and the women of the house are expected to do it even when there are cooks in the house. What happens in most narrative is that the festive occasions are accounted more and hence gives the impression that cook’s work is dispensable. The underlying assumption was that the servant may not be able to cook well. There is also the stigma of contamination since servants have always been seen as dirty and hence likely to contaminate the food. To take an example from the section titled “When We Moved to this House” in A Strange and Sublime Address:

When we moved to this house, my father decided to give a feast – just a small feast for some relatives and close friends. My mother worked all morning in the kitchen; she did not trust the cook. She made dal and shuktani and fried savouries from potatoes and poppy seeds, a preparation from unripe jackfruit, and another of immense chunks of chittol fish, and smaller tangda fish which lay in the sauce with their eyes open. The cook tried to help, saying, all the time, “Yes boudi,” and “No boudi.” (Strange 197) [emphasis added]

Whenever there is a feast or a celebration the servant’s contribution is erased as evident from this example and an earlier one in the very first section of the novel. The feast that is presented had been cooked by Saraswati but it is not mentioned for the simple fact that it would mean taking cognizance of servant’s work and thus giving

him/her credit. In *A New World*, this denigration of the servant's cooking ability continues. "His [Jayojit's] mother was not the best possible cook, and these days she had a helper who did some of the cooking in the morning; this helper was not a very good cook either" (New 14). We must not be fooled into thinking that the mother's efforts are also looked down upon for the narrative further mentions that "It was an honest, even joyful, effort by his mother, though it had not quite worked; but it was not wholly tasteless either" (New 14). The use of positive terms like "honest", "joyful", "effort" leaves no doubt about the light in which the mother's cooking is received by Jayojit.

There is a constant anxiety in the literary texts about the need for order and discipline in the domestic sphere and the servants to be controlled. "There is in fact a sudden and well-documented new anxiety on the part of masters and mistresses about the damage that servant spies and informants could do. If they were groundless, the fears were nevertheless quite real".⁴³ Mikhail Bakhtin, Bruce Robbins further adds, was right to point out that domestic servants "are the privileged witnesses to private life. People are as little embarrassed in a servant's presence as they are in the presence of an ass, and at the same time the servant is called upon to participate in all intimate aspects of personal life."⁴⁴ The surveillance of servants was only one end of the "many-pronged, long-term process of imposing a new discipline on the new industrial work force"⁴⁵ that was coming into strength in eighteenth century England and later on elsewhere. It is not as if servants, in England or elsewhere, were not monitored before. Robbins cites Michel Foucault to stress on the difference between the old and the new surveillance. The old relation of master and servant or slavery was "based on a relation of appropriation of bodies; . . . [and this] service . . . was a constant, total, massive, non-analytical, unlimited relation of domination, established in the form of the individual will of the master, his 'caprice'".⁴⁶ The new surveillance, on the other hand, sought to make "good subjects" of servants. The reason behind such revival of surveillance, Robbins rightly notes, was "not because domestic servants had become more unruly or households more complicated to manage but because the rest of the work force had gone out of control". Societal or more precisely "patriarchal or paternalistic ideology" had "lost its hold over an industrial working class". Unlike the earlier cottage or household dominated labour, this new working class was no longer subjected to head of the family or household. The need for surveillance was a sign that the "family" had broken down. But it was precisely in the

name of the family that surveillance could be (re)instituted; the ideal that was thought to survive only in the institution of domestic service could be transferred to the work force outside the home.⁴⁷

The lazy Indian servant, in need to strict surveillance, has a long pedigree and gained particular interest in colonial literature. Nupur Chaudhuri deals with the reason why the colonials tended to stereotype native servants as lazy. Chaudhuri notes that:

In India the situation was different [from Britain]. Each domestic job was specialized and a particular person would perform it, the task perhaps requiring only a few hours. Following the completion of their particular task, servants would rest. Consequently, memsahibs believed that servants were not working hard, and they concluded that Indian servants were lazy.⁴⁸

Caste played a distinctive part in this misconception. Thus, Muslim servants would not touch pork while Hindu servants would hardly be engaged to cook and serve beef. Sweepers and washermen were considered as low castes and hence for these purposes separate servants had to be engaged. So caste considerations and not natural laziness as it is commonly believed, forced the English colonials to end up with a large retinue of servants. The days of large retinue may be over but in the Indian household we would still find, according to the economic prosperity of the family, more than one servant. Other than the lower caste, no Indian servant would clean the toilets and no middle class Indian family would allow a sweeper to cook or do other household work. All these subtleties of the Indian domestic servants are missed out by the Indian novelists in English. And they resorted to the standard stereotype of servants as being lazy and unwilling worker.

IV

If we take a look at the novels we would also find the constant refrain of servants' stealing from the owner, money or other material things as food, clothes, and such like. This accusation of stealing or cheating takes various forms and this can be illustrated better by taking up some examples. "Meanwhile, Nando [the servant] went out to the market and came back, having pocketed a rupee and fifty paisa for himself" (Freedom

99). This is presented as a daily vignette in the middle class life of metropolitan Calcutta. But a careful look at the observation would reveal certain assumptions about servants that are highly denigrating but probably false. It is pertinent to wonder how the narrator knew about Nando's cheating if he had gone to the market alone. It is, in fact, one of such slippages where the thieving nature of servants is assumed.

Another example could be taken from Amit Chaudhuri's Strange and Sublime Address, where the servant Rehman is shown stealing money and food: "Then she thought that she must tell Rehman to sell the old copies of the papers of the newspapers that were stuffed now in two drawers in the hall. He'll be very eager to sell them, she thought grimly, and of course he'll forget to give me the money" (Strange 187). This supposition by the mistress is further confirmed by the narrative a couple of pages later when Rehman steals food:

He [Rehman] himself had a jar of mango chutney, which the memsaab had quite forgotten about, hidden in the darkest shelf at the bottom of a cupboard. Now and then, he took it out when he was sure the memsaab was sleeping and ate some of it with a quarter of an onion and a cold leftover crescent of a chappati . . . He had decided that if memsaab should ever remember the jar, he would bring it to the table with a straight face as if nothing had happened, and if it was empty by then, he would insist with an injured smile that the memsaab had finished it long ago, or, if he was in a risky mood, pretend it had never existed. (Strange 190)

In the same novel, we have another example of such pilfering of food by the servant.

Outside, in the hall, I saw the cook, as he took the dishes into the kitchen, expertly and almost invisibly insert a savoury into his mouth. In the hot and silent afternoon, he polished the glass table with a squelching, wet rag, standing back from time to time and winking at it with one eye closed, until, to his one open eye, it looked clean and immeasurably perfect again. (Strange 199) [emphasis added]

Here, the implication is that the cook has been constantly stealing food. What is glossed over in all these instances is the possibility that the servant could be possibly hungry and underfed. That they are the first to get up and work and the last to eat the food

that they prepared or at least helped to prepare needs hardly to be reiterated. All these facts are never even remotely considered for it would mean exposing for all the exploitative conditions under which servants labour. The wages, minimal or very often not paid, is then glossed over and not taken into consideration. Seen in this context, the succeeding lines of his labour are pathetic and cruel. But the narrative, more often than not, seek to make the servant unsympathetic by making him comical, or unsavoury. Swapna M Banerjee rightly points out in this context that desire for food is not necessarily restricted to a particular caste or class. But the literary representations of servants showed that “while the dominant group [the middle class masters] deemed itself fit for having such feelings and had the wherewithal to enjoy them, the subordinate class [such as the servants]. . . were not only deprived but were persecuted and tortured for possessing and living by the same feelings.”⁴⁹ Indian fiction in English does not sympathise with the servant’s desiring and eating food. And it “always represents such behaviour with the inherent gluttony of the servants. It is not just the appetite for drink that is grotesque in the poor [servants], and therefore a sign of idleness, but appetite in general.” On the other hand, “the virtuous, industrious poor [servants] have no appetites; they are content with and grateful for whatever their industry or the benevolence of their betters can procure for them.”⁵⁰ If servants are not shown straightaway as thieves, they are portrayed as potential thieves. For instance, in the same novel we see the maidservant Savitri portrayed in the following words of the narrator:

She [Savitri] was a good worker, perhaps a little too sweet-tongued, a little insincere in her willingness. “You must watch her,” a neighbour had told my mother. “She maybe a thief – not big things, just little ones; knick-knacks; a pen – though a pen can be expensive.” She also might be a part-time prostitute – difficult to tell. There was an independence about her, something in her movements (Strange 138-9) [emphasis added]

The narrative betrays a tension of the middle class master to “know” the servant. If the servant, Savitri in this case, does not conform to usual stereotypes, it baffles the master. Here the narrator, like the neighbour, tries to slot Savitri in the stereotypes of a thief or prostitute. What is noticeable is the attempt to denigrate her even though she is a good worker. Servants have to be slandered or denigrated always if only to deny them their due. Swapna M. Banerjee points out that in domestic manuals the oft repeated argument for women’s education particularly accounts was to check theft by servants.

Housewives were to “be aware of the market price of food and other essential household items and was asked to weigh and measure the products once the servants them home”.⁵¹ We can take another example from Anita Desai’s Fasting, Feasting: “In between she [Uma] has to drive off the urchins who are after the ripe mulberries on the tree by the gate, and see if the cook has bought the green mangoes for pickling and has the ingredients and necessary spices – but no extra that might be pilfered” (Fasting 133) [emphasis added].

Anita Desai praises Attia Hosain’s works as the “reconstruction of a feudal society and its depiction from the point of view of the idealised, benevolent aristocrat who feels a sense of duty and responsibility towards his dependents – women as well as servants”.⁵² But here too we find the same stereotyping of servants as cheats. For instance, let us consider this example from the story “The Street of the Moon” (Phoenix Fled) where we find Kalloo Mian, the cook submitting accounts with his master’s wife:

“Two rupees for eggs? Why so much?” frowned the Begum . . .
“I charge only what I use, and I use what is eaten at table. I don’t eat eggs,” he [Kalloo Mian, the cook] said with goaded defiance.
There was a moment’s silence of surprise.
“But you do eat meat, and if that is the best you cook, you will have to be taught again. Day after day it becomes worse, swimming in water, no ghee at all. What becomes of the ghee you take? Let me see now, a quarter of a seer for the meat dish alone -”
. . .
He spluttered: “I do my best. I’m no thief –” (Phoenix 29)

Here the narrative leaves no doubt about Kallo’s pilfering of meat and money spent while shopping. But there is a complex situation when Kalloo scolds his young wife for stealing or borrowing without permission, make-up and silk stockings, from the Begum. Witness this reaction of Kallo when he finds it out: “‘Allah,’ he [Kallo Main] said, and sat heavily on the bed. ‘Now you’re a thief too. This I cannot stand. I’ve been here twenty years or more; I cannot have this shame on my head . . .’” (Phoenix 54). This is a sign of the complex relationship that servants shared with their masters. They stole as and when it suited them but at the same time, they felt protective towards their masters/mistress and their property. In Sunlight on a Broken Column we have this example: “Asad was our contact with the outside world, running errands for Zahra and

me, buying those things with which we did not trust the servants”.⁵³ This leaves no doubt about the commonplace suspicion about servants as thieves.

It is not true that only in Indian English fiction servants were shown as susceptible to stealing. In Richardson’s Pamela, we have these misgivings of Pamela about another servant through whom she sends money to her parents: “I [Pamela] sent it [money] by *John* our Footman, who goes our way; but he does not know what he carries; because I seal it up in one of the little pill-boxes which my Lady had, wrapt close in Paper, that it mayn’t chink; and be sure don’t open it before him” [italics author’s].⁵⁴

Money, thus, is not the only thing that servants steal as is evident from the above examples. Right from the early models of Indian fiction in English such as Rajmohan’s Wife the servants have always been portrayed as stealing food, particularly “ghee”, a precious commodity and luxury: “The cook . . . was anxious to secure only just double the quantity that was necessary, wisely deeming it advisable that half should be set apart in secret for her own special benefit and consumption”.⁵⁵ In The Moor’s Last Sigh, Rushdie presents the “ayah, Miss Jaya Hé, peg-leg Lambajan’s domineering wife . . . [as] a liar and a thief”.⁵⁶ Associated with their thieving nature, servants are always portrayed as constant borrowers of money or demanding other things. This demand for money or things is seen as irrational, unreasonable and irritating from the master’s viewpoint. Besides deflecting attention from the underpaid labour of the servant, it helps to heighten the image of the masters as generous.

In A Strange and Sublime Address, the section titled “Jadav” portrays the servant Jadav as bothering his master, a young boy for an extra shirt. This is even after the latter had already given him pyjamas and had promised him a shirt after he had completed six months of service. In an earlier section titled “Lakshmi Poornima Night”, we have similar demands by the servants.

In the morning she [Savitri] had said to my mother, hiding her body shyly behind a door, her head peering out angularly from behind it:

“Ma give me twenty rupees.”

“. . . I gave up two saris for Durga Puja a week ago,” said my mother.

Savitri did not reply at once. She smoothed invisible undulations on my mother's sari. Then she said:

"Today is Lakshmi Puja."

'What can I do if it is Lakshmi Puja?' asked my mother with an astonished laugh. This is an act she had perfected, of refusing or being unable to understand before she gives in as usual to the demand. The questions and answers are a game; like the measured dipping and rising of a see-saw. Again Savitri did not reply. Then she offered a solution:

"Deduct it from my salary."

"Naturally," said my mother. "Oh go now leave me in peace! Every few days ten rupees twenty rupees! . . ." (Strange 139-40) [emphasis added]

Savitri's demand for money is "seen" unreasonable by both the narrator and his mother for she had already been gifted two saris just a week before. That she had the habit of demanding money comes out in the irritation of the mistress who naturally succumbs to the demand if only to buy peace. These demands for money or other things are never "seen" as prompted by real needs. It is another matter that it is the masters who are never able to comprehend the demands of the servants and the effect of representation of such demands serves to heighten the image of the servants as cunning manipulators who try to fleece their gullible masters as much they can without putting in hard work. This is confirmed in the text where only a few lines later, the sweeper Panna repeats the process with the narrator for borrowing ten rupees citing the occasion of Lakshmi Puja.

The fleecing of the masters could be done by more artful ways as is evident from this conversation between Uma and her ayah from Fasting, Feasting:

You think *she* [Lakshmi, Ayah's daughter] is poor – not I [Ayah], her mother, who has suffered all these years, spent good money on her wedding, gone without food and clothing to raise her –'

"No, you haven't. You get food in our kitchen and Mama gives you clothes. You are well dressed."

Ayah stares at her, scandalised, holding out her ripped and faded sari. "You call these clothes? I call it a shame. It is an immodesty to dress in these rags. But what can I do? I must take what I can get. We are not all born fortunate –" and here she strikes the heel of her palm against her forehead and groans.

Uma gets up, annoyed. She has fallen into ayah's trap again. She marches up to her cupboard and flings it open. "Oh, all right, take my saris off me. Ask, ask, till you have all I can give. Then you may be satisfied –" . . .

Ayah is all smiles and beams. She picks them off the floor and clutches them to her, then vanishes from the room before her good fortune runs out. Uma bangs the cupboard door and locks it fiercely; her evening is spoilt. (*Fasting* 37-38) [emphasis added] [italics author's]

Here Uma is shown falling into the trap of the scheming ayah who never fails to exploit any opportunity to wriggle out money or other material goods from Uma and perhaps her mother too. This reveals the common accusation that servants are never happy and satisfied with their payment and are constantly demanding more than their just due. It is not that servants do not demand or cheat their masters. But the unvarying presentation of servants in Indian fiction in English is not without ideological manipulation. The moot point to ask is why servants are always represented like this and not otherwise. One effect of such stereotyping of servants as unreasonable and greedy is that their labour is sidelined; the general feeling of the texts is that servants are always too busy demanding money rather than working honestly. By representing the servants as always stealing, borrowing or demanding the texts seem to convey that servants enjoy a great deal of material comfort. It is for the same reason that they are represented as gossiping and shirking and not doing their work properly. In other words, Indian fiction in English underlines that servants contribute nothing to the family's prosperity. The aspect of the wages of the servant is very rarely highlighted especially the proportion to the work done or the number of hours which is also never remotely gauged or even hinted at. Even novels by non-Indian writers like Paul Scott do not skip any opportunity to present this image of the scheming Indian servant who tries to cheat in every possible way. Scott's *Staying On* portrays the Smalley family which decides to stay in India after independence and cheated in every possible way by their wily servant Ibrahim. Ibrahim foxes his mistress Lucy Smalley when it comes to hiring a part time gardener Joseph.

[In fact] Ibrahim regretted the passing of the days of the *raj* which he remembered as days when servants were treated as members of the family, entitled to their good humours and bad humours, their sulks, their outbursts of temper, their right to show who was really boss, and their right to their discreetly appropriated perks, the feathers they had to provide for the nest when the nest they presently inhabited was abandoned by homeward-bound employers.⁵⁷ [emphasis added] [italics author's]

For servants like Ibrahim, there is no contradiction between loyalty to the Smalleys and his cheating them now and then – the “discreetly appropriated perks”. The picture of the servant as an incorrigible cheat is the Other against which the middle class identity is built.

It was in the contexts of theft and transgression that middle class records restored servants as active agents. Servants were given a subject position as criminal actors and not as passive recipients or executors of employers’ orders – a rare moment indeed in the portrayal. Subversive acts such as theft thus became crucial markers for ascribing negative attributes to the serving population and thereby to distance and distinguish them from their own class.⁵⁸

We can compare such attitudes with Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things where Estha, a member of the family, enacts the role of the servant for sometime. Estha, forced to live with his father and stepmother, after finishing school did not go to college.

Instead, much to the initial embarrassment of his [Estha’s] father and stepmother, he began to do the housework. . . . He did the sweeping, swabbing and all the laundry. He learned to cook and shop for vegetables. Vendors in the bazaars . . . gave him rusted film cans in which to put the vegetables he picked. He never bargained. They never cheated him. (God 11)

Here, Estha enacts the role of servant. But, he does not betray any servant-like qualities like cheating while shopping, shirking or doing the chores improperly and gossiping. Nor does he make unreasonable (to the middle class) demands. We can also refer to Bankimchandra Chatterjee’s Indira (1873) where the heroine even after forced to work as a servant manages to keep her chastity intact. Like her English counterpart Pamela, Indira becomes a servant under compulsion, but her middle class virtues including chastity remains unsullied unlike the lower class servants.⁵⁹ Elisabeth Jay remarks similarly of Jane Eyre. Charlotte Bronte’s heroine is careful to impress her essential gentility upon any servant she meets no matter how low she sinks. Though she is happy to work with Hannah, the nurse turned housekeeper of her cousins’ house, Moor End, Hannah (and more importantly, the reader) is invited to note the condition of Jane’s hands, unused as they are to servant’s toil, and to acknowledge the book-learning that will always divide the two of them.⁶⁰

Reworking Kumkum Sangari's words in another context we can posit that literary servants are represented as "emblems of unmitigated, unearned consumption (eliding their labour)" and they [like the women in the family who shared domestic labour] "seem to have functioned at once as latent critique of mercantile capitalism and as an adjustment to it." On one hand there has been a "decrease of subsistence-related activities, household production and food processing in urban homes" and on the other there has been an "increased dependence on cash purchase of preprocessed staples, food and other items". This has naturally led to the effort to control women's consumption. Sangari adds that women "were entering new logics of cash purchase and consumption" and so they "had to be simultaneously turned into consumers, taught to handle cash incomes, and castigated for potential excesses". Naturally, such women had to curb not only their consumption but also that of those working under them such as servants. In a nutshell, if women and servants "consumed less and laboured more then there would be gap between income and family survival".⁶¹ It is this reason why we have seen the survival and popularity of the images of servants as lazy shirkers and wasteful gluttons who consume more than what they produce.

Of course, it is not to be denied that some Indian novelists in English drew favourable portraits as we have already seen in the preceding chapter. For instance, "unlike most of the servants who shop for their mistresses, Bhima tries never to waste a paisa of Serabai's money. To Bhima, it is a matter of trust. Serabai trusts her enough to send her grocery shopping on her own. So it is right to protect Serabai's finances as zealously as she would if she were spending her own money."⁶² Bhima is not only clean but also hard-working and honest. Perhaps this is the reason why she endears herself not only to her mistress Serabai but also to the readers. We will discuss this positive stereotyping of domestic servants in more detail in the next section.

V

Erasing the servant's labour and/or denigrating it are not the only ways available to the middle class domestic ideologies for his continued exploitation. Another enduring stereotype about servants is that of the happy and docile imbecile, all too happy to work

hard for the master. Linda Anderson points out that “servants who are obedient, efficient, quiet, honest, healthy, and apparently contented with their place – servants who were the equivalent of well-oiled machines – were the ideal”.⁶³ Such myths of the happy servant were motivated, more often than not, by nostalgia for the paternalistic feudalism that was facing extinction from the rising capitalistic system with its concept of wage and open market. There was also an increasing awareness that the servant’s continued exploitation, like other subalterns, could hardly be justified in the modern times.

In earlier times the servant problem was always thought of as the shortage of hardworking or pliable servants. Today’s servant problem is different: it is that domestic employment exists and is growing. This isn’t just a problem because it seems to be a throw-back to earlier, less enlightened times: it is a problem because the growth in domestic employment results from a combination of unwelcome trends. If we look at these trends that underpin the growth of the domestic labour sector, we find gender inequalities, income inequalities, racism, work practices, that have become less rather than more family-friendly,⁶⁴

Authors/narrators/master tried to meet this problem by presenting the past where servants and masters enjoyed a better relationship, that is, less mercenary and based on mutual obligations, in contrast to that of modern society. The paternalistic system in the pre-modern or feudal family arrangements are always seen by these novelists including Attia Hosain as less exploitative, more responsible towards the servants and one where servants were a part of the family. This difference between the servants of the past and that of the present is no better illustrated in the Book Two, chapter two of Sunlight on a Broken Column. “Instead of the Karam Ali [servant] with his fund of tales, and his protégé Chuttan who had flirted with Ramzano and Saliman, there were Lal Singh, my uncle’s trained valet, and Ghulam Ali who ruled over the dining-room and pantry” (Sunlight 121). Here the narrator, Laila misses the older generation of servants like Karam Ali, Chuttan, Ramzano and Saliman and longs “for the informality of past meals served by maid-servants” (Sunlight 121).

Mulk Raj Anand is perhaps one of the few writers who depict somewhat sympathetically the servant working. In Untouchable he gives the following picture of Bakha working:

He [Bakha] worked away earnestly, quickly, without loss of effort. Brisk, yet steady, his capacity for active application to the task he had seemed to flow like constant water from a natural spring. Each muscle of his body, hard as a rock when it came into play seemed to shine forth like glass. . . . he seemed as easy as a wave sailing away on a deep-bedded river. "What a dextrous workman!" the onlooker would have said. And though his job was dirty he remained comparatively clean. He didn't even soil his sleeve, handling commodes, sweeping and scrubbing them. "A bit superior to his job," they always said, "not the kind of man who ought to be doing this." For he looked intelligent, even sensitive, with a sort of dignity that does not belong to the ordinary scavenger, who is as a rule uncouth and unclean. . . . And as he went forward, with eager step, from job to job, a marvel of movement dancing through his work.⁶⁵

What is surprising is that during all the time that Bakha was cleaning, never once did the narrative mention about his nausea, or his disgust at his work, though at the beginning he was shown to be highly conscious about the uncongenial atmosphere of their house and the slum in which it was situated. He is also disgusted by the left-over food given to him and his family by the upper caste Hindus. But when it comes to his dirty job a different Bakha presents himself. "He hardly realised that he had lapsed into activity, so vigorously did he attack his job. And he was completely oblivious . . . the sense of power that he felt as he ended up" (Untouchable 12).

Anand then tries to sidestep and hide Bakha's insensitivity to his dirty and demeaning job. "This forgetfulness or emptiness persisted in him over long period. It was a sort of insensitivity created in him by the kind of work he had to do, a tough skin which must a shield against all the most awful sensations" (Untouchable 12). Here Bakha is allowed the insensitivity while the other outcastes are criticised in the beginning of the novel for showing similar insensitivity to their uncongenial surroundings. In fact, Anand falls into the trap that he had created for himself. If he makes Bakha insensitive like the others then he would not rebel and thus win the (middle class) reader's admiration. On the other hand, if he is shown as sensitive, then it would be impossible for him to work under the conditions shown in the novel. Moreover, a rebellious and vengeful Bakha would hardly appeal to the kind of middle class readers that Anand was appealing to. Right from the beginning of the novel, Mulk Raj Anand portrays Bakha as hardworking unlike his father or even his younger brother. Bakha does not grumble against working

hard but only against the degradation and humiliation that he suffers. He works hard and plays hard. In fact, he takes pride in being a champion hockey player. But “Bakha had principles. With him duty came first, although he was a champion at all kinds of games and would have beaten them hollow at khutti” (Untouchable 29). It is not impossible for servants to be hard workers or good players. But the trouble is that they are so only when they have to be portrayed in a sympathetic light. Take Anand’s other servant character Munoo from Coolie. Munoo is also a hard worker. Servants like Bakha who are sympathised with are presented as doing their work sincerely though not paid well enough. Why they work hard without any grumbling or never shirk like other servants is never questioned or investigated.

Another sympathetic treatment of subaltern character can be seen in Velutha in Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things. The narrative informs us that “He [Velutha] was alike a little magician. He could make intricate toys – tiny windmills, rattles, minutes jewel boxes out of dried palm reeds; he could carve perfect boats out of tapioca stems and figurines on cashew nuts” (God 74) [emphasis added]. It is this dexterity with his hands that made little Ammu like Velutha when they were small children and it is this quality that made him the object of charity by Pappachi. Sent to study, Velutha escapes the fate of many of his class and receives further vocational training.

By the time he was sixteen, Velutha had finished high school and was an accomplished carpenter. He had his own set of carpentry tools and a distinctly German design sensibility. He built Mammachi a Bauhaus dining table with twelve dining chairs in rosewood and a traditional Bavarian chaise lounge in lighter jack. For Baby Kochamma’s annual Nativity plays he made her a stack of wire-framed angels’ wings that fitted on children’s backs like knapsacks, cardboard clouds for the Angel Gabriel to appear between, a dismantlable manger for Christ to be born in. When her garden cherub’s silver arc dried up inexplicably, it was Dr Velutha who fixed its bladder for her.

Apart from his carpentry skills, Velutha had a way with machines. . . . He mended radios, clocks, water-pumps. He looked after the plumbing and the all the electrical gadgets in the house. (God 75)

Velutha is treated sympathetically by the narrative for the simple reason that he is not only physically attractive but also hard working. Velutha is a hard working carpenter

with refined and “distinctly German design sensibility”. It is highly strange that a man with such skills – not merely in carpentry – and with a formal education to boot, should be portrayed as economically dependent like Bakha or Munoo. In the case of the latter two it is understandable for they are minors and unable to resist their elders or adults when they are exploited. Velutha may be a “paravan” or an outcaste. But he does not belong to the lowest caste like Bakha. Such caste distinctions, a part of the Indian social scenario, are absent in Indian novels in English. As Khair had remarked that “it is not that the ‘caste other’ is completely ignored in Indian English fiction, but that his/her presence – in most cases – has been subsumed, rewritten and marginalized.”⁶⁶ Velutha, unlike Bakha, also possesses mobility for the novel specifically mentions his disappearance for four years during which it is rumoured that “he [Velutha] was working on a building site for the Department of Welfare and Housing in Trivandrum. And more recently, the inevitable rumour that he had become a Naxalite. Somebody said they had seen him in Quilon” (*God* 77). Here we can wonder why Velutha’s work for these four years is not described or referred to in detail in the text. It is perhaps because Velutha’s life and work has no meaning, both literally as well textually, unless it is intertwined with that of the middle class characters like Ammu, Rahel or Estha. Velutha’ labour is erased like his thoughts and feelings in the novel.

Such a man coming back and depending on the Ayemenem household for work is one argument that does not hold much water if we take the textual evidence into consideration. It could have been very well for his crippled brother Kuttappen or his father Vellya Paapen. Velutha’s apparent lack of desire for social upward mobility so explicitly manifested in characters Comrade Pillai and other characters is hard to explicate. This reluctance of the author to present Velutha as upwardly mobile could be due the fact that it would then be difficult to present the oppressive Indian social scene as static and unchanging. It is equally true and evident from any random newspaper survey that untouchables are oppressed even now or that caste distinctions even after innumerable socio-legal steps and legislations have not disappeared totally and at times appear more ensconced than before. But, it would be false to dismiss the improvements made in their lives as evident in the fact one of them became the President of the Indian republic. Khair is right in pointing that Indian writers in English have failed to take cognizance even of the daily acts of servants’ resistance or subversion in their zealous

desire to portray epics of suffering.⁶⁷ This is not unconnected to the predominant tendency in much of Indian writing in English to pander to Western audiences' appetite.

While Ammu and Velutha's sexual contact is certainly "transgressive" and celebrated as such in the text we should not forget that it has been embedded within a myth of reciprocity. Ammu gives her body and her self to Velutha and in this romantic and sexual encounter feels liberated. But Ammu certainly does not stop being a part of the Ayemenem household that exploits Velutha's labour. Nor does it give any indication that she tries to help Velutha to improve. It is as if their love dissolves all these class differences and certainly the paradise-like quality given to their encounters remove them from the mundane inequalities. Both Ammu and Velutha find a refuge in the personal relationship and the "romantic union between man and woman", a "new locus of identity",⁶⁸ is used to sidestep the differences of class between the two and reconcile them into a classless society. A kind of mythical union is created by the author to glide over unbridgeable barriers of class, caste. And the language of the sexual encounter is certainly that of the perfect union, a mythic union between man and woman, Velutha, the Adam with Ammu, the perfect Eve in a perfect world. Roy may be brilliant in depicting the oppression of Velutha but she fails to register the possibility of resistance by low castes. We can use in her context Meenakshi Mukherjee's words used with reference to Saratchandra. Roy, like most Indian writers in English, "saw problems in a fragmentary way, the fact remains that . . . [Roy] knew the individuals who made up a village/ town even though [s]he may not have grasped the economic system".⁶⁹

VI

This is what Sera appreciates most about Bhima – this unspoken language, this intimacy that has developed between them over the years . . . When Bhima was the only one who knew, the only one who felt the dampness of the pillowcase after long nights of shedding hot tears, the only one who heard the muffled sounds coming from her and Feroz's bedroom . . . (Space 17-18).

This quotation from Thrity Umrigar's novel reveals the easiest of all the strategies to appropriate the labour of the servant and that is by implicating it in lasting personal

relations. Patriarchal domestic ideologies, as pointed out earlier, have constantly improvised to deal with the servant or for that matter women's labour in the wake of modernity. The earlier methods of physical control could hardly be subscribed to in the literary texts. We have already seen how the Indian home in the nineteenth century was "imagined" in opposition to the "outside" or public sphere. The outside was also the place of the market, which was "esteemed for self-reliance, rationalism and modernity" but was "also decried for being driven by self-interest and instrumentalism". Unlike the market relations which were "amoral" and "forged between atomized actors, governed by contract, in which individuals buy and sell their labour", the master-servant relationship was "imagined as governed by mutual dependence and affective relations, altruism, responsibility and duty."⁷⁰

The imperative to see master-servant relationship in terms of anything other than economic was also motivated by the upper/middle class unease with the sort of power that such a relationship entailed. Bridget Anderson quotes Orlando Patterson's observation that people "have always found naked force or coercion a rather messy, if not downright ugly business, howsoever necessary."⁷¹ Anderson goes on to declare that:

So the beastliness of power is clothed in the language of obligation, support and responsibility rather than power and exploitation. The relationship is presented as one mutual dependence. . . . The relationship draws on notions of protection and responsibility, with the master/mistress having a duty of care towards the servant or helper, who is subject to the employer and bound into their family through a set of hierarchal relations but with some degree of reciprocated responsibility By entering into such a relation, the employer not only demonstrates social status, but also kindness, for which the migrant can be grateful, a gratitude that is expressed in pleasure in service.⁷²

Therefore, the servants, like the women in the family, are represented as enjoying personal relations with the family. The parent-like servant dominates Indian writing in English, as in other fiction. Servants in literary representations are presented as "the natural subjects of ideologies of selfless devotion, sacrifice, altruism".⁷³ To take one such illustration from Upamanyu Chatterjee's The Last Burden we can refer to the ruminations of Jamun, the main protagonist: "As a kid, he [Jamun] too was more intimate with his aya than with his mother. He had continuously striven to wield Aya's fondness for him to

prick Urmila's jealousy . . . [aya was] the surrogate mother of his nonage" (Burden 85-6) [emphasis added].

Here we must remember that this close relationship between Burfi and his aya has been presented to us as childhood reminiscence by an adult narrator. Such representations of the aya as loving surrogate mother effectively block her labour from precise valuation of her labour. The text occludes the narrative possibility that aya has had to look after Burfi because of lack of any other gainful labour and in spite of the exploitative conditions of her service. But all these have been erased with the glorification of the master's happy relationship with the aya. In the above example, the relationship between the child-Burfi with that of his aya has been romanticised and sentimentalised with the latter seen as a foster mother and confidante of the mistress.

Consider this example from A Strange and Sublime Address: "Saraswati loved the child [Surajit], said Mamima, and then she said conspiratorially, she even nursed him to keep him quiet. Sandeep thought of Saraswati's small, wrinkled breasts" (Strange 92). Katzman comments that "many mistresses hired servants to fulfil psychological independent of the work involved. Mistresses might seek companionship, a loving relationship, or a surrogate daughter in a young girl . . . Whatever the relationship, it was not an equal one, and mistresses rarely offered chances for mutual fulfilment".⁷⁴ Katzman's words are worth remembering while considering the following words of Sera: "Even at the sweetest moment of lovemaking with Feroz, it never felt as generous, as selfless, as this massage did. After all, lovemaking always came with strings attached . . . But here, with Bhima, there was none of that" (Space 108). Here Sera, the middle class mistress's reminiscence about her special relationship with her lower class servant Bhima sounds suspect. Even though Bhima responds in the novel to the extra love and care from Sera, it is worth pondering that whether the familiarity and closeness that Sera and the narrator seems to read in the relationship is not a little one-sided and unequal.

It must be conceded that this process of imbricating domestic labour within personal relationships is true not exclusively for domestic servants only. Patriarchy "builds personal relationships *into* exploitation, operate *inside* the sphere of relationships of love, nurture and sexuality" [italics author's]. Most "domestic ideologies prescribe,

elevate, and idealize those personal relations of mother, wife, daughter, daughter-in-law, into which unpaid domestic labour and services are packaged.”⁷⁵ The boundaries between work and familial relationship become thin and the domestic ideologies try to make these boundaries disappear. Domestic ideologies as reflected in the literary texts have often presented a sort of bond with mutual dependence and care between servants and masters.

If we look at Rushdie’s The Moor’s Last Sigh, we find that the protagonist is unable to report his ayah, Miss Jaya Hé’s stealing because she is the wife of his beloved servant and mentor, Lambajan. “I [Moor] could not have betrayed Lambajan; he taught me how to box” (Moor 194). Swapna M Banerjee points out that in imagining and recreating their childhood experiences with servants, the authors in most cases relegated themselves to a “‘junior’ position and assigned to the servants a position of power.”⁷⁶ Likewise, such recollections in Indian fiction in English by adult-narrators of their childhood relationship are more often a construct compensating for their neglect of servants. Shashi Deshpande’s short story “The Day Bapu Died” presents an unnamed narrator who recounts her childhood friendship with Ashok, the son of a low-caste servant Kalappa. She also points out that though her father was a professed Gandhian, he was still prejudiced against Kalappa and Ashok. “Kalappa had a room at the back of our compound; this was called ‘living with us’ and much was made of it. I wouldn’t understand it and wondered why they spoke of Kalappa was living ‘in’ our house, since he never came into it all. . . . It was his son Asok who hovered around the house and I noticed it made my parents a little uncomfortable.”⁷⁷ Here the narrator is obviously criticising the elder generation for their inability to rise above caste considerations. Again in The Last Burden the narrative informs us about the close and loving relationship that Jamun had enjoyed with his aya and the subsequent neglect of her by Jamun’s parents and even by him. Again, the young Kersi in Rohinton Mistry’s story “One Sunday” (Tales from Firozsha Baag, 1987) breaks his favourite cricket bat after feeling guilty over taking part in the public beating of Francis, a servant. But these should not be meant more than a mere self-flagellating exercise or guilty trip. By acknowledging in fiction the servants – their exploitation as well (imaginative or otherwise) authority – Indian novelists tried to amend the wrongs and sanitize the highly stratified, hierarchical relationship.⁷⁸

If we take one example from R. K. Narayan's Swami and Friends, we can see this inversion of the power between the servant and the master:

He [Rajam] peered into a cup and cursed the cook for bringing it so dirty. The cook looked up for a moment, quietly lifted the plate, and saying, "Come and eat in the kitchen if you want food," went away with it.

This was a great disappointment to Swaminathan and Mani, who were waiting with watering mouths. To Rajam it was a terrible moment. To be outdone by his servant before his friends!⁷⁹

Here the servant openly disregards his master's son, Rajam. And the narrative exhibits the humour when Rajam, to save his loss of face before Swami and Mani, pretends to go and kick the servant in the kitchen. The inversion of hierarchy very cleverly turns the narrative from considering the actual exploitative condition of the servant. It is interesting to note that The God of Small Things is also recounted from memory as the twins Estha and Rahel grow up and return to Ayemenem long after the incidents that make up the story. The twins, Rahel in particular, remembers the happy times and the close relationship that they shared with Velutha.

To use Kumkum Sangari's words in another context, the main intention of paternalism is to make sure that there is a non-dissoluble relationship between the servant and the master and one that is kept as far away from the economic province. Thus "domestic service of the servant is a site where the fiction of disinterested labour is sought to be maintained long after the precapitalist economies which gave it birth have ceased to exist."⁸⁰ Domestic labour is highly contradictory and evasive; it can carry elements of emotional fulfilment even as it is marked by power relations. Sara Dickey notes in this regard that:

. . . "affection" remains a quality cultivated in the other by workers and employers alike. These qualities befit a relationship that is often described and enacted in familial terms. Domestic workers address their employers and their families in kin terms denoting simultaneous respect and closeness, such as "mother," "older sister," and "older brother." Employers (who often refer to a worker as "younger sister" or "aunt," depending on the servant's age, but may also dispense with kinship terms if they create more closeness than is desired) define themselves as good employers by saying they treat their servants as "one of the family." These ideas continue to shape the expectations that workers and employers

have of one another, despite the decreasingly patrimonial nature of their relationship.⁸¹

Thus, these personal ties often conceal the real power relationships at work and this, needless to add, facilitates exploitation. It is therefore not entirely improbable that a servant may at times find fulfilment in the relationship with the master's family. It is also not improbable that the master's family at times deals with servants as a part of the family. But the fact remains that this relationship always carried elements of power. "Though forced to imitate 'non-alienated labour', it would always be so until the full erasure of power, both within the family and outside".⁸² It is possible for both the master and servant to be wrong about their relationship, for the simple fact that mere occupancy of a social position does not guarantee objective knowledge.

Tabish Khair praises Arun Mukherjee for correctly noting in Oppositional Aesthetics: Readings from a Hyphenated Space, (1994) that servants are more visible in Attia Hosain's Sunlight on a Broken Column, than in many English novels. "Servants are more visible and deeply integrated into domestic life in Sunlight on a Broken Column – which depicts aspects of life that share a heavy Urduized 'old order' location than most contemporary *Indian English* novels" [italics author's].⁸³ It must be admitted that Hosain's novel and her collection of short stories in Phoenix Fled deal overwhelmingly with servants and perhaps with a greater sympathy as Anita Desai remarks in her Introduction to Sunlight on a Broken Column.

. . . [It] is not only the wealthy and titled who live for *Izzat* and die for *Sharam*. The same primal passions possess those who live in the lowly servants' quarters of the compound. The washerman Jumman speaks in those terms of his daughter Nandi who he feels has disgraced his name when she is found in the garage with the cleaner. "My honour was besmirched, and I felt possessed by a thousand devils," he says after beating her severely.⁸⁴ [italics author's]

But, it would be wrong to assume the complete integration between masters and servants based on certain shared attitudes to women – such as their sexuality, izzat, shame, honour etc. Attitudes shared by masters as well as servants do not make them integrated any more than the shared attitudes between the natives and the colonisers made them integrated. In fact, the relationships between servants and their employers ran an

entire gamut from downright opposition in certain cases to willing co-operation in other cases. Patriarchy ran deep into the society and it cut across class and caste barriers, but did not obliterate them. Khair and Mukherjee are not also entirely correct in assuming that all the servants are integrated into the family in either Sunlight on a Broken Column or Phoenix Fled as this is also a strategy to occlude the past exploitation and contain the ever-increasing pressure of commercialisation and of wage market on domestic service. Attia Hosain's fiction sets up a hallowed past, particularly the past feudal set-up where servants and masters enjoyed a close, reciprocal relationship unlike the modern family where the economics of the wage market rules the roost. Hosain celebrate the virtues of paternalism even which was becoming increasingly difficult in a capitalist world. As the servant turned more and more to a wage labourer with his/her relationship with the employer a purely economic one, the novels turned more and more to depicting a close personal relationship between servants and masters. It is as if the literary texts would compensate for the actual loss of closeness. In the story "White Leopard", Attia Hosain presents two contrasting master-servant relationships, i.e. between the unnamed narrator and Shiv Prasad and between Mr. Bell and Shambhu, Shiv Prasad's son. The former is shown as one of mutual trust, love and obligation. The unnamed narrator's uncle had taken Shiv Prasad into his service knowing full well that the latter was a dacoit. And Shiv Prasad too feels protective and obliged to his master's family. He feels so much a part of the family that he even scolds the young members of his master's family, especially unnamed narrator when she shows fear for lizards or wrongly calculates the money to be sent to the bank. In sharp contrast to this relationship is the one between Mr. Bell or Bela Ram and Shambhu, Shiv Prasad's son. Mr. Bell shouts at Shambhu for every slight mistake and is suspicious of Shambhu. When some money is misplaced, Mr. Bell threatens to drag Shambhu to the police station for stealing. "At a time when the majority of servants changed positions every year or two, the literary prevalence of long-serving family retainers may have stemmed both from paternalist illusions and from their peculiar usefulness as figures of family continuity".⁸⁵

Literary texts continued to praise a different kind of relationship in which the servant enjoyed a social tie with the master too. Here the master gave him/her clothes and other luxuries during the festive occasions, and kept them even when they are too old for work, thus cementing a lifelong relationship. But as Judith Rollins clarifies that the

“traditional paternalistic relationship between master and servant was . . . both consuming and protective of the servant, far more than was its legal basis. Its core was in the tradition of patriarchal domination”⁸⁶ Rollins further quotes Max Weber to point out that such notions of paternalism was defined more by the master than the servant: “The master wields his power without restraint, at his own discretion and, above all, unencumbered by rules, insofar as it is not limited by tradition or by competing powers. . . .”⁸⁷ Moyra Haslett remarks aptly that from “a Marxist perspective, a paternalist system, exemplified in its ‘virtue’ of benevolence, is more exploitative than magnanimous”.⁸⁸ This is so because it is the product of economic arrangements in which the benevolent is alone responsible and no matter how much or how hard the servant worked, the benevolence depended less on his work than on the whims of the employers. Most of the Indian novels in English could be seen as attempts to mystify the social relations and occlude the exploitation which ensures the smooth functioning of the household. We cannot blind ourselves to the fact that Hakiman Bua has been insufficiently compensated for her lifelong devotion to Laila’s family. Judith Rollins points out that:

A hierarchy among Indian domestic workers exists, less elaborate than that of eighteenth-century England, but perhaps even more rigid because particular jobs are associated with particular castes and religions. On the top of the pyramid are the housekeepers and butlers, with gardeners and cooks in the middle, and “general help” (including cleaners, launderers, errand boys, et cetera)⁸⁹

If we examine domestic servants in Indian fiction in English in the light of the above remark then we would find very often the authors limited their positive portraits to the ones at the very top of the hierarchy like the ayas. The sweeper, who is the very bottom, hardly calls for any attention from the authors, except perhaps Mulk Raj Anand. To generalise about servants from the favourable portrait of ayas is wrong. As the fact is that it is these lowest of the low that face the daily rituals of abuse, both from masters and from those above in the servant hierarchy.

They [Sheila and Ganga] looked at each other frankly. They had known each other for a long time and they liked each other well enough, but between them there was no question of love or hate. (68)

VII

One aspect of labour, missing from Indian fiction in English, is the daily rituals of abuse, verbal or physical, suspicion and threats, particularly accompanying the servant's work. Except socially committed writers like Mulk Raj Anand, most literary accounts tend to overlook the impact and nature of such domestic violence on the body and psyche of the servants. "The models of supervision of servants have run the entire gamut from feudal ones like beating, sometimes to death (once legal and sanctioned in pre-colonial times but now illegal), to modern reformatory ones where emphasis is put more on supervision".⁹⁰ With increasing awareness of domestic violence, particularly towards the maids, legal measures such as The Housemaids and Domestic Servants (Conditions of Service and Welfare) Bill, 2004⁹¹ have been put forward and passed. But it is interesting to note that violence towards servants has not called for special attention in literary texts. Servants are exposed to extreme physical violence including murder and rape which, of course, gets noticed more easily. What is not so easily acknowledged is the unwanted physical contact or the mental violence like threats and economic abuse like controlling or denying wages. Due to the personal nature of the service and since most servants live with the masters, the latter have an entire range of punitive measures. These range from like preventing the servant from seeing friends and relatives; sabotaging the servant's social relationships or socially isolating him/her. All these forms of violence have been very dimly noted by Indian fiction in English. We can accuse it of the same bias that Gyanendra Pandey applies to the historian that only the "disorganized", "spontaneous", and "haphazard" violence of the people [servants] catches everyone's attention.

[This]. . . violence recognised as such by the [literary] historian is divorced from the routine violence that marks the functioning of the modern bureaucratic state and the advancement of modernity in general, as well as the daily lives of the "marginal" groups – untouchables, immigrants, women, children, domestic servants and a myriad others. Such violence and the many small acts of counter violence it provokes, is so "normal", so "everyday", so little threatening to security and trade, that it goes unrecorded by . . . [literature] – except occasionally in sensational accounts of "criminality", "deviance", or "madness" . . .⁹² [emphasis added]

One of the typical responses to violence towards servants is that they themselves provoke their abuse. It was assumed that if the battered servant was more hardworking or compliant, the employer would stop abusing him/her. Thus, the servant was identified as the problem, whereas the truth was that no matter how hard the servant worked, the abuse depended on the whims of the employer. Here it would be wrong to assume that violence towards servants is essentially masculine. It is also class and race oriented. Munoo and Velutha suffer both at the hands of the masters as well as their mistresses. Indian novels in English, more or less, confront the primitive aspect of private life with regards to the weaker sex, particularly the middle class women. But it is somewhat silent when it comes reflecting that which is routinely committed on the lower caste women and other male servants, except when it results in fatal or near fatal consequences.

Servants are predominantly portrayed as unable to grasp their situation and hence shown as helpless victims; the trope of incomprehension or confusion is always applied to servants. This is interesting for allowing the concession to servants the intelligence to grasp their exploitative position would mean that Indian writing in English would have to consider their resistance. This would also mean that servants are not as helpless as they are projected to be and are able to get back at their masters in howsoever, little ways they can. It is this reason why novelists seeking social reform like Anand resort to “messiah figures” who would embody the change that the authors want. Suresht Renjen Bald points that the “characterization of the messiah figures in all the novels [of Anand] is similar: virtue of traditional Hindu heroes appear combined with those of a Leninist hero.” Bald refers to Mohan who is “is respected and admired by the rickshaw pullers because of his renunciation of the comfortable life”. On the other hand, Onkarnath, the Congressite trade unionist, “lacks the simplicity of Mohan, the true revolutionary”.⁹³ These figures are “the incongruous example of elites rebelling against their elitism, yet unable to forget their apartness from the ‘people’. The Revolution to them is not a means to end the economic alienation of the proletariat, but an end to their own alienation from both traditional and modern society; it is a search for emotional fulfillment.”⁹⁴ Asma Rasheed points to a similar figure in Asad (Sunlight on a Broken Column): a “‘young ascetic’ in handspun clothes, an ‘attractive monk’ with deeply ‘dreaming eyes,’ who teaches the illiterate, works in villages, organizes meeting, campaigns for the party.” Rasheed argues that “Hosain through her narrative, locates two possible identities for properly ‘Indian

Muslims': one, the liberal armchair intellectualism of Laila and two, the activist-nationalist fervour of Asad.”⁹⁵ The trouble with such authors is that they are unable to acknowledge even remotely of any alternative that the subalterns might offer. The following remark of Ipsita Chanda's about Roy's The God of Small Things can be seen as applicable to most of Indian fiction in English:

This [The God of Small Things] is not Velutha's text; it is the text of Rahel, Estha, their mother Ammu or even their family. Velutha exists; he acts; the people from whose perspective is told are sympathetic to him – but here seems to be a classic case of the subaltern not being able to speak. What he says cannot be heard by those in whose world he finds himself because in the only language they speak his experience is an unfamiliar one, the experience of the Other. His motives are known only to himself, as are his feelings.⁹⁶

Roy, like most Indian novelists in English, believe in “the category of human – quintessentially liberal-modern-Western” and the fact that this is most easily transcribed in English. Meenakshi Mukherjee also hints at the role of language in the inability of Indian novelists in English to represent subaltern agency. This is partly because “in the English texts of India there may be a greater pull towards a homogenization of reality, an essentializing of Indian, a certain flattening out of the complicated and conflicting contours, the ambiguous and shifting relations that exist between individuals and groups in a plural community.” This is so because “for the Indian writer in English there may be other unarticulated compulsions – the uncertainty about his target audience, . . . spread far and wide, within India and outside, hence the need for an even-toned minimalist representation that will not depend too much on the intricacies and contradictions in the culture and the inflections of voice which only an insider can decipher.”⁹⁷

But servants can indeed resist and get back at their employers. Let us consider the following example from Salman Rushdie's The Moor's Last Sigh:

“You can talk”, she [Jaya Hé, the cook] said. “Your family. Perverts. Your sisters and mother also. In your baby time. How they played with you. Too sick.”

I did not know, have never known, if she was telling the truth. Miss Jaya Hé was a mystery to me, a woman so deeply angry at her lot in life that she had become capable of the most bizarre revenges. (Moor 197)

Here we find one of the ways in which the servant can get back at the employers. Miss Jaya Hé, the cook of Aurora Zogoiby, tries to get back at her mistress by stealing ornamental or decorative knick-knacks from the house and selling it. She also tells Aurora's son, Moraes or the Moor about his sexual abuse at his mother and sisters' hands. The perpetrated abuse could be imagined, but that does not lessen its power to hurt. Here we find the servant's power to resist by stealing or spreading rumours. But we do not find that the narrative acknowledges or even hints at such potentially subversive power of the servant. Gossip of servants is most irksome to the masters because it is outside the control/supervision of the master. What's more gossip presents alternative and subversive meanings. In The Dialogic Imagination Mikhail Bakhtin suggests that the "spying and eavesdropping" of servants represents "that distinctive, embodied point of view on the world of private life without which a literature treating private life could not manage."⁹⁸ But Bruce Robbins begs to differ for even if the servants became privy to "their master's secrets" they could not manage to get "even local leverage". Gossip gave but very limited power to women, apart from injuring reputations. "Power was not so easily rocked by anyone's testimony."⁹⁹ Even during the colonial times when the white masters enjoyed almost complete control over their native servants, the latter was able to exert a certain amount of resistance, howsoever indirectly. Charles Allen in his Plain Tales From the Raj: Images of British India in the Twentieth Century (1975) notes repeatedly the circumspection and strain that marked the relationship between the white colonial master and his native servant. "One always had to behave in a comparatively circumspect manner in the matter of drink or flirtations, because servants were constantly hovering around . . . Your bearer would pass the word to another and soon it would be known that Mr So and So sahib was having an affair with such and such a memsahib."¹⁰⁰

Usha Bande's presentation of how the servants in the literatures of India's regional languages protest makes an interesting contrast. Sudha Narvane's Marathi short story "Suud" (Revenge) portrays the defiance shown by Veenu, a servant boy. Ill-treated by the mistress of the house the young lad takes his revenge on her child. He teaches abusive language to the child and makes him repeat the unutterable in the presence of guests. He runs away after accomplishing his mission. In another Marathi short story a young maid servant is fascinated by the beautiful clothes, earrings and other goodies possessed by the daughters of the house who are her age. Once humiliated by the eldest

daughter, she cuts holes in her new birthday sari and feels satisfied for having avenged herself on her tormentor.¹⁰¹ The trouble with Indian fiction in English was that it recorded the “complaints of mistresses [and masters and] . . . that it rarely was discussed in economic terms. When observers [authors/narrators] discussed conflict between mistress/master and servant, it was in terms far different from those used in contemporary discussions of conflicts of capital and labour, of bosses and workers.”¹⁰²

[Indian fiction in English] . . . while faithfully reproducing the surface of working-class life, refuse to set it in any larger context. The characters are placed in working-class settings but their problems are seen in personal terms rather as a consequence of structural inequalities. Representations of the working class thus suppressed the issue of class in the very act of staging it.¹⁰³

One of the reasons why servants’ work was missed out by most Indian novelists in English is that the two roles of paid housekeeper and housewife were in danger of a troubling confusion. As mentioned earlier Elisabeth Jay had rightly pointed out how the wearing and parading of the “chatelaine”, a miniaturised key and chain worn as an accessory, by wealthy Victorian women, succeeded in creating the concept of the hard-working mistress ably looking after her home. Adopting other parodic imitations of housework, these rich women tried to posit themselves as hard workers though the “the real work went on below stairs performed by the unseen ‘hands’ of domestic skivvies”.¹⁰⁴

Here we can spend a brief thought on the stories of successful servants exemplified by the young heroine of Bharati Mukherjee’s short story “Jasmine”.¹⁰⁵ Gayatri C. Spivak’s words that “the old scenario of empowering a privileged group or a group susceptible to upward mobility as the authentic inhabitants of the margin”¹⁰⁶ means that we cannot take one Jasmine’s example as representative of the modern servant’s ability to improve their lives. We would also find that Arvind Adiga’s Balram Halwai is also not much of an improvement as the structural inequalities remain at the end of the story. Malasri Lal praises Rama Mehta for the portrayal of Pari, the senior-most maid in Inside the Haveli (1977), a portrayal “that would be hard to match elsewhere in Indian English fiction because servants are usually faceless providers of creature comforts.”¹⁰⁷

She [Pari] had already known four generations of the family, shared in the joys of births and marriages, in the sorrow of deaths

and misfortunes of the haveli. . . . The new daughters-in-law knew that she to be given the same respect as one paid to a relative. She was a maid only in name and she never tried to be anything more. But the other servants knew her position and treated her with deference. They took her orders as if those of the mistress.¹⁰⁸

Pari is able to scold even the upper class and educated protagonist Geeta “for talking too much, or not displaying sufficient subservience” (Haveli 91). But Lal is wrong here to confound Pari’s authority for real power. In fact, it is merely a delegated power. The eldest servant is delegated some of power by the master’s family and this serves two purposes. First, it ensures that servants, at least those at the top of the hierarchy, do not rebel. But the other more important purpose is that it spares the masters the unease that comes with authoritarian rule over the servants. It is this power of Attia Hosain’s Hakiman Bua that critics have mistaken for integration with the master’s family. She is only accorded respect and in return she keeps an eye on the other servants and manages them for the smooth running of the master’s household.

It is not as if all Indian English writers fail to note the hard labour of the servants. In a rare moment in The Space between Us, Thrity Umrigar presents such gliding over of the domestic work of the servant by the middle class mistress while juxtaposing it with the servant’s painful consciousness of the work.

Bhima is in the kitchen, washing the dishes from last night’s dinner. Sera watches as her hands, thin and dark as the branches of a tree, fly over the pots and pans, scrubbing them until they sparkle like the noonday sun.

Sometimes she can’t figure Serabai out. On the one hand, it makes her flush with pride when Serabai calls her “my Bhima” and talks about her proprietarily. On the other hand, she always seems to be doing things that undercut Bhima’s interests. Like refusing Viraf baba’s offer to buy a dishwasher. How nice it would be not to run her arthritic hands in water all day. Bending over the sink to scrub the dishes has also begun to hurt her back, so that, at the end of the day, it sometimes takes half the walk before she can straighten up. . . . And this morning, making her feel guilty because she had fix omelets for her own daughter and son-in-law. So what if she hates chopping onions? Does she, Bhima, enjoy squatting to shit in a communal room? But she does it because there is no other choice. Compared to that humiliation, chopping onions feels as easy as cutting a cake. (Space 19-20) [emphasis added]

Here Umrigar acknowledges that there is a gap between the viewpoint of both the mistress and her servant regarding the domestic chores. In spite of her kindness and sympathy for Bhima, Sera is unable to see the former's work as hard and backbreaking. Bhima's alternating love and hatred for her mistress is perhaps one of the most complex pictures of servants in Indian fiction in English. However, such visions are eclipsed as Umrigar relapses to stereotyped attitudes later in the novel. Besides, we must not forget that Bhima has been portrayed favourably with clean habits and hardworking, i.e. a middle class figure. How far the author or the reader would have sympathised a dirtier and lazier version of Bhima is worth considering. Moreover, Bhima is shown as a faithful figure who sees herself as a part of the Dubash family. Out of her sense of loyalty she dismisses her and Maya's accusations and is prepared to do is willing to do more than her chores.

Her anger spent, Bhima's sense of fair play and her stout affection for the Dubash family take over. Oh, you ungrateful woman, she chides herself. And who looked after you when you had malaria? Was it your ghost of a husband? Who gave you money just yesterday, so you could take a cab to Maya's college? Was it your spread-her-legs granddaughter? No, it was this same woman whose salt you eat, who you are thinking ugly thoughts about. Shame on you. (Space 20)

It is out of this gratitude that she heals Sera's bruises using traditional medicine even though it is not required of her. The close relationship that Bhima apparently shares with Sera makes the final betrayal more poignant. In this context we can recount Judy Giles words that "the economic explanation do not adequately account for the cultural significance of a system so pervasive and taken for granted that appeared part of the 'natural' order. A sense of self and identity based on the practices and markers of servant-keeping was a significant element of the social positioning adopted by middle-class women."¹⁰⁹

To sum up, Chapter Four examined how literary texts erase the entire gamut of servants' physical and expressive chores and instead represent them as merely executing "peremptory aesthetic duties". The texts present the running of Indian domestic scene as natural, ignoring the servant's labour or encapsulate this drudgery in a few words at best. It is this unseen and underpaid labour of the servants that makes it possible for the

masters to indulge in leisure, and other activities. Most Indian writers in English saw the relation between servants and employers always in social terms – cultural, sexual, etc, but never in economic terms. Reading Indian fiction in English one would “conclude that servants spent the vast majority of their time peeping through keyholes, reading their master’s letters, gossiping, having affairs (with each other and with their masters), corrupting children, and worshipping their masters and mistresses with a dog-like devotion (despite the fact that several of these claims are mutually exclusive). In fact, the one thing that . . . [one didn’t] catch most literary servants is working”.¹¹⁰

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CHAPTER FIVE

MARGINALISATION OF THE SERVANT'S SPACE

Space has its own values, just as sounds and perfumes have colours, and feelings weight.

Claude Lévi-Strauss

I

In the preceding chapters we have explored how the servants, particularly their bodies and labour, have been marginalised or erased by Indian novelists in English. Another aspect of servants, i.e. their living quarters or space has also been similarly erased in the texts in the effort to marginalize the presence of servants as much as possible. Literary representations of middle class physical settings just tended to ignore the servants' space – their place of residence, the place where they are served their food and eat it, the place where their leisure is spent etc. This absence of the servant's space in Indian fiction in English is striking for most of texts deal with the household scene of middle classes. And servants, even when part-time, spent plenty of time in their masters' household occupying a certain amount of "space". In this chapter we would highlight in the literary texts the "absence" or the manner of presentation, if there is any, of the lived spaces of the domestic servants. We would find that servants were not only denied a fair share of the material comforts but there is also a conscious effort in the texts to distort, and dismiss the servant's space and those parts of the house, such as the kitchen when it is occupied only by the servant.

The concept of "space" has received much critical attention in recent times. Henri Lefebvre points out that:

Space is becoming the principal stake of goal-directed actions and struggles. It has of course always been the reservoir of resources, and the medium in which strategies are applied, but it has now become something more than the theatre, the disinterested stage or setting, of action. Space does not eliminate the other materials or resources that play a part in the socio-political arena, be they raw materials or the most finished of products, be they businesses or "culture". Rather, it brings them all together and then in a sense substitutes itself for each factor separately by enveloping it. The outcome is a vast movement in terms of which space can no longer be looked upon as an "essence" as an object, distinct from the point of view of (or as compared with) "subjects", as answering to a logic of its own. . . . its role is less and less neutral, more and more active, both as instrument and as goal, as means and as end.¹

Michel de Certeau's The Practice of Everyday Life (1984), Gaston Bachelard's The Poetic of Space (1964), Edward Soja's Post-modern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory (1989) are some works dealing with space. For Soja,

social reality is not something that exists independent of space. “Social reality is not just coincidentally spatial, existing ‘in’ space, it is presuppositionally and ontologically spatial. There is no unspatialized reality. There are no aspatial social processes. Even in the realm of pure abstraction, ideology, and representation, there is a pervasive and pertinent, if often hidden, spatial dimension.”² In postcolonial criticism the concept of space occupies a pride of place. Even Edward Said wrote in Orientalism (1978) that the “geographic boundaries accompany the social, ethnic, and cultural ones in expected ways.” He goes on to state that “objective space of a house – its corners, corridors, cellar, rooms – is far less important than what poetically it is endowed with, which is usually a quality with an imaginative or figurative value”. Said acknowledges that “space acquires emotional and even rational sense by a kind of poetic process, whereby the vacant or anonymous reaches of distance are converted into meaning for us here.” In other words, Said argues that the “Oriental [even the geographical or the physical aspect] was something more than what was empirically known about it.”³ Critics, influenced by postcolonialism and feminism, have also noted the politics of space particularly how it is manipulated and denied not just to individuals based on race but on gender, particularly how there has been a division of space into public and private and how women have been relegated to the latter and silenced.⁴

So far as domestic servants are concerned, there is a similar process by which they are relegated to the private sphere and thus marginalized. Even when the texts purportedly deal with the domestic scenario, the servants are pushed to the background, particularly their spaces. In the texts under consideration we would find the preponderance of representations of the “‘front stage settings’ (those spaces for family living and public entertainment)” relegating to the background the “‘backyard settings’ (spaces for work)”.⁵ The “backstage” is the space in which the servants tended to work and occupy.⁶ So, servants are naturally excluded. Now, the description of the physical settings itself could be “objective” or neutral and subjective or coloured. But even when objects are described objectively, there is always an element of subjectivity involved as evident from the above comment from Lefebvre. In the case of Indian fiction in English, we have to remember that more often than not the narrator/focalizer is from the privileged class and not servants. We can refer to Agastya’s description of his uncle’s garden as “simple”⁷ as an example of the subjective focalization. Since the garden itself is inanimate, the psychological facet of focalization is relevant only to the human

focalizer perceiving it. So it is obvious that these middle class characters/narrators/focalizers would hardly pay much attention to the servants' space. However, it may be argued that descriptions of space or external details have hardly served much purpose in Indian fiction in English. Meenakshi Mukherjee points out that some critics like V. S. Naipaul allege that Indians (including writers) are impervious to external details. "The outer world matters only in so far as it affects the inner." Citing Gandhi's My Experiments with Truth as a representative of Indian autobiographies, Naipaul points out that "there are only three gratuitous references to landscape"⁸ in it. This indifference to external details would mean that in Indian novels in English the presence or absence of a particular landscape does not carry any (ideological) significance. In this context, we can consider Meenakshi Mukherjee's comment:

The fidelity to actuality involves a focusing on the immediate, the here and now, on details of the visual world, on specific human action and its verifiable human consequences. Indian literature did not have any tradition of this variety of realism because it was based on a very different notion of reality. Even when the nineteenth-century Indian writer started consciously to emulate the western writer, interest in the palpable surface of physical reality was slow to evolve. Descriptions of the sky or a sunset or a landscape are often found as stylised set pieces in these early novels.⁹

While this is partly true with regard to early models in Indian English fiction, it can hardly be applied to most of the texts written in the twentieth century, particularly after the R. K. Narayan or Mulk Raj Anand's realistic novels. Most of the literary texts under consideration deal with upper/middle class social scenario and so naturally move over the material domestic set-up of these two classes. Though this domestic space occupied by the masters includes that of the servants, more so in the case of live-in or full time servants, most Indian English fiction avoids describing or paying at least the same attention to details in the case of servants' quarters. The moment these texts step into the servants' quarters, the narratives become derisive, if not instantaneously dismissive, vague and generalising. For instance, there are several descriptions of houses such as the Deputy Collector Srivastav's house (English 52-53), or Agastya's room at the Government Rest House, Madna. But there is not one single description of the servant's space, for instance, the kitchen either in Srivastav's house nor Vasant's kitchen or room at the Government Rest House. It is only when the exigencies of plot demands that we

have references to the kitchen. Take for instance the first visit of Agastya to Srivastav's house which is described extensively, at least the front part, i.e. the lawn (English 52-53). But when it came to the kitchen, there is a marked absence.

“The servants always go and smoke bidis beyond the kitchen. And it is such a big house that they can't hear from there,” said Mrs Srivastav. In her voice was . . . pride in the size of the house, and relief that the servants did not smoke bidis *in* the kitchen.

The corridor was almost opposite Agastya. He saw the servants before Srivastav. They strolled round a corner into sight, sharing a bidi, Ramsingh scratching his (own) balls, while Srivastava and Menon continued to shriek for them. Gopu trampled on the stub, then both began running, ending in a close finish in the room, panting like defeated marathon men. (English 56) [*italics author's*]

Here there is a reference to the kitchen beyond which the servants smoked but we are never led to that kitchen even once. All the parts of the house are not given equal attention in the narrative. We find that servants, in this case Ramsingh and Gopu, are shown as appearing but their space is not described. They appear, do the needful and then retire to the kitchen or elsewhere and we are never presented with them again. The narrative never goes to the kitchen or to the living quarters where we could see the servants and see their lives, at least those parts unconnected with their employers. The refusal of the narrative to see the servants' space is a strategy to render them invisible.

Just as we have dealt with such material culture as clothes, food in the earlier chapter on body, so also we have to deal with the living quarters to show how they are produced in the process of social interaction between servants and their masters. “The servants' quarters reflected their employers' attitudes . . . architecturally as well as materially”.¹⁰ The presentation of such space or its absence reflected the anxiety to contain the presence of servants within the texts. In Indian fiction in English the body as well as the “lived space” of the servant serves as the predominant site for the “othering” of the servant and the construction of the upper/middle class identity. “The environment is made to represent a fear of other people.”¹¹ The texts, thus, not only ascribe a relationship between the servants and their space, but also manipulate the “observed” domestic space to deny to the servants as little space as possible, push him to the margins and thus render him invisible as much as possible. Thus, space “is not a receptacle, a vessel that can be filled and emptied of its contents – ideology, history, force etc. – at a whim . . . Space exists only as it is inhabited: it is created by the act of occupancy.”¹²

II

So far as Indian fiction in English is concerned Raja Rao's Kanthapura (1938) is perhaps the only work where the narrator admits frankly that she was not interested in describing the subalterns' lived space. "Till now I've [Achakka] spoken only of the Brahmin quarter. Our village had a Pariah quarter too, . . . and a Sudra quarter. How many huts had we there? I do not know. . . . Of course, you wouldn't expect me to go to the Pariah quarter," ¹³ Here, the narrator, an old Brahmin woman of the village of Kanthapura, declares that she cannot describe the sudra (Pariah) quarters since she dare not visit it on account of her high caste. Rao's highly stratified and somewhat rigid rural community is not replicated too often in Indian fiction in English. In fact most of the texts that we have seen so far deal with urban settings where the restrictions of caste are hard to maintain. In fact, apart from odd novels like Kamala Markandaya's Nectar in a Sieve, there is hardly any Indian novel in English which is located predominantly in rural India. Moreover, domestic servants, at least those employed for chores inside the house are not "sudras". In other words, in the literary texts under consideration there is a strong possibility of close proximity amongst the masters and servants in the urban household and easy accessibility at least for the former to visit and inspect the latter's quarters. But even then we would be hard pressed to find extensive descriptions of the servants' quarters in the texts. This is also strange considering the fact that most Indian novelists in English, and particularly the women, tend to stress on the domestic arena. "Women writers, being thoroughly conversant with the complicated rituals of homemaking, are often tempted to write elaborate scenes using interior space. Weddings, religious ceremonies, childbirth, deathbed are a few favourite inclusions to which the writer usually grants all the colour, emotion and sentiment called forth by these rites of passage." ¹⁴ To substantiate this remark, Malasri Lal cites the beginning scene from Attia Hosain's Sunlight on a Broken Column where there is hushed gloom in Babajan's household as he lies dying. But what Lal overlooks is that the description is restricted to the inside of the house where Babajan is lying. The servants' quarters are dismissed as being unusually quiet. "The quarrels of the maid-servants were desultory and less shrill; the men-servants' voices did not carry over the high wall; the sweeper, the gardeners and the washerman drank less and sang no more to the rhythm of the drum" [emphasis added]. ¹⁵

Servants' quarters, normally, are not a problem to avoid in most upper class houses where an adjacent wing or block can be added for them. Servants could be dismissed as and when their services were not required. But with middle class households with a smaller house, servants' quarters become problematic.

Modern urban housing where shortage of space is a perennial problem creates a crisis vis-à-vis use of space by servants, particularly bathrooms. The use of open public space for ablutions is one solution with employers turning a blind eye. Many unstable illegally built additions to homes are geared to the needs of domestic workers and become a way of creating separate spaces within the home "for servants".¹⁶

Thus, these quarters become an integral part of the employer's house and so their physical presence was not to be so easily dismissed. The middle class used and manipulated the domestic space in such a way to deny the servants as much as possible of it. "Saraswati was sleeping on the terrace, a small, huddled figure. The sun was high and scorching, and it was uncomfortably hot, as it always is between rains".¹⁷ Here the maidservant Saraswati is forced to sleep on the terrace, to give the family of Chottomama who live in a relatively small house the necessary privacy. Again later when another maidservant Meera felt sleepy "she [Meera] walked to the guest room . . . [and] lay down on the carpet. To her right was a bed meant for a guest . . ." (Strange 192-193). Later when she washes her hands at the kitchen tap, she is forbidden to do so by Rehman.

Meanwhile, in the kitchen, the maid sighed and washed her hands at the kitchen basin.

"Don't let memsaab catch you doing that," Rehman said.

"Why?" she asked with some irritation.

"Nothing, it's just that she doesn't like people washing in the kitchen. You have to go the bathroom inside." (Strange 185)

Meera is forbidden to use the kitchen tap which is meant only cooking. The middle class insistence on thresholds that cannot be crossed by the servants is brought out superbly by Amit Chaudhuri. He also highlights the denial of the servants to unrestricted use of the domestic space. Meera cannot sleep wherever she wants nor can she wash, eat or sit anywhere. Later in the same story titled "The New Maidservant" we find that Meera and Rehman sitting on the kitchen floor and having their lunch (Strange 189). Meera, Rehman and the sweeper all use corridors to access certain areas of the house without being seen by their employers.

But even here too we find that descriptions of household space reflected the attempts to preserve such class/caste boundaries. The “backstage setting” or kitchen at times attracted interest but only because the plot required such transgression. The “tension” or anxiety about the servant’s physical presence is not entirely erased. The politics of such spatial location within the domestic arena could be traced to an anxiety. Rehman’s thieving nature is brought out by describing the kitchen scene where he brings out the pilfered “jar of mango chutney” (Strange 190). There is also another reason why Chaudhuri’s depiction of the kitchen does not warrant praise. “Segregation of space”, Radhika Chopra points out, “is critical in demarcating the position of insider-outsider.” The master and servant may share space in the kitchen, but this does not mean anything. The kitchen is one such place where the servant “must be visibly present” as he/she is a worker and nothing else. But there “are other spaces where a worker must remain unnoticed, especially in the presence of guests (the acme of the outside with the home)”.¹⁸ And this is what we get to see in most of Indian fiction in English. In other words, by positing Rehman and Meera in the kitchen, the author/narrator further confirms that servants are to be visible in the “spaces” constructed for them.

To grasp the reason for denying the servants the domestic space, we have to understand the importance as well as imperatives behind the reconstitution of the Indian upper/middle class family, particularly in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Of course, this reorganisation is not necessarily peculiar to the Indian family. Bruce Robbins points out that from the eighteenth century in England there was “a sudden and well-documented new anxiety on the part of the masters and mistresses about the damage that servant spies and informants could do.”¹⁹ This is in sharp contrast to the early servants’ ease and freedom that Mikhail Bakhtin commented on while discussing Apuleius’ The Golden Ass in The Dialogic Imagination. Unlike eighteenth century servants, earlier servants were “the most privileged witnesses to [the] private life” of their lords and the latter “are as little embarrassed in a servant’s presence as they are in the presence of an ass”.²⁰ As stated earlier, the family or the domestic space, as distinct from the public sphere, had for various reasons, become more sacrosanct for the upper/middle classes.

In the Indian context right from the early Vedic times there was segregation of servants and slaves, particularly those from the lowest caste. But as we have seen the review in Chapter One, there is conclusive proof that servants or slaves from other castes

enjoyed a greater freedom of movement. The imposition of restrictions increased during the colonial encounter where the importance of the family for the subjugated Indian classes assumed a new significance for the simple reason that it was the only sphere controlled by them. As mentioned earlier the family became the site for struggle between the colonials and the natives with all debates on identity, nation, progress, modernity centred on the family.

The discourse of nationalism . . . [separated] the social space into *ghar* and *bahir*, the home and the world. The world is the external, the domain of the material; the home represents our inner spiritual self, our true identity. The world is a treacherous terrain of the pursuit of material interests, where practical considerations reign supreme. It is also typically the domain of the male. The home in its essence must remain unaffected by the profane activities of the material world – and woman is its representation. And so we get an identification of social roles by gender to correspond with the separation of the social space into *ghar* and *bahir*.²¹ [italics author's]

Since the world “was a place of oppression and daily humiliation,” Partha Chatterjee adds, the colonized Indians felt “the crucial need . . . to protect, preserve and strengthen the inner core of the national culture, its spiritual essence.” In other words, no “encroachments by the colonizer must be allowed in that inner sanctum,”²² – the home or domestic sphere. Dipesh Chakravorty, however, notes that this “Indian home” was not to be based on the traditional one. He cites an anonymous nineteenth century Bengali text on women’s education *Streetiksha* (1877) to show how much the Victorian domestic ideal had influenced the Indians. Unlike the traditional Indian house where dirt, disorder, prevailed the European household was seen as clean, orderly and pleasing.²³

Thus, the family and the domestic space had to be protected not only against all outsiders, foreigners but others (particularly the lower class/caste) who could possibly be a threat to the new values such as “cleanliness”, “hygiene” “purity” of the family. So far as servants are concerned, there was an extra urgency for the masters because servants, more particularly those who stayed with their masters, were very easily privy to the family’s secrets. The domestic space – both physical and behavioural – had to be arranged to protect it from the servants and other outsiders. Here we can borrow Mary Louise Pratt’s concept of the “contact zone” from her *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992). Reworking Pratt’s use for subject-hood in the contact between

colonizers and colonized, we can posit that the middle class “homes” are “‘contact zones,’ social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination”.²⁴ It is a “social space” in which the upper/middle class master and the lower class (and very often low caste) servant “come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict”.²⁵

Kumkum Sangari uses Robert Kerr’s The Gentlemen’s House; or How to Plan English Residence, from the Parsonage to the Palace (1864) to stress the growing importance of privacy in the Victorian architectural planning. Normally the upper/middle class house was divided into physically into two sectors to accommodate separately the families and servants. “The ‘essential privacy’ of the former was to be ensured by obscuring everything that passed on the other side of the ‘boundary’. This was to be achieved by the proper location of kitchens, windows and gardens (to prevent being overheard or seen unexpectedly and to block out unsightly labour) and also by separating entrances, sleeping rooms, routes of ‘traffic’ through staircase and corridors.”²⁶ The following is an accurate description of the kitchen of a middle class household as given by Amit Chaudhuri: “And in the kitchen an electric light was glowing, for the kitchen was so placed that it faced the kitchen of the neighbouring flat and was thus cut off from the sun. Besides the kitchen windows were mostly kept closed to prevent the embarrassment and wasteful curiosity of gazing into the faces of the servants in the opposite flat” (Strange 187). We can take an illustration from Attia Hosain’s Sunlight on a Broken Column where servants are perhaps more visible. But here too we see the segregation of servants from the masters. We have already seen how Babajan’s illness meant not only silence in the household but also outside including the servants’ quarters. Thus, even in the apparently more integrated world of Hosain’s fiction, there is segregation of male servants. “Chuttan, the young man who performed the duty of keeping a watchful eye on flies all day, always left the room when my [Laila’s] aunts came in, but Karam Ali was allowed to stay because he was as old as Baba Jan, and had seen their babyhood” (Sunlight 30). Here we see how the young servant is denied the free use of the household space. This is perhaps because the potential sexuality of the young male servant. Radhika Chopra writes that the male servant’s “potentially dangerous sexuality for the women of the employer household is most evident in the women’s

avoidance behaviour as well as the exclusion of the worker from spaces like bedrooms and bathrooms.”²⁷

Set entirely apart from the family’s living space, the quarters reflect the sense that domestics should inhabit areas of the home where the work was to be performed – the “backstage”. This separation between servants and family is noticeable in the architecture of the spaces: the large, open hallway gives way to a narrow one (always with a door separating spaces) . . . whereas the family reaches its private space through grand, ornate staircases, entryways to the servants living spaces are narrow . . . The backstage of the servant’s spaces . . . is also reflected architecturally: they are entirely separated from the families’ living spaces by their locations in the back of the house . . . an indication, perhaps, that prophylaxis-obsessed, middle-class employers felt that their lower-class servants, who were usually from a different culture as well, were not hygienic.²⁸

Very often, the servants’ space is erased by avoiding any reference to it and, if at all necessary, present it as little and/or as vaguely as possible. And this starts with the servants’ place of origin. “Rehman’s [the cook] country was Bihar. His wife and children and seventy-two-year father lived there in a village” (Strange 189). Such ignorance or generalising from the author in a work which tries to particularise the setting is unforgivable. But for middle class authors like Chaudhuri, servants are less than human and whose hi(story) does not merit any particular mention. So he is able to generalise Rehman’s origin as from Bihar, a large state within the Indian Union, which is saying not much. It is true that Chaudhuri’s work deals with the Kolkata and in figures like Rehman exhibit a hangover of colonial times where the upper-class Bengali “bhadralok” or gentleman’s predilection for Hindustani or Muslim cooks marked their social status. But it is surprising that he should resort to generalisation in a work where every tiny detail in humdrum life is paid so much attention. The summary dismissal of Rehman’s place of origin glares in sharp contrast to the details paid to the cities of Kolkata and Oxford.

If we turn to Upamanyu Chatterjee’s works we find that there is a similar lack of interest towards servants’ space. For instance, in The Last Burden we find that in spite of the close relationship with Kasibai, Jamun does not bother to know her past, including her native place. “When Jamun received the telegram about Urmila’s heart failure, Kasibai and Vaman had been in their village hundreds of kilometres away in the district of Yavatmal” [emphasis added].²⁹ Here we find that same dismissal of the servant’s

space. Kasibai's village is not only one in the several in the district Yavatmal, but it is hundreds of kilometres away, meaning distant, unfamiliar and not worth considering. Jamun's words here reproduce the indifference about the servant's history. Later in a conversation, Jamun's neighbour Hegiste divulges to Jamun that "She [Kasibai, the maidservant] learnt this afternoon, from a visiting fluff from her bit of world, that the cock's last sexpot snuffed it some weeks ago – encephalitis, deduces my [Hegiste] wife from Kasibai's reportage" (Burden 282) [emphasis added]. The term "her bit of world" connotes a sense of otherness of Kasibai's place. Let us turn to another example from Salman Rushdie's The Moor's Last Sigh where the Moor "half-remembered that he [Lambajan, a servant] came from a village somewhere in Maharashtra, but it was being made shamefully plain that I [the Moor] had known nothing of importance about him, nor made it my business to know" [emphasis added].³⁰ Khair point out that Rushdie for all his inclusion of servant characters in his novels was not interested in them.

In fact, Lambajan Chandiwala marks a further degree of . . . acculturation of the "other": his very identity and name are creations of Aurora's (and the Moor's) class background. . . . He has no real past before getting knocked down by Aurora and being assigned a part and a name and identity out of European literature (in translation). Even when we realize – through his connections with and support of the reactionary "Mainduck" Raman Fielding – that Lambajan did have a name and a past outside the Moor's circle, that alternate reality is only hinted at (by Fielding to be exact) and never depicted. It stays out of the range of narration.³¹

Thus, servants are not merely denied any humanly characteristic but also the space that s/he inhabited or inhabits is inevitably denied to the reader. The following extract from Amit Chaudhuri's short story "Portrait of an Artist" depicts the middle class prejudice against lower class habitation and by extension, their life: "I [the narrator] heard that he [Bishnu Prasad Chakravarty or mastermoshai] had moved into Ganesh's house beyond the railway lines, where the nomadic poor – domestic servants, factory workers – lived in a different society, with a different kind of life".³² Indian English fiction tries hard to reduce the whole slum or such area inhabited predominantly by subalterns like servants into one invariable adverse image. Even the sentences are unvarying: "In slums this...in slums ... that". On the contrary, when the story shifts to the metropolitan areas of the middle/upper classes, the details thrive. On a similar plane, whereas the servants' quarters are summarily dismissed, those of the masters' attract

close attention. Tabish Khair remarks that while Amit Chaudhuri's novels have the extensive descriptions of foreign servants/subalterns, there is a surprising lack of detailed descriptions of the Indian servants' toilets in the same novels.

One cannot help noticing that . . . throughout the Indian sections of Afternoon Raag: the author does not even once take us into the quarters of the urban poor (servants) in India, who merely appear as cleaners of the family-flat and users of the next-door toilet. What is as surprising is the fact that Chaudhuri can and does write powerfully about the urban poor in England and takes us into *their* quarters!³³ [italics author's]

Khair rightly points out that the "socio-economic gap" between the upper/middle class/caste and the lower class/caste servant in India is almost insurmountable. And it is these servants' quarters that the novel never steps into, the world of maids quarrelling and men-servants drinking, gambling and singing. Indian fiction in English does not step into this forbidden territory.

We have already mentioned in the preceding chapter the instance where Agastya steps into his friend Dhruvo's kitchen in New Delhi to make tea (English 158). Interestingly we are presented with the kitchen only when a middle class character steps into it and not when the servant was working in it. Thus the servant's space, including the kitchen where s/he works, is normally not considered and if described it is only when the middle class character occupies it. If we turn to The God of Small Things we find that Velutha's hut is presented for the first time only when Estha and Rahel find a boat and take it to his place for repair.³⁴ Velutha's "world, the hut where his crippled brother lies all day, where he carves wooden toys for boys for the children, is a refuge whose true potency lies in the fact that it is forbidden". Ipsita Chanda points out that Roy, like other Indian novelists in English, "takes the characters she can speak as/for, [such as Estha and Rahel] to visit those who she cannot speak as/for, thereby displaying their (and her own) rejection of the hierarchies that traditional Indian society enforced".³⁵ In other words, we are presented with the world of Velutha only because it enables Rahel, Estha and Ammu a chance to violate the societal laws. But the focus is always on the middle class characters and their rebellion; the lower class/caste servant and his or her space is never there for itself. The only time that we see Hakiman Bua's tiny room is when Laila, the middle class protagonist, goes to her for "assurance". "Hakiman Bua was sitting on her string bed which nearly filled the tiny room crowded with her meagre possessions. . . .

The room was cosy with love” (Sunlight 39). Here the narrative points to the abject conditions in which Hakiman Bua lives. But it is swiftly glossed over with the observation that the “room was cosy with love”. By recalling the warmth that narrator shared with the maidservant, the protagonist and also the author is able to skip the exploitative conditions in which servants lived. In Kiran Desai’s The Loss of Inheritance we are led inside the cook’s house only when Sai visits it and that too because of an act of transgression. Sai visits the cook’s house only because of the theft of the guns of Sai’s grandfather for which the policemen suspect the cook and search his house.

It pained Sai’s heart to see how little he [the cook] had: a few clothes hung over a string, a single razor blade and a sliver of cheap brown soap, a Kulu blanket that had once been hers, a cardboard case with metal clasps that had belonged to the judge and now contained the cook’s papers Sai felt embarrassed. She was rarely in the cook’s hut, and when she did come searching for him and enter, he was ill at ease and so was she, something about their closeness being exposed in the end as fake, . . . yet she always felt tender on seeing his crotchety face, on hearing him haggle in the market, felt pride that she lived with such a difficult man who nonetheless spoke to her with affection, calling her Babyji or Saibaby.³⁶

Here, the author points to the exploitative conditions of the cook and Sai’s embarrassment and pain. But then it ends with the observation that in spite of such exploitation the cook was affectionate to her and that they enjoyed a mutually affectionate relationship. The description of the servant’s space and its poverty is sidestepped cleverly by highlighting of the close and personal relationship between the materially comfortable master and the deprived servant.

It is not just the poverty and the need to hide it that motivates the upper/middle classes to avoid the servants and their spaces. Eve M Lynch points out that the separation of the space is necessary because “the mistress daily faced her double in the governess, the nurse, the housekeeper, and the chambermaid.”³⁷ Borrowing the concept of the “uncanny” from Freud, she states that the mistress faced the uncanny double in the domestic worker. For Freud, “the uncanny [*unheimlich*] is something which is secretly familiar [*Heimlich-heimisch*], which has undergone repression and then returned from it, and that everything that is uncanny fulfils this condition.”³⁸ The mistress was “raised in infancy by the nurse, the nanny, and the maid,” but she “left behind the nurturing and

benevolent aspects of her caretakers” once she becomes herself a mistress to a household. The irony lay in that she now was “in charge of managing, directing, ordering, disciplining and sacking those same figures – all the while keeping those once-friendly faces out of sight, confined to the back stairs and lower regions of the house, concealed from view.”³⁹ Therefore, Lynch agrees with Mark Girouard’s words that the architectural necessity of a backstairs was to repress this “uncanny, discomfiting repetition”,⁴⁰ the mistress facing her maid.

III

“Each floor had a servants’ bathroom on one side and a servants’ toilet on the other; . . . This situation was aggravated by Chhaya and Maya, who always went about with the privileged air of outsiders and paid no attention to the state of that toilet.”⁴¹ This extract from Amit Chaudhuri’s novel Afternoon Raag highlights one of the common assumption about servants and their spaces. This is that of dirtiness. The dirty toilets reflect the dirty nature of the servants, not to mention the lazy nature of Chhaya, Maya and their mother who refused to clean it regularly even when scolded. We have already seen in one of the preceding chapters how the body of the servant has been used by the narrative of middle class domesticity as one of the character-indicators. The lived “space” of the servant also serves as an effective trait-connoting metonymy. As Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan elucidates: “A character’s physical surrounding (room, house, street, town) . . . [is] also often used as trait-connoting metonymies. As with external appearance, the relation of contiguity is frequently supplemented by that of causality”.⁴²

When it came to servants who do not live with their masters, the texts presented them as coming from areas that definitely are dirty – some slum or similar area situated on the periphery of the clean, civilized wholesome areas lived by the upper/middle classes. Again we can take the following extract from Amit Chaudhuri’s A Strange and Sublime Address: “She [Chhaya, the floor-cleaner] had a serious cultured face with a serious smile, the face of a kindly and understanding teacher; it was hard to believe she lived across the railway-lines, in the clump of huts called the basti, from which whiffs of excrement rose on windy days” (Strange 9) [emphasis added].

This postulate of a pseudo-scientific connection between character and environment became established in the nineteenth century in the very first Indian novel in English. It is worth considering Bankimchandra's rather detailed description of the house of Mathur Ghose, the villain of Rajmohan's Wife: "The house of Mathur Ghose was a genuine specimen of mofussil magnificence united with mofussil want of cleanliness." Some of the terms used to describe it are "blackened walls", "rude and unpainted shutters hanging by a single hinge", "dried slime and soot reposed on the mass of bricks in murky grandeur".⁴³ Meenakshi Mukherjee notes that the "shabbiness of the house is also intended to indicate Mathur's unrefined ways".⁴⁴ This is true not only of the masters' spaces but also that of the servants'.

Such typecasting of the servants' living quarters is evident in Upamanyu Chatterjee's novels. In the Introduction of this work we have already seen how Kasibai, the nymphomaniac maid is shown as hailing "from the intestines of some slum", where her regular (sexual) customers were "crimson-eyed truckdrivers" (Burden 88). Slums are also seen as the place where disease and irrationality prevailed as is evident from Amit Chaudhuri's works: "Not long after she had taken him [Nando] back, Khuku had heard him coughing, and saw him lying about like a sack on the carpet, utterly tired. Dr. Mitra, who lived nearby, had come down to take a look at this fatigued specimen, and had advised that a test be done, for TB. Apparently it was still widespread in the bastis and areas these people lived" [emphasis added].⁴⁵ Here the obvious reference to the living places of servants and other subalterns as full of disease is to be further contrasted with that of the middle class masters. It is to reaffirm the image of the servants as dirty and lazy. While describing Rakha's diseased body, Anand makes ample use of metonymic connotation of the outcastes' slum.

He [Rakha] seemed a true child of the outcaste colony, where there are no drains, no light, no water; of the marshland where people live among the latrines of the townsmen, and in the stink of their own dung scattered here, there and everywhere; of the world where the day is as dark as the night and the night pitch-dark. He had wallowed in its mire, bathed in its marshes, played among its rubbish-heaps; his listless, lazy, lousy manner was a result of his surroundings. He was the vehicle of a life-force, the culminating point in the destiny of which would never come, because malaria lingered in his bones, and that disease does not kill but merely

dissipates the energy. He was a friend of the flies and the mosquitoes, their boon companion since his childhood.⁴⁶

If we read Upamanyu Chatterjee's earlier work English, August we find a reinforcement of such middle class assumptions. Agastya's room in the Government Rest House at Madna is described in detail. But we are not presented with Vasant's living quarters. "Once, out of boredom, he [Agastya] had wanted to go to the kitchen to demonstrate the boiling of water for drinking, he couldn't" (English 66-67). Vasant at first pretends not to understand and then stops Agastya physically from entering the kitchen. Agastya concludes that Vasant stops him because he doesn't want expose the dirt in the kitchen. Whatever be the reason we are not presented with the kitchen though there are plenty of references to Vasant's bad cooking and dirty nature throughout the novel. Not only Vasant's kitchen but the whole of Madna becomes to Agastya a place full dirtiness as is evident from this scene coming towards the end of the novel:

"When last I saw these shitters", said Agastya, "I remembered that Gandhi line about how we lack a sense of sanitation. It sounds so simple, dig a small hole before you shit."

"But that's just extra physical work," said Sathe, "always the easier way out." (English 278)

These "shitters" are small children belonging to the subaltern class and the novel is full of derogatory remarks against their unsanitary habits. But neither the author nor Agastya does betray any awareness about the hardship and poverty that forces the subalterns to live in such a manner. The text presents the dirty quarters as if the subalterns preferred them due to their inherent laziness rather than try and work for better conditions. We can see the prevalence of such attitude from the following example taken from Anita Desai's Fasting, Feasting where the same derogatory remarks about the living quarters of the mali or gardener can be seen:

Her [Uma's] feet crunch the sparse gravel of the driveway and she follows it to where mali lives in a shack that he built for himself by the garden tap and use it to maximum benefit. . . . All around there is a powerful aroma of the cow-dung pats he uses for fuel, and the raw rank odour of the tobacco he smokes in his chilam. . . .

He [mali] comes to life with a gratifying start. 'Ji!' he cries and comes crawling out on all fours from his dark, smoky odorous cave like some misshapen, bow-legged insect.⁴⁷ [emphasis added]

Here the presentation of the mali's as shack smelling of cow-dung and tobacco stirs up the middle class's sensibilities against the dirty, smelling servant. Most of the servants, particularly the part-timers and in the urban areas come from slums or areas where poor housing facilities exist. Most often these slums were pushed into the periphery, and distanced from the residential areas of their employers. Let us take this example from Abha Dawesar's Babyji where Anamika, the young protagonist goes to the nearby slum where her maid lives.

The area was dark except for a few kerosene lamps flickering here and there. They cast menacing shadows. Men were squatting together in small groups and laughing. Their laughs sounded sinister. They spoke in some dialect, not in pure Hindi. I [Anamika] could not follow them. All the women were in their oppressive six-by-six hutments, putting their litter of children to sleep. I felt unsafe. I wanted to run before someone leapt at me in the dark.⁴⁸

Here the slum or the servant's quarter becomes more than a "space" and is a metaphor of the unknown where disease, crime, and sexual deviancy rules supreme. It becomes the "dark", "menacing" incomprehensible, "oppressive" "Other" against which the upper/middle class household with its cleanliness, order can be posited. We can take one such example from Fasting, Feasting: "Uma had a vision of a frantic pig she had seen once in the bazaar, wriggling to escape from the butcher, and a memory of the whines and cries of mating dogs behind the servants' quarters," (Fasting 15) [emphasis added]. Here the narrative mentions the protagonist Uma's becoming aware of sex for the first time and also her middle class repulsiveness to it. Normally in a cursory reading the locating in the text of this repulsive sexual act is not so noticeable. The dogs are, in fact, presented as mating "behind the servants' quarters". Thus, the narrative positioning of the repulsive sexual act in the servants' quarters is done effortlessly. Salman Rushdie's novels are also infected with such bias against servants or lower class quarters: "He [Tai, the boatman] is described as living somewhere in the insanitary bowels of the old wooden-house quarters and his wife" [emphasis added].⁴⁹ Here is another example from Rushdie's The Moor's Last Sigh where we find the repetition of the same image of the slum areas overrun by filth, violence, irrationality and criminality.

Here everything was a collage, the huts made of the city's unwanted detritus, rusting, corrugated iron, bits of cardboard boxes, gnarled lengths of driftwood, the doors of crashed motor-

cars, the windshields of a forgotten tempo; and the tenements built out of poisonous sounds, out of water-taps that had started lethal quarrels between queuing women ...out of kerosene suicides and the unpayable rents collected with extreme violence by gangland Bhaiyyas and Pathans; and the people's lives . . . had also become composite, as patched –up as their homes, made of pieces of petty thieving, shards of prostitution and fragments of beggary, or, in the case of the more self-respecting individuals, of boot-polish and paper garlands and earrings and cane baskets and one-paisa-per seam shirts and coconut milk and car-minding and cakes of carbolic soap. (Moor 302)

Tabish Khair refers to Elleke Boehmer's work on colonial (Victorian) novels and their focus on certain areas (namely the capital) and not the outlying areas as a significant indicator of imperial values. Indian English novels "privilege urban/metropolitan areas of experience, and Babu-domestic ones within an urban location."⁵⁰ Here we can add that within the "Babu-domestic" that is upper/middle class-domestic representation, there is an absence of the lower class/caste servant's space. If we look at all the novels of Amit Chaudhuri, we find that they are located within the metropolitan areas of Kolkata and at times moves to other locations such as Oxford in England. Within Kolkata we are presented mostly with the domestic household located in middle class areas. Slums and other areas are seldom described unless of course middle class characters visited them. Very often there is the presentation of the servants' quarters only for the ulterior motive of showing a lack or to present the sterling qualities of the middle class characters. Meenakshi Mukherjee remarks in this regard that for early nineteenth century novelist, this bias against the lower class/caste extended to depicting their living quarters: Saratchandra's "central concern never shifts beyond the bhadralok. One may hear of Muchipara where the cobblers live but one is seldom taken there unless an epidemic breaks out . . . The bhadralok characters go there to nurse the poor and we are expected to admire their selfless nobility rather than look at the lives of the cobblers."⁵¹ What was true of the nineteenth century Indian novelists like Saratchandra is sadly true for Indian writers in English. Let us take the instance from The Space Between Us where Sera visits Bhima's slum for the first and only time when the latter falls sick with typhoid fever:

Although her apartment building was located less than a fifteen-minute walk away from the basti, Sera felt as if she had entered another universe....murky, muddy water that gathered in still pools on the ground; to gag at the ghastly smell of shit and God knows

what else; to look away as grown men urinated in the open ditches that flowed past their homes. And the flies, thick as guilt. And the stray dogs with patches and sores on their backs. And the children squawking like chickens as their mothers hit them with their open hands.⁵²

The narrative continues for another page where Sera is forced to drink her favourite soft drink generously offered by Bhima. This allows both Sera and the author to indulge in self-flagellation: “The generosity of the poor, Sera marvelled to herself. It puts us middle class people to shame. They should hate our guts, really. Instead, they treat us like royalty. The thought of how she herself treated Bhima – not allowing her to sit on the furniture, having her eat with separate utensils – filled her with guilt” (Space 115). Sera then takes Bhima back to her house and nurses her back to health. But here too the physical segregation of servants continues as Bhima is made to sleep on the floor and Sera plopped Bhima’s medicine in her hands without making any contact. It is not only that Sera sees Bhima coming from a different place, but she tries to restrict Bhima’s space within her household too. For instance, Bhima is not allowed to sit or use the furniture. She is made to sit on the floor despite the occasional protest from Sera’s daughter.

And yet . . . The thought of Bhima sitting on her furniture repulses her. She herself had on numerous occasions declared that Bhima was one of the cleanest people she knew. . . . Sera tries to justify her prejudice. Part of it is the damn tobacco she chews all day, she thinks to herself. It just makes me sick and dirties everything else about her. Also, having seen where she lives, I can imagine the conditions in the slums – what kind of water she uses to bathe in and, well, how effectively she is able to clean her nether regions. (Space 29)

If we look at The Last Burden we find that Jamun presents his aya’s space only because he is unable to get over his neglect when she was dying. “Yet he [Jamun] cringed away from Aya when she was dying in her terminal months at home, a derelict in her charpai beneath the stairs, once virtually his foster-mother, he was revolted by her” (Burden 88) [emphasis added]. Jamun feels ashamed of his sexual attraction towards Kasibai who is evidently far less worthy of his attention while he had earlier neglected his aya who deserved much better treatment. Jamun goes on reminiscing about his neglect.

Jamun more or less ceases to acknowledge Aya. When he bounds upstairs, or slopes off through the side door, or ushers an electrician to the fusebox, he disassembles to himself that she's only an inanimate accumulation beneath the stairs, a truss of cast-off clothing, a few blackened sticks. Only her eyes, misted by infirmity and bitterness, jar him. In time overlooking her existence became almost effortless. (Burden 90)

Here Jamun's presentation of the aya's living space beneath the stairs is only an act of self-flagellation. It is not impossible that some servants find their space dirty and unhygienic like their masters. One instance could be taken from Untouchable where Anand depicts the slums in the very beginning of the novel:

And altogether the ramparts of human and animal refuse that lay on the outskirts of this little colony, and the ugliness, and the squalor and the misery which lay within it, made it an "uncongenial" place to live in.

At least so thought Bakha, a young man of eighteen, strong and able-bodied, . . . (Untouchable 1)

Here the description of the slum of the outcastes live in is interesting for the description is followed by the narratorial comment that the focalizer is one of the outcastes, i.e. Bakha. The authorial comment itself makes it clear that Bakha is not an ordinary dirty servant but one with a strong sense of hygiene and noble sense of humanity. Later on too, we have the authorial comment on the unhygienic nature of their work as contrasted to the free, clean and wholesome atmosphere of Bulashah Hills that he enjoys with his friends (Untouchable 83-6). Bakha's seeing or appreciating such landscape is to highlight his noble and sensitive nature and thus distinguish him from other outcastes.

The hand of nature was stretching itself out towards him, for the tall grass on the slopes of Bulashah Hill was in sight, and he [Bakha] had opened his heart to it, lifted by the cool breeze that wafted him away from the crowds, the ugliness and the noise of the outcastes' street. He looked across at the swaying loveliness before him and the little hillocks over which it spread under a sunny sky, so transcendently blue and beautiful that he felt like standing dumb and motionless before it. He listened to the incoherent whistling of the shrubs. They were the voices he knew so well. He was glad that his friends were ahead of him and that the thrum was not broken, for the curve of his soul seemed to bend over the heights, straining to woo nature in solitude and silence. (Untouchable 83-4)

We see this in The Space Between Us where Bhima reflects on her house in the slum:

A few hours later and there will hardly be room to walk between the tidy piles of shit that the residents of the slum leave on the mud floor of the communal toilet. After all these years, the flies and the stink still make Bhima's stomach turn. The slum residents have taken to paying the Harijan woman who lives at the far end of the slum colony to collect the piles each night. ... Bhima makes it a point to smile at her. Unlike most of the residents of the slums, Bhima does not consider herself superior to the poor woman. (Space 8)

The narrative makes it amply clear Bhima is “unlike most of the residents of the slums”; she is rather a middle class woman in her sense of hygiene and sanitation. In certain examples such as the one below from Untouchable the authorial patronizing comment is clearly more evident.

[I]t was not strictly a kitchen in the Hindu manner, for there were no four lines defining its limits, according to those laws of hygiene which are the basis of Hindu piety. Most of the utensils were . . . never washed since Bakha's mother had died, for Sohini was young and inexperienced, and had a great deal too much work to do outside the house to devote herself assiduously to housework. . . . till sanitation cleanliness, and hygiene had lost its meaning for them. (Untouchable 67)

Here Bakha's kitchen is described less for itself than for showing the lack of the cleanliness or hygiene that “the *really* civilised man” possessed (Untouchable 85) [italics author's]. It is hardly necessary to mention that Anand saw not all upper class/caste Hindus as belonging to this category. Witness the description of the streets (Untouchable 58). This would be clearer from the example from Untouchable where two housewives are contrasted when Bakha goes begging for food. One housewife who gives Bakha food is described as “quiet as she was heavy”, and she addresses him “kindly” (Untouchable 63). The other is described “as voluble as she was short of volume” and she abuses Bakha for polluting her house by sleeping at her doorstep. A little later she is shown as telling her little son to defecate in the open drain, much to the disgust to Bakha and asking him to clean it up in return for the food that she had thrown to him. Bakha runs away in disgust at her shabby manner of giving food. Anand, thus, seems to point out not all upper caste/class are clean or hygienic. Then again we have to examine the fact that in spite of the description of the toilets and rather dirty surroundings of the outcastes'

colony, there is hardly any description of the outcastes' toilets. We have at one point in the novel, a passing reference to the outcaste women's toilets.

Then from the dark undeclared places of his [Bakha] soul arose another picture of her [Ram Charan's sister] in his memory – as she came through the darkness before the dawn from the banks of the brook where, he knew, she and the other women of the outcastes's colony went every day, taking advantage of the privacy which the half-light afforded, to perform their toilets unseen by men. He remembered that he had been about the latrines and had at first felt a thrill of delight, then a sensation more vital. (Untouchable 79)

Ultimately, employers [and authors] were more interested in teaching the servants middle-class values even while presenting their space.

Bakha seemed nevertheless unaroused and unresponsive as a child turning aside from every wayside flower, for though he had the receptivity of the man who is willing to lend his sense to experience, he had an unenlightened will. Nature had forced him to the contemplation of the charms of nature, merely superficially. Heredity had furrowed no deep grooves in his soul where flowers could grow or grass abound. . . . It was a discord between a person and circumstances by which a lion lay enmeshed in a net while many a common criminal wore a rajah's crown. (Untouchable 85)

Anand, like most Indian novelists in English, is unable to see that what seems a slum to him is home to the outcastes. It is also interesting to note that most of the action in Untouchable takes place outside the slums. The joys, fears, hopes, disappointments i.e. the lived reality of Bakha or the other outcastes is expunged in favour of the largely middle class scenes in the town market, cantonment, temple and the last at the "golbagh".

IV

"Different occupants have different relationships with space that transform space according to the acts of occupancy".⁵³ What is slum for the middle class is a home for the lower class servant. But this possibility is something that is missed out completely by most of the novels that we have had examined so far. This does not mean reworking Buchanan's words that if a servant thinks that his slum is free from disease, dirt and what not, it would not make it so. A slum would always be a slum, no matter what the servant

thinks. The space in the middle class house remains controlled by the master and is what Michel Foucault labels a “dominated space”.⁵⁴ However, as Buchanan agrees with Foucault that such “disciplinary apparatus cannot determine in an absolute sense, for all contingencies, the behaviour of all inmates [like servants] all of the time”. Like a model prisoner the servant must observe all regulations laid down by his jailors i.e. his employers without question. “But it is precisely at this juncture, this vortex between what is expected and what is delivered, that the system proves itself vulnerable. There is always the possibility that behaviour will prove to be an act; that is, behaviour as simulacra. There are two sub-categories to conforming: conform and thereby appropriate the system.”⁵⁵

Thus, it means that a servant always has the potential to subvert the master’s space even when s/he maintains full subservience. “In spatial terms it means that disciplined spaces cannot be thought of as absolutely dominated; they can always be appropriated”. The middle class have to maintain constant surveillance of the middle class home for it “is subject to appropriation”. The masters “can never relax . . . [their] vigilance, the surveillance of its [domestic] perimeters must be ceaseless.”⁵⁶

Indian fiction in English’s discussion of the kitchen as a trope does not show how, for the domestic servants the kitchen is a workplace where they are subjected to torment and abuse from their employers. The servant’s relationship to the kitchen can also be a cause for resentment and envy, as the servant is exposed to the luxurious commodities that s/he knows s/he can never own. There is no nuanced exploration suggesting the very different meanings of spaces such as the home and the kitchen for middle class and lower class. We would not find literary examples of servants being confined in establishment, listening to the merriment of the family members while standing cooking in kitchens serving up meals, day in and day out.

The study of space is more important in the Indian domestic scene for its special caste/religious taboos, particularly the notion of ritual pollution. These notions, interestingly, are not restricted exclusively to only Hindu households. For instance we have already mentioned how Velutha and other untouchable Paravans were not allowed to enter Ayemenem house even though they were all Christians. Rahel, Estha and Ammu and Velutha pay a heavy price for crossing the spatial and emotional boundaries that

divide the two communities. In Thrity Umrigar's The Space Between Us we have a similar prejudice of Sera Dubash, a Parsi who looks down on her maid Bhima.

As usual, Sera sits on a chair at the table while Bhima squats on her haunches on the floor nearby. When Dinaz was younger, she used to prod her mother about the injustice of Bhima not being allowed to sit on the couch or a chair and having to use her own separate utensils, instead of the ones the rest of the family used. "You tell all your friends that Bhima is like a family member, that you couldn't live without her," the teenage daughter would rail. "And yet she's not good enough to sit at the table with us. And you and Daddy are always talking about those high-caste Hindus burning Harijans and how wrong that is. But in your own house, you have these caste differences, too. What hypocrisy, Mummy."
(Space 27)

Interestingly it is this very same Sera who prides herself for her liberal treatment of servants unlike other people who commit atrocities. Thus the space (the landscape including the house) observed "within" the narrative is not without its ideological ramifications. As Tabish Khair puts it rather succinctly that landscape "is a selected reality, or rather a reality selectively perceived or depicted towards a certain conscious or unconscious end. Even landscape has its reasons to be or not to be in a literary text".⁵⁷ To sum up, even in fiction, the servant's quarters are as much a threat to the author/narrator/master's middle class values as his/her body.

Notes and References

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CONCLUSION

in democracies servants are not only equal among themselves, but it may be said that they are in some sort, the equals of their masters

– Alexis de Tocqueville

I

Michael Dunlop Young in his book The Rise of Meritocracy (1958) had prophesied that domestic service would be re-established by the end of the twentieth century. Young's claim runs counter to the general view that in the face of rapid modernization and increasing mechanization of the Western (Euro-American) world and gradually imitation by the rest of the world, servants would naturally become redundant. His prophecy is highly exaggerated but it is debatable whether it would come true in the future. But one thing is sure that it hints at the tenacity of domestic service to adapt to changing socio-economic conditions. Rosie Cox points out startling facts that run contrary to the smug belief in most developed or Western world that domestic servants exist only in "Third world" countries.

There are perhaps two million domestic workers in Britain today – more than there were in Victorian times. . . . As well as the traditional butlers, maids, valets and cooks who wait on the super-rich, Britain is now served by tens of thousands of nannies, cleaners and au pairs as well as housekeepers, gardeners, drivers and the new domestic helpers – “conciierge services” – all ensuring the middle class live more comfortably. . . . Modern society and modern domestic appliances have not, it seems, put an end to drudgery. Rather, the twenty-first century marks a new high point of domestic employment.¹

Domestic servants have indeed persisted in the twenty first century both in the West and in India, albeit in different forms, and so have the biases or prejudices against them. Swapna M. Banerjee concludes rightly that “domestic service continues to be an important occupation in present day India it is hardly possible to call for a closure of the analysis of an evolving relationship”.² To illustrate, we can turn to the Arushi Talwar murder case³ which is now seen as a classic case of media overkill, not to mention the inept handling by Indian investigative agencies. Leaving aside the initial predictable “the butler did it” response to Arushi's murder from the local police, we cannot brush aside the inability and/or unwillingness of the media or government authorities to acknowledge the domestic servant Hemraj's reputation or plight. Arushi's murder hogged the media limelight but no one spared a thought for Hemraj or that his family could have been in possible dire straits due to his untimely death. The lurid speculations in the media of Arushi's possible physical relations with Hemraj and Dr. Talwar's murderous anger at the objectionable position in which Hemraj was in with his daughter also lay bare the

middle class anxiety of the servant's transgressing the class boundaries. Sensible voices, of course, protested against this character assassination with strong condemnation from Renuka Choudhury, Union Minister of State for Women and Child Development, who promised to find legal measures to protect juveniles from such character assassination by investigating authorities as well as media.⁴ But here again the concern was about the character vilification of Arushi, the middle class victim and not about Hemraj, the lower class servant. It might be galling to some but it is nonetheless true that Hemraj came into focus only because he was murdered and that too in mysterious circumstances along with his employer's daughter. Servants are documented only in moments of crisis; they occupy narrative space only when they steal, murder or are murdered. It is a fact that nobody wants to acknowledge this somewhat feudal practice of the modern Indian domestic scene, least of all the middle class which profits mostly from such practices. Hence, the collective silence over the exploitation of domestic servants.

Hemraj's nationality also points out to the increasing transnational nature of domestic service. "The development of an integrated global economy and the spread of neo-liberalism have supported the growth of domestic employment in various ways. In the first place, there is now a supply of workers available for British [read developed countries] families at relatively low cost."⁵ Poor people from relatively underdeveloped nations flock to more developed areas and fill in the much-needed cheap labour essential in domestic and similar service. Whether it is Nepalese men working as servants, including as watchmen in Indian towns and cities, or maids from countries like Sri Lanka, Philippines and other South Asian countries in Saudi Arabia, Singapore and Hong Kong, there seems to be preference for certain race of people in domestic work. For instance, in the case of India, there has always been a marked preference for Nepalese or more, particularly Gurkhas, as watchmen as they are known for their bravery and loyalty. In the American subcontinent, domestic service was and continues to be dominated by members (particularly female) of the black community and those of Hispanic descent. This is partly racially motivated as it is felt that people of these communities are unable to work in higher posts. The increasing mobility of labour does not mean that people from all communities find it easy to leave behind domestic service and move on to better jobs. Very often people from less privileged communities, and more particularly women, are stuck in such low-paying jobs.⁶ The vulnerability of foreign domestic servants is much more evident from the numerous cases of abuse, physical and mental, reported in the

newspapers. After all not everyone is lucky like Bharati Mukherjee's Jasmine to have understanding employers like the Moffitts.⁷ Sometimes, these servants are illegal migrants and hence take up such low-paying domestic service as a means of earning their board till they secure citizenship and better prospects. Bridget Jane Anderson criticises the invisibility of such domestic workers, exploited by their employers take advantage of their helplessness and stresses the social and economic importance of their work.

This does not mean that these jobs have no social or economic value. Paying for domestic work facilitates the maintenance of standards which in turn has social implications as we go "out" into the world marked by the house. Thus although themselves hidden, the results of those who labour in private households are everywhere apparent – how many of those smart politicians, senior executives and newscasters who appear on our television sets night after night have had their shirts and blouses ironed by paid domestic workers, and how many by migrant women?⁸

The continued presence of the domestic servants is a reflection of the intransient quality of this class. As stated earlier in Chapter Four Rosie Cox's words that the servant problem had always existed rings true. Earlier it was the problem of finding good servants. Now it is the problem of why servants exist.⁹ Domestic servants with their vulnerability combined with affective nature of the servant-employer relationship continue to be seen as an aberration in this modern egalitarian world. Class may have played an overriding part in their exploitation, but it is not the only factor. Gender, caste, religion, age are some of the other factors that come into play. In India, as elsewhere, there has been an increasing trend in feminization of domestic service and part-time service. But still, there is a preference for male servants and that too full-time and live-in as and where possible. Of course, there is always an underlying tension, particularly about the sexual threat posed by male servants. The servant is always seen as the dark, threatening "Other" who could very easily transgress the sexual and class boundaries. No doubt, there is every possibility of affective ties growing between the servants and their employers' families. Hemraj and Arushi, for instance, may have had such an affective relationship. But witness the media and local police's quick labelling of this relationship as illicit. Thus, for the middle class such ties are viewed with suspicion. Whatever relation exists between servants and the master's family, it is always marked by inequality.

Here, it would be not beside the point to pause a little and consider the possible reason behind such callousness and insensitivity towards servants as exhibited by the upper/middle classes. Pavan Kumar points to the very nature of Hindu spiritual practices where the “emphasis on the self as the centrepiece of the spiritual endeavour tends to stunt the growth of a sense of involvement in and concern for the community as a whole [including servants]”. This “insensitivity to the external milieu, conterminous often, with the most overt preoccupation with spiritual pursuits has become so much a part of life that it is mostly not even noticeable to the educated Hindu.”¹⁰ Kumar uses Gunnar Myrdal’s observation about Indians that even “those who honestly advocate radical egalitarian reforms reveal themselves as harsh, and sometimes thoughtlessly cruel when they deal with members of the lower strata as individuals and not as a group to be cajoled”.¹¹

This thesis has attempted to work on the marginalization of servants in the literary field, particularly in Indian fiction in English. But we have found that the marginalization of servants in real life is mirrored to some extent in the literary texts, though it would be wrong to argue that there is one-to-one correspondence between the two. “The entrenched nature of domestic service in everyday life is seen in the many references to it in the media, film and literature where servants are often key figures in the plot. . . . Servants have been also used to convey ideas about societal norms and values as well as aspects of social change.”¹² Recent works like Arvind Adiga’s *The White Tiger* (2008), with its servant-turned-entrepreneur Balram Halwai, confirm that such blindness to servants has not altogether disappeared, though the plot appears to be somewhat new, at least so far as servants are concerned. Balram, the son of a rickshaw-puller, suffers at the hands of the rich landlords who terrorise and exploit the rural poor. Forced to work at a tea shop after dropping out of school, Balram struggles up the social ladder through learning to drive and later becomes chauffeur to the son of the local landlord. Later he goes to Delhi where he is exposed to the new consumerism exemplified by the mall culture. Anger for his father’s pathetic death and desire to achieve a better life, motivates Balram to murder his master and decamp with seven hundred thousand rupees to Bangalore. There he runs successfully a taxi service catering to the new and fast-expanding call-service or outsourcing business. Now a master to sixteen drivers, Balram is determined not to regret his treachery to his master.

The presence of the servant as a narrator in The White Tiger marks a rare departure from most Indian fiction in English. The literary texts that we have had examined so far in the preceding chapters did not yield hardly any representation where the servant is the narrator or even focalizer. S/he is always the subject of the gaze, whether of the author, the narrator or the master. This is very much true of even sympathetic writers like Mulk Raj Anand or Arundhati Roy. In the case of the former, Bakha or Munoo are not the narrators though the narrative is seen through their eyes. Velutha may be one of the central characters in The God of Small Things but we do not see his thoughts except in one instance. The novel deals rather extensively on the thoughts and consciousness of the middle class characters like Ammu, Estha, Rahel and others. Subalterns as narrators can be seen in Kamala Markandaya's Nectar in a Sieve. But here too, the narrator is not the lowest of the low, for Rukmani is the daughter of a headman. Adiga's novel to a certain extent gives, for the first time, the narrating voice to a servant. But to take this as an attempt to give the servant a voice would be too hasty. If we look closely we would find that it is a middle class voice disguised very thinly as the lower class servant's. Sanjay Subrahmanyam writes correctly that it is hard to believe Balram when he states that he admires Urdu poets without being able to read Urdu. There is further evidence of the falsity in the narrative voice of Balram Halwai.

Despite the odd *namaste*, *daal*, *paan* and *ghat*, his [Balram Halwai's] vocabulary is not sprinkled with North Indian vernacular terms. His sentences are mostly short and crudely constructed, apparently a reflection of the fact that we're dealing with a member of the "subaltern" classes. . . . But he does use a series of expressions that simply don't add up. He describes his office as a "hole in the wall". He refers to "kissing some god's arse", an idiomatic expression that doesn't exist in any North Indian language. "Half-formed ideas bugger one another, and make more half-formed ideas" and the Chinese prime minister is advised never to "let that blasphemous idea into your yellow skull". On another matter, he sneers: "They're so yesterday." A clever little phrase appears: "A statutory warning – as they say on cigarette packs – before we begin." Dogs are referred to as "mutts". Yet whose vocabulary and whose expressions are these? On page after page, one is brought up short by the jangling dissonance of the language and the falsity of the expressions. This is a posh English-educated voice trying to talk dirty, without being able to pull it off.¹³ [italics author's] [emphasis added]

However, as Subrahmanyam regrettably adds, “for many of this novel’s readers, this lack of verisimilitude will not matter because for them India is and will remain an exotic place.”¹⁴ The anxiety to sound Indian as opposed to the fear of appearing alien can be ascribed as a possible cause for such a use of language. Meenakshi Mukerjee rightly remarks that this anxiety was a bane for “the first generation of writers, [like Mulk Raj Anand, Sudhin Ghose, Raja Rao, G. V. Desani] who had to resort “certain thematic or formal devices to to tether their texts to indigenous contexts”.¹⁵ Mukherjee adds that this anxiety has not altogether disappeared with the modern writers. She cites Upamanyu Chatterjee’s adding the subtitle “An Indian Tale” to his maiden novel English, August.¹⁶ Adiga’s work only proves that this anxiety is here to stay. Since the Indian novelist in English’s “audience is spread far and wide, within India and outside, hence the need for an even-toned minimalist representation that will not depend too much on the intricacies and contradictions in the culture and the inflections of voice which only an insider can decipher.”¹⁷ With “no sense of the texture of Indian vernaculars,” yet claiming to have produced a realistic text”, Adiga, like all Indian writer in English, “gets the tone right only when he writes of the world of the bourgeois.”¹⁸ One such example noted by Subrahmanyam when Balram interacts with his master Ashok and his wife Pinky over the correct pronunciation of the English word “pizza” can be worth reproducing here.

“Ashok,” she said. ‘Now hear this. Balram, what is it we’re eating?’

I knew it was a trap, but what could I do? – I answered. The two of them burst into giggles.

“Say it again, Balram.”

They laughed again.

“It’s not piJJA. It’s piZZa. Say it properly.”

“Wait – you’re mispronouncing it too. There’s a *T* in the middle. *Peet. Zah.*”

“Don’t correct *my* English, Ashok. There’s no *T* in pizza. Look at the box.”¹⁹ [*italics author’s*]

The plot, for instance, confirms the middle class stereotype of a scheming servant who would not hesitate to murder his employers for money. Balram’s social aspirations and hankering for stylish proper clothes (t-shirts with a single English word), costly whisky or laptops are the upper/middle class aspirations and what these classes imagine the lower classes too desire. The White Tiger is another attempt to critique the Indian society, but once again from the middle class ethos of meritocracy – hard work translated into success. Balram does not fritter away his ill-begotten money and instead turns into a

successful middle class entrepreneur himself. The problem with Indian novelists in English including Adiga is that they “even when not writing about the middle class,” see “every character [including the servant] through the lens of middle-class values”.²⁰ The servants were always inevitably located in the middle class domestic situations and appraised in the context of middle class values. This concern for servants is less to improve the servant condition and more of a critical reflection on the middle class narrator/masters own selves. Whatever little interest is there for servants in Indian novels in English, is less to “. . . alleviate the distress of the servants but more of a critical reflection on their [middle class author/narrator/masters’] own selves, an auto-critique, to conform to their newly evolved ideas of modernity and progress.”²¹ In Adiga’s novel it is the new predatory consumerism that comes under fire; the development of Delhi and Bangalore that is based on the exploitation on places like Laxmangarh. The White Tiger is so not much about the servant Balram’s successful story as it is about India – or rather the two Indias of “Light” and “Darkness”. And the servants who are pitied and sympathised are always the deserving poor, i.e. those who exemplify middle class virtues. The bottom line is that servants never really mattered in Indian English fiction. But they still continue to be represented.

The continuing presence of servants in Indian fiction in English, thus, is not baffling. Like Lakshmi Srinivas, we can also quote Karen T. Hansen’s words to sum up the representation of domestic servants in Indian fiction in English: “The literary writer’s servant is there in an active variety; as a loyal tool, mercenary opportunist, active agent, disturber of the social order, representative of the rising bourgeoisie, forerunner of the revolution”.²² In other words, the servant is there for anything and everything except for himself/herself.

Of course, marginalization of servants is not restricted to Indian fiction in English only as the brief review in Chapter One of Indian literature, English literature (including fiction), American fiction and even print media, has clearly pointed out. Needless to add, the universality of the prejudices against servants cuts across cultures and time. But it would be wrong to conflate the representation of domestic servants in old classical Sanskrit plays like Mrichchhakatika to those in Indian English fiction of the twentieth and twenty first century. It is not merely the case of different genres or languages, but also of representational politics. “Representation however is not merely reflection, it is

itself an active force in moulding social relations and social understanding.”²³ The continual inclusion and at the same time marginalization of domestic servants in Indian fiction in English served a particular ideological purpose – the construction of the upper/middle class identity. The middle class identity is literally as well as imaginatively erected upon the servile, uncouth and uncultured servant.

In Chapter Two we tried to counter the charge of essentialism, laid by postmodern thought, behind any construction of identity whether of the servant or the middle class master merely on one factor. Inspired by the Post-positivist school of theory, we have sought to postulate that the identity of the servants as well as the middle class master as presented in the literary texts be discredited while arguing for a truer version of experience and identity. Using the conceptually more rich term, “subaltern” to denote the servant, we sought to establish that the paradigmatic relation between the servant-subaltern and the privileged class is one of power and domination. The presence of domestic servants in Indian English fiction does not translate into sympathetic concern or interest in their characterization. As mentioned earlier, the portrayals of servants “cannot be taken as representative of the servants’ viewpoint”. Literary servants were used by these “middle-class writers, to construct “their own sense of class and gender identity”.²⁴ As Danijela Petković puts it rather succinctly: “[The] middle class Self is in the course of the novel[s] carefully constructed – made possible, even - through numerous contrasts with/negations of its dark Other, Servants. Thus, not only are the authority and the validity of the oppressive middle class Self established, but the essential and permanent ‘otherness’ of servants also.”²⁵

In Chapter Two, we had discussed the problems in the study of servants such as the inefficacy of the English medium to represent Indian realities particularly in the case of representation of people like servants who, by and large, are not familiar with it. In Indian fiction in English, it has been observed that one of the common ways of distinguishing servants is to reproduce their speech in a seemingly ungrammatical or pidgin English, thus differentiating them from their educated masters who speak correct English. Needless to add that there is a further identification of the author and the master since there is no comment on the latter’s English. This is wrong because servants would hardly speak English, correct or otherwise, unless of course, forced to work in a

European household or highly anglicised metropolitan Indian household. Thus the dialogues in the texts under consideration cannot be credited, without any reservations, to the domestic servants. Language plays a crucial role in marginalizing servants. Doubts persist as how to represent illiterate servants like Bakha's or even Munoo's consciousness in a language they can hardly understand, let alone use. The English used in the fiction whether to represent the thoughts or the speech of the domestic servants is merely translation of Indian dialogues. We cannot accept uncritically the dialogues attributed to the servants in the texts, particularly those that tend to make them comical, or culturally deficient. Thus, servants are not narratable in Indian fiction in English for the simple reason that their realities are not so easily transcribed into the English medium.

Chapter Two dealt more closely the role that ideology plays in the marginalization of servants. One noticeable aspect in most of Indian fiction in English is that the brute force and downright repression of servants in actual life is not mirrored. But domestic chores have been constructed as lowly and insignificant and hence fit to be done by servants who are also constructed as inferior. It is this element of ideological repression, particularly in the "Family Ideological State Apparatus" that concerns us, for in Indian fiction in English this element is hardly taken cognizance of. The repression of the individual or women (particularly upper/middle class) within the traditional and patriarchal family has been no doubt noted both by writers as well as literary critics. But when it comes to domestic servants, barring rare exceptions like Mulk Raj Anand, Thrity Umrigar and now Arvind Adiga, there has been a studied silence. There is always a tension in the novels about the threat from the servants and the author/narrator/master tries to deal with it effectively by marginalizing or occluding the servant and his voice. Chapter Three, Chapter Four and Chapter Five had demonstrated how the servant's body, labour and space are occluded using various strategies in texts.

We have examined in Chapter Three the depiction of the Indian upper/middle class domestic panorama right from such early models as Bankimchandra's Rajmohan's Wife which does not acknowledge the servant's name, let alone her/his body. Using select novels of Mulk Raj Anand, Attia Hosain, Anita Desai, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Amit Chaudhuri, and Arundhati Roy as representative work, Chapter Three exposed that the body of the servant in Indian English fiction is not an unambiguous fact of nature but a construction. References from works of other Indian English novelists and from English

translations of seminal Indian writers in other Indian languages supported the premise that servants' bodies are represented only to marginalize them. Nando, Uma, Jochna, Haridasi, (Freedom Song) Rehman, Jadav, Panna, Chhaya, Saraswati, Savitri, Meera (A Strange and Sublime Address) are all done predominantly in slight sketches by Amit Chaudhuri, and their bodies described mostly in uncomplimentary terms as repulsive, misshapen, sickly, elderly or juvenile (in both cases, unchanging). Vasant (English, August), Kasibai, Vaman, Aya (The Last Burden) of Upamanyu Chatterjee are no better. "Motivated by a complex mixture of guilt, fear, revulsion, greed, and sanctimonious self-righteousness, . . . [Indian novelists in English] figured the [servant's] . . . body as grotesque and . . . as metaphorically dismembered."²⁶ In all their works there is a metonymic relation between external appearance and character-traits; the servant's body is used as a signifier for the supposed "lack" of cultural traits and hence fit for the lowly tasks of servitude. Vinay Bahl stresses this point when he quotes from Immanuel Wallerstein's Geopolitics and Geoculture: Essays on the Changing World-system (1991):

It is argued that one group is genetically or "culturally" . . . inferior to another group in such a way that the group said to be inferior cannot be expected to perform tasks as well as the presumably superior group . . . [. . .] The existence of unequal incomes thus becomes not an instance of . . . [classism-sexism-casteism] but rather of the universal standard of rewarding efficiency. Those who have less have less because they have earned less . . . [. . .] [servants] are paid less because they work less hard, merit less. And they work less hard because there is something, if not in their biology, at least in the "culture" which teaches them values that conflict with the universal work ethos.²⁷

On the other hand, most middle class employers are shown or implied as superior because of their hygiene, health, sense of style, manners, etc. Whether it is the "social realist novels" of Mulk Raj Anand, or the "domestic realist" works of Attia Hosain, Anita Desai, Upamanyu Chatterjee or Amit Chaudhuri the body became the site for difference; the middle-class identity is constructed against the other i.e. lower class/caste servant. Structured in a hierarchy, the lower class servant became the outsider, while the insider is the master/narrator. If not disparaged, servants are rendered as ageless or grandparent-like figures in order to make them acceptable to the readers. Even the exceptions, as in Mulk Raj Anand's Untouchable or Coolie, not to mention Thrity Umrigar's Bhima or Arvind Adiga's Balram Halwai, where the servants have been portrayed in positive manner, are not subversions but mere reworking of the middle class hierarchy. Anand

represents only the hardworking, honest servants as Bakha or Munoo as physically attractive while the rest of them are condemned to disparagement. Anand or for that matter Umrigar and Adiga, do not subvert the patriarchal image of body where physical beauty reflects inner goodness. Their characters may be too stereotypical but there is only a difference of degree between them and that of less sympathetic writers. And in spite of the variety of texts examined from Indian English fiction the same tropes recur giving an indication of their influence and pervasiveness. Balram may not be a paradigm of beauty but is at least far better drawn than the other subalterns. The Nepali watchman is “sly slant-eyed” (*Tiger* 59); Ram Persad was a “grim-looking fellow” (*Tiger* 67); the vitiligo-ridden driver who “looked like a clown at the circus with painted lips” (*Tiger* 123). Like Bakha in *Untouchable* or Munoo in *Coolie*, Balram is distinguished from other servants, for instance, by his interest in education. He is the white tiger, that is, unique among all the subalterns in the novel. Witness his repeated references to poets like Iqbal, Rumi, Ghalib and a fourth Muslim poet whose name he cannot remember. Unlike the other servants, he even visits the second-hand book sellers in Daryaganj, Delhi where he leafs through books that he cannot fully comprehend or read. Balram’s intense desire, unlike the other servants, for improving his material and mental life through buying laptops, stylish clothes, drinking foreign liquor, or even practising yoga, the latest fad of the upper class, reminds the reader of similar attempts of Bakha and Munoo.

However, it is not merely Indian fiction in English that constructs the servant as the other. The review in Chapter One sought to reveal that Anglo-Indian novels and short stories and even fiction produced by cultures widely varying and at different historical moments have looked down upon servants. In the case of India, such prejudices for servants goes back to the earlier times when the caste system helped to make certain communities subservient to the ruling castes/classes. But the most powerful impact on the Indian upper/middle class aversion for lower class/caste servant was the advent of colonialism with its associated ideas of Western nationalism, and more specifically, Victorian domesticity. The otherization of subalterns like servants, rephrasing Partha Chatterjee words, “is an index of the failure of the Indian nation to effectively include within its body the whole of the demographic mass which it claimed to represent”.²⁸ This is a historical failure and goes back to the formation of the Indian ruling class, i.e. the upper and middle class, notably the latter who evolved with the new ideas of nationhood, and its associated ideas of domesticity.

Imaginations of the “Indian nation” and the writing of the novel in the Indian subcontinent occurred at the same time though we may not concur to the extent that Benedict Anderson did in linking up of the novel form with the idea of the nation. Novels and newspapers, Anderson points out, are the print forms through which a community imagines itself into existence.²⁹ But the Indian nation, as pointed out by Partha Chatterjee and others, is also “*necessarily* built upon a system of exclusions” [italics author’s].³⁰ Aijaz Ahmad calls for the replacement of the “idea of the nation with that larger, less restrictive idea of collectivity and to start thinking of the process of allegorization not in nationalistic terms but simply as a relation between private and public, personal and communal”³¹ Therefore, it is easy to conclude that the Indian novel does not present objectively an authentic “Indian nation” and this exclusivity is built more in the case of our area of interest – Indian fiction in English – due to the continued privileged position of English. The Indian novel in English is the form through which the privileged class (excluding subalterns like servants) sought to bind itself into a new affinity by imagining the nation. If we take Indian fiction in English as texts reflecting this hegemonic culture, then we see the reflection of such exclusions, in our case, that of the subaltern servants from the Indian upper/middle class domestic sphere. “Ideas of freedom, equality and cultural refinement went hand in with a set of dichotomies which systematically excluded from the new life of the nation the vast masses of people [like the servants] whom the dominant elite would represent and lead, but who could never be culturally integrated with their leaders”.³² Thus the representation and marginalization of servants the literary texts under consideration is connected to the larger socio-political issue of nationhood.

The invisibility of maidservants (and the double invisibility of male servants) and their labour in Indian English fiction was because it dealt with the clash of modernity with tradition with respect to the Indian family or more particularly the Indian upper/middle class woman. The role of the women in the family, particularly the wife, became central to the debate amongst progressive Indians, proselytising missionaries and reactionary traditionalists. In the battle of discourse of domesticity between the nationalists and pro-western liberals the servant was all but ignored. This is largely true of most of Indian fiction in English as Chapter Four had more than amply shown how literary texts erase the entire gamut of servants’ physical particularly the hard backbreaking labour behind the normal household chores and instead represent them as executing minor parts/roles dictated strictly by the exigencies of plot. Barring Mulk Raj

Anand, or Thrity Umrigar, most texts present the running of Indian domestic scene as natural, ignoring the servant's labour or encapsulate this drudgery in a few words at best. It is this unseen and underpaid labour of the servants that makes it possible for the masters/mistresses like Nanda Kaul, Sita, Agastya, Jamun to indulge in leisure, and other activities. The construction of the Indian family, the upper/middle class ideal of simple living or the edifice of culture and refinement all include the hidden labour of servants. Whether it is Anita Desai, Amit Chaudhuri, or Upamanyu Chatterjee, servants are presented as constantly demanding or stealing or as incorrigibly lazy or natural shirkers. Their narratives reaffirmed the general idea about servants to be kept under strict control. Of course, Indian English fiction did not always have to portray maids or male servants in such pejorative light to marginalize them. The easiest of all the strategies to appropriate the labour of the servant is to imbricate it in lasting personal relations. Patriarchal domestic ideologies, as evident in the literary texts, have constantly improvised to deal with the servant's labour due to increasing inability to rely on physical methods of coercion and punitive measures. So most servants in Indian fiction in English are shown enjoying personal relations with the family. But the fact remains that this relationship always carried elements of power. "The many loyal feudal retainers of literature are an embodiment of social fears just as much as dangerous servants are. Servants who 'know their place' and willingly participate in the paternalistic social order are reassuring to [middle class] authors and [middle class] readers alike who suspect otherwise".³³

By according more space to affective ties with the servant than to the instrumental services of the servant such as cooking, washing or sweeping, these literary texts tried to downplay the marks of coercion and exploitation in the average master-servant relationship. That's the reason why maids and ayas are more visible than male servants in Indian fiction in English. This is interesting because though domestic service is increasingly feminized, males formed a not inconsiderable section of domestic servants in India. Literary narratives are more prepared to show the loving relationships enjoyed by the males (particularly in their childhood) with their ayas than the exploitation of the cook, gardener or sweeper. "Authors [narrators] recalled vividly memories in which they were loved, nourished, taken care of, or even deprived, mistreated, or abused by the domestic workers".³⁴ Whether it is less likely for loving relationships, including sexual, to develop with the male servants is interesting to speculate. Baring rare examples, the sexual relationships with servants, particularly those of middle class women, are missing.

Upamanyu Chatterjee's novels deal with the sexual relationships of masters and maids but not middle class women with male servants. Even Arvind Adiga's The White Tiger does not allow such relationships though Balram is at one point shown as attracted by his mistress, Pinky. Perhaps the overriding influence of patriarchy on such narratives makes it difficult for the representation of the female members' relationship with the male servants. Interestingly, though female servants, ill-paid and abused by the master as well as by their men, occupy the bottom of any hierarchy of servants, they are more favourably treated in literary representations. On the other hand, it is the male servants who end up primarily being denigrated and marginalized more in literary representations.

Patriarchal domestic ideologies, as evident in the literary texts, have constantly improvised to deal with the servant's labour due to increasing inability to rely on physical methods of coercion and punitive measures. So the servants in Attia Hosain are represented as enjoying personal relations with the family. This stereotype, perhaps the most enduring, of a happy and docile imbecile, all too happy to work hard for the master is hard to miss in the work of the other writers. It is not impossible for servants to be hard workers or good players. But the trouble is that they are so only when they have to be portrayed in a sympathetic light as in Anand's work. Why Bakha or Munoo work hard without any grumbling or never shirk like other servants is never questioned or investigated. Even Balram Halwai is projected as a hard-working man. He believes in the motto of hard work and grabbing of opportunities to improve one's material and mental prospects. It is another matter that opportunities rarely knock at the doors of the really hard-working people because of corruption at every level. But Balram's rage is more against the upper caste/class people like the landlords, politicians and other people who do not believe in hard work. Balram Halwai ends up as the supporter of the new competitive economy as exemplified by the call-centre or outsourcing business, which he admires and assists through his taxi-service. At the end where he becomes a successful entrepreneur, Balram promises to let his own drivers those opportunities for social mobility provided they worked hard. Balram declares that he would let his relationship with his drivers be anything but economic. But in his decision to protect an errant driver from the police we see a reflection of the same feudal mindset of mutual trust and obligations between inferiors and superiors. In works of Amit Chaudhuri, Upamanyu Chatterjee or Anita Desai, this feudal world may not be overtly present. But their work too betrays nostalgia for the paternalistic feudalism by prescribing a sort of bond with

mutual dependence and care between servants and masters. This may be seen in the frequent recollections in Indian fiction in English by adult-narrators of their childhood relationship where an idyllic relationship was shared between the servant and the little master. But the fact remains that, whether in a feudal set-up like Attia Hosain or modern as in Chaudhuri, Chatterjee or Desai, this relationship always carried elements of power. Anand, Umrigar and Adiga are some of the rare writers who tried to see the servant-master as exploitative. But they too succumbed to glib generalisations and failed to posit the structural nature of their oppression. They created ideal figures, gave them middle class characteristics and then made them suffer pathetically to elicit sympathy from readers. Anand's refusal to subvert the existing society can be seen in the fact like Dickens he creates benign middle class masters who help the suffering lower class/caste hero. Anand is more interested in teaching Munoo and Bakha middle class values than in listening to or expressing their subaltern status. He does not allow them the freedom to think or express their situation other than within the middle class cultural compass. Though Umrigar and Adiga are more realistic in not allowing any middle class saviour but they too are not concerned with the subalterns as a class. Reworking Elleke Boehmer's words about E. M. Forster's *Passage to India* we can posit that Indian fiction in English as exemplified by Anand or Roy "offers a liberal option: an 'aristocracy of the sensitive' in the form of homosocial bonding across the class/caste divide". Society "is to be condemned", particularly its treatment of servants, "but individual [master and servant, like Ammu and Roy] are occasionally able to rise above the divisiveness to affirm human values"³⁵

Of course, it would be foolhardy to see that later Indian novelists in English, particularly the women writers like Arundhati Roy, Anita Desai or Attia Hosain as subscribing to the patriarchal norms. They show the oppression of the women (more particularly, middle class) and thereby, blind themselves to the fact that in spite of all sufferings, these women or less privileged characters are not merely victims but also oppressors in their own rights. "To the extent that individuals are differentially situated within those relations [of domination], they may be simultaneously constituted as both oppressor and oppressed."³⁶ Therefore, an upper/middle class woman can be oppressed by patriarchy at the same time that she oppresses others such as servants and other subalterns. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak points out that "women's ideological liberation has its class fix" and liberal feminist "might be parasitical not only upon

imperialism” but “also upon the gendered subaltern [servant] as well.”³⁷ With the increasing presence of middle class women in the public sphere, it is more likely that such privileged women push responsibility for domestic work onto lower class women. The Indian women novelists in English fail to locate their works in intersecting relations of domination that constitute the world since they see domestic work as a universal yoke imposed on all women. But our study, particularly in Chapter Four revealed that domestic labour is not the same for all women and even falls on some men.

In the chapter on space, we have exposed how Indian fiction in English manipulated the observed domestic space to erase that of servant’s quarters as much as possible, push him/her to the margins and thus render him/her invisible as much as possible. Though their work deals with the middle class domestic scene, the focalization sets the servants quarters entirely apart from the family’s living space reflecting the bias that domestics should inhabit areas of the home where the work was to be performed – the “backstage” as well an upper/middle-class desire to maintain a distance from the lower class servant. When not engaged in falsification, generalisation, vagueness or summary dismissal, the texts represented the servants as living in and/or coming from slums, or areas that are definitely dirtier than that of the masters and situated on the periphery of the clean, civilized wholesome areas lived by the upper/middle classes.

Our conclusion argues that the world-view as depicted in most of Indian fiction in English is inadequate. These works present, to a greater or lesser degree, a circumscribed reality for it occludes subalterns like the domestic servants. This blindness is not prevalent, in the same degree in all the writers nor is it invariable in each of the works of the same novelist. The same novelist, sometimes within the same work may betray prejudices against servants side by side with conscious and genuine sympathy and insights. But there is always an anxiety underscoring the depiction of servants. This ambivalent attitude is paralleled by the ambivalent description of servants. Domestic servants entered Indian English fiction “in two contra-distinctive positions: as markers of loyalty and sacrifice and as embodiment of loose morals – the latter encompassing all those tendencies that transgress middle class values: sexuality, corruption, theft of food, articles, money, and valuables.”³⁸ In the literary texts, we have found that the servants are ridiculed or idealised – loyal pinheads or villainous shirkers – but never “seen” as individuals with complexities. But servants, like people everywhere, are “defiant,

compliant, selfish, magnanimous, independent, innovative, tradition bound, fearful, courageous, optimistic, and pessimistic. They hope, aspire, despair, subvert, connive, abide, enforce, manipulate and choose between alternatives”³⁹ as they try to cope with their masters’ society and values.

The literary treatment reflects the inability or reluctance of the middle-class authors/narrators/masters to deal with servants other than within the “common sense”. This is somewhat close to what Gramsci’s common sense – a highly contradictory body of beliefs that “combine elements from the Stone Age and principles of a more advanced science, prejudices from all the past phrases of history at the local level and intuitions of a future philosophy”.⁴⁰ The treatment of servants in Indian fiction in English, except in certain texts, is very demeaning. There is an anxiety underscoring the depiction of servants which is masked in a close personal relationship. If there is guilt among middle classes employers at having exploited the servants, they also cannot stop exploiting servants as they need the underpaid services to maintain the material privileges and ideals. This ambivalent attitude is paralleled by the ambivalent description of servants in Indian fiction in English.

If we take into consideration all the textual evidence so far, we find that the servant “appears as a figure that resides outside authorized categories, signifying a pure externality beyond the realm of reason.” Paradoxically enough, the servant “is also claimed to be intelligible to the dominant techniques of representation”.⁴¹ Thus applying Gyan Prakash words we can safely posit that Indian English fiction encloses within itself “an irresolvable paradox”. This discourse projects the servant “as an irrational other beyond authoritative reason and understanding” and at the same time “claims that the subaltern [servant] is completely knowable and known as an embodiment of irrationality.” The “constitution of the subaltern [servant] as an external other that is nevertheless knowable as such by the self is a ruse of dominance, a projection of self-confirming otherness.”⁴² Servants are unknowable to these middle class writers and yet they incorporate their presence and using various stereotypes, paradoxical at times, try to contain them and present them as marginal, both to the plot as well as thematic concerns. The reason for such inability to know the servants lies in the “contingent unequal power/knowledge conditions”.⁴³

The emblematic relationship between servants and their masters was, is and always will be one of exploitation, oppression and distrust even though modernity, with its concepts of free market and egalitarian ideas, has put increasing pressure on it. In fiction, the authors/narrators/masters, who belong predominantly to the upper and middling classes, have always seen as the domestic servants as transgressors or with the potential to do it, and yet they do not admit the possibility of resistance. The failure of Indian authors in English as well as critics to take cognizance of servants and their resistance is because they are infected by “a teleology which finds some resistances to be backward and primitive, and hence less congenial material for . . . [them] to work on than those which are advanced along the road to an enlightened awareness of class interest.”⁴⁴ For all their exploitation, servants could manage to resist and at times subvert their masters’ power. Power is never a simple matter of “have” and “have-nots”. The power and powerlessness of the servant was not static and depended on the status of his/her work, length or duration of stay with the family, gender, age and so on. It is noticeable that old retainers and servants wielded more authority than other servants. The powerlessness of servants is mitigated by such acts as stealing, shirking, gossiping and other forms of resistance. Since the master could not be defied or antagonised openly, these little acts gained all the importance. Of course, such resistance were confined to the individuals.

So far we have seen that representations about servants reveals as much, if not more, about the masters than it does about servants. The location of almost all Indian English novelists as members of the privileged middle class would partly explain their blindness. The moot point is that whether we can see servants as they “are”. If we look at the “writing of subaltern history”, a “sense of impossibility has marked” it as exemplified by Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak’s hotly debated contention that subalterns cannot speak.⁴⁵ “There has always been an underlying awareness that the project of “recovering” the subaltern as a full-blooded subject-agent must fail, for by definition subalternity implies a “minor” position that cannot be undone retroactively”.⁴⁶ Subalternity in Gyan Prakash words, “erupts within the system of dominance and marks its limits from within, that its *externality* to dominant systems of knowledge and power surfaces *inside* the system of dominance, but only as an intimation, as a trace of that which eludes the dominant discourse” [italics author’s].⁴⁷ In other words, it is “this partial, incomplete, distorted existence [in the dominant domestic discourse] that separates” the servant from the

middle class master. Reworking Prakash's words we can say that the servant's presence in the domestic discourse (and in our case, Indian fiction in English) "does not issue forth from a priori existence but arises in the entanglements of power, inhabiting the warps it produces in the fabric of dominance." "Contingent and partial", the servant's "irruptive presence" stands at odds with strategies to portray and describe subalternity in itself. Gyan Prakash concludes that the history of the subaltern would always be contingent within the dominant discourse and it is this that makes it impossible for subaltern historians to recover it. But this contingency or partial nature of the subaltern makes it valuable to challenge dominant discourse.⁴⁸ Servants can never be fully known or represented in Indian novel in English because the genre of fiction itself is of middle class orientation. Actual servants like Baby Halder writing novels would also not automatically end the marginalization of servants in literature. "Domestics who wrote about themselves and their works were probably atypical. They represented a more self-consciously reflective and articulate group than most servants."⁴⁹

Indian fiction in English, so far as the treatment of domestic servants is concerned, seems to have "as stuck in the same groove of repetitions". In spite of the narrator moving from one place (or theme) to another, the Indian novelist in English ". . . [so far servants are concerned] keeps circling back to the same enactments, the same names, the same characters, the same conflicts, the same futility of *any* act of affirmation" [*italics author's*].⁵⁰ For Bakha, Munoo, Velutha and scores of other servants in Indian English fiction, life is represented as having no other narrative apart from suffering relieved only by pathetic death. "Literature has the capacity to uphold the human values against the wrong system and offer an image of a fuller, richer life than that which exists under capitalism."⁵¹ But in so far as domestic servants are concerned, Indian fiction in English has only served to support the status quo.

To conclude, representations of domestic servants in Indian fiction in English "typify the conflict, coercion, co-optation, and exploitation inherent in the unequal relationship"⁵² of the master and domestic servant. The novels seek to reform the servants and the system that exploits them, while at the same time, to fix servants into perpetual otherness. If we find the sympathy and the effort to see servants as they are and to make them cultured like the middle class, the same texts see them as the dark "Other" against whom the middle class constructs its identity. Even sympathetic writers like Mulk Raj

Anand or Arundhati Roy would uphold middle class/upper caste perspectives even as they sought to challenge them. “This ideological blindness – a self-repetition on the part of the self-critical – appears again and again in the work”⁵³ of Indian novelists in English. Indian novelists in English would have to strive hard to keep their “practice slipping into what Baudrillard described as the obsessive demand of . . . [their] political culture: from making the subaltern’ [servant’s] voice heard, but construing it in the image of . . . [their] own.”⁵⁴

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